

## Residential Flat Conversions Policy Note February 2010



1. The Council recognises that the conversion of dwellings to flats can form an important element in the District's housing stock. Such proposals can often enable a more efficient use of large properties that are worthy of retention and can provide an opportunity for their renovation. However, it is also recognised that flat conversions can raise privacy issues, parking problems and can have an adverse effect on residential amenity. They can also result in the loss of smaller family-sized units and a consequential increase in the overall number of flatted units unsuited to family occupation. This poses serious issues for maintaining a mixed housing offer across the District.
2. The Council, therefore, wishes to ensure that large-scale loss of smaller family-sized units is resisted. Furthermore, when proposals for sub-division of existing properties into flats is promoted, satisfactory standards of accommodation should be achieved and any impact on the amenity of future residents and neighbouring properties minimised. It is important that the implementation of the policy balances the permitting of high-quality flat conversions in appropriate locations, with the need to protect family-sized dwellings and the avoidance of over-concentration of such development.
3. The purpose of this policy note is to provide criteria and guidance by which the Council will determine planning applications for the conversion of dwellings to residential flats, including non-residential buildings within the curtilage of a residential dwelling (e.g. garages). This policy note does not cover flats above shops or conversion of commercial premises into flats.
4. In broad terms the Strategic Housing Market Assessment<sup>1</sup> (SHMA) demonstrates that there is a shortfall of accommodation in the District for households requiring 1 bedroom. Whilst this may seem to advocate the sub-division of larger dwellings into smaller units, the SHMA also highlights a shortfall of accommodation for households requiring 3 bedrooms. It is important, therefore, that a balanced approach is taken to the sub-division of existing properties, allowing only those which provide a satisfactory standard of accommodation, whilst not impacting upon surrounding residential amenity and the overall supply of smaller family-sized units.
5. Past planning permissions granted for flat conversions between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2006 until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009 show a trend of increasing permissions. During this period, 45 planning permissions for residential flat conversions were granted. This consisted of 6 in 2006/07, 15 in 2007/2008 and 24 in 2008/09<sup>2</sup>. In terms of location, the majority of permissions granted were in Spalding (36). The remainder were in Holbeach (4), Crowland (2), Pinchbeck (1), Gosberton (1) and Gedney Hill (1).

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<sup>1</sup> Peterborough Sub-Regional Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2008), South Holland Stage One Report (Fordham Research).

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that in 2 instances a specific site was the subject of 2 separate applications, with only minor details differing, thus reducing the overall potential for sub-division of dwellings by 2. In one instance permission was granted for a House in Multiple Occupancy (HMO) and on another occasion permission was granted to sub-divide a dwelling into flats and a HMO.

6. It is evident that there has been a noticeable year on year increase in the granting of planning permissions for the conversion of residential dwellings to flats. In light of this trend, which can result in the loss of family-sized units, there is a need for strong protection in order that the Council can maintain a balanced and sustainable mix of housing across the District.
7. This is an interim policy that supplements the adopted South Holland Local Plan (2006), until such time as the Council adopts a Core Strategy and associated Development Plan Documents, as part of the Local Development Framework. Whilst the adopted Local Plan contains a policy to restrict the change of use of properties to HMOs (Policy HS18), there is no such policy relating to flat conversions. Therefore, this policy seeks to expand the fundamental sound nature of the adopted HMO policy.
8. Given that there is evidence suggesting that the conversion of residential dwellings to flats is becoming an increasing trend, the Council will seek to protect the stock of family-sized units by only permitting the conversion of properties to flats where all of the following equally important criteria are satisfied:
  - **They would not result in the loss of small to medium-sized dwellings in high density residential areas and streets of predominantly terraced and/or semi-detached properties.**
  - **There would be no material harm to the amenity of existing, nearby residents by virtue of general disturbance, noise or overlooking.**
  - **There would be no significant adverse impact upon the character or appearance of the area.**
  - **Adequate provision is made for the maintenance of communal gardens and amenity areas.**
  - **Adequate provision is made for the storage and disposal of refuse.**
  - **There would be no material increase in demand for on-street car parking that would exacerbate existing car parking problems.**
  - **Secure, weather-proof cycle storage should, where practicable, be provided as follows<sup>3</sup>:**
    - **For studios and 1 bedroom dwellings a minimum of 1 cycle space per dwelling.**
    - **For 2 and 3 bedroom dwellings a minimum of 2 cycle spaces per dwelling.**
    - **For 4 bedroom dwellings and larger a minimum of 4 cycle spaces per dwelling.**
  - **The property is of an adequate size without being extended for the proposed use and the layout, room sizes, range of facilities and external amenity space would ensure an adequate standard of residential amenity for future occupiers.**
9. Where all of the above criteria are satisfied, minimum floor space standards for the subdivision of residential dwellings will also be applied to ensure that the occupiers of flats have adequate floor space. Cramped accommodation will not be permitted.

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<sup>3</sup> Reference should be made to pages 89-93 of the *Code for Sustainable Homes: Technical Guide Version 3 (DCLG, May 2009)* for further guidance on cycle storage.

10. The following tables comprise the minimum floor space standards that will be used by the District Council for assessing the adequacy of the size of new flat conversions. The proposed baseline standards (Table 2) are to be taken into account in addition to the general size standards (Table 1) to ensure that satisfactory provision of 'habitable floor space' is achieved.

**Table 1: General Size Standards<sup>4</sup>**

Number of bedspaces	Minimum Internal Dwelling Area Range (m <sup>2</sup> )
1 bedspace	30 to 35
2 bedspace	45 to 50
3 bedspace	57 to 67
4 bedspace	67 to 75

**Table 2: Proposed Baseline Standards<sup>5</sup>**

<p><b>1) The minimum floor area for the aggregate of the cooking, eating and living areas (CEL areas) is to be:</b></p>											
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Number of bedspaces</th> <th>CEL Area (m<sup>2</sup>)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1 bedspace</td> <td>22</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2 bedspace</td> <td>22</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3 bedspace</td> <td>24</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4 bedspace</td> <td>27</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Number of bedspaces	CEL Area (m <sup>2</sup> )	1 bedspace	22	2 bedspace	22	3 bedspace	24	4 bedspace	27	
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<p><b>NB1: Cooking, eating and living areas exclude bedrooms and any utility area or space taken up on plan by staircases or hallways/corridors connecting these areas.</b></p>											
<p><b>2) The minimum floor areas for bedrooms is to be no less than 7m<sup>2</sup> per single bedroom and 12m<sup>2</sup> per double/twin bedroom provided.</b></p>											
<p><b>NB1: Where bedspace is not provided separately to the CEL area, the aggregate amount of floor space for both the CEL and the bedroom (as outlined above) should still be provided overall.</b></p>											
<p><b>NB2: En-suite bathrooms or shower rooms do NOT count towards this minimum.</b></p>											
<p><b>NB3: The floor space taken up by built in wardrobes in bedrooms counts towards the bedroom floor area.</b></p>											
<p><b>3) Storage cupboards: 1m<sup>2</sup> floor area for 1 bedspace dwelling plus 0.25m<sup>2</sup> per additional bedspace.</b></p>											

<sup>4</sup> The general size standards (Table 1) are based on those outlined in the Homes and Communities Agency's (HCAs) *Housing Quality Indicators* (HQI Version 4, April 2008).

<sup>5</sup> The proposed baseline standards build upon the HCA's HQIs and are based on those outlined in HATC Limited report *Housing Space Standards* (August 2006).

11. The floor space areas in the tables above refer to the space enclosed by the internal faces of the external and/or party walls of the original dwellinghouse, or the converted flat, and includes the area occupied by internal walls or partitions, chimney breast, any external wc; as well as hallways, stairways and landings. In the case of the converted flat, common entrances and stairways shared with another flats are excluded. Internal storage space under stairs etc is included but not general storage areas, such as lofts, cellars, fuel stores, garages or conservatory type structures. Parts of rooms with ceiling heights less than 1.5m and lobbies open to the air are also excluded.
12. For the purposes of this policy, 'bedspaces' represents the number of occupants the dwelling is designed to accommodate.
  - A single bedroom is a bedroom designed to accommodate one person in a single bed.
  - A twin bedroom is a bedroom designed to accommodate two people each in a single bed (with no bunk beds).
  - A double bedroom is a bedroom designed to accommodate two people in one double bed.
  - A triple bedroom is a bedroom designed to take three people in three single beds, or one double bed and one single bed (with no bunk beds).