Open Space in Residential Areas

Contents

0.1 Objectives
0.2 Limitations
0.3 Organisation of this note

Standards

1 Standards applicable to any Housing

1.1 Public Open Space
   1.1.1 Access and Circulation Space

1.2 Private Open Space
   1.2.1 Car Parking Space

1.3 Communal Open Space
   1.3.1 Visitor Parking Space

2 Standards which apply to any Family Housing

2.0 Introduction

2.1 The Outdoor Room Standards
   2.1.1 for activities
   2.1.2 for extensions
   2.1.3 for accessibility
   2.1.4 for natural light
   2.1.5 for overlooking

2.2 The Common Garden Standards
   2.2.1 Private Open Space
      a. size
      b. extensions
      c. access
      d. natural light
      e. overlooking
2.2.2 Communal Open Space
   a. size
   b. location
   c. access
   d. natural light
   e. overlooking
   f. landscaping
   g. maintenance

3 Standards application to groups of more than 50 but less than 100 family dwellings.

3.0 Introduction

3.1 For self-contained Groups
   3.1.1 size
   3.1.2 treatment
   3.1.3 location
   3.1.4 accessibility
   3.1.5 overlooking
   3.1.6 landscaping
   3.1.7 maintenance
   3.1.8 control of noise

3.2 For Groups over 100 Dwellings
   3.2.1 size
   3.2.2 design

4 Standards for Non-Family Housing

4.0 Introduction

4.1 Private Open Space Standards
   4.1.1 activities
   4.1.2 extensions
   4.1.3 size
   4.1.4 accessibility
   4.1.5 natural light
   4.1.6 privacy

4.2 Communal Open Space Standards
   4.2.1 size
   4.2.2 location
   4.2.3 accessibility
   4.2.4 natural light
   4.2.5 landscaping
   4.2.6 maintenance

Bibliography

Appendices

1. Summary of the current General Development Order
2. Examples of designing for privacy
3. The maintenance of Public Open Space
Planning Standards - Open Space in Residential Areas

Introduction

0.1 Objectives - to set down standards that will ensure that within new residential areas enough open space is provided in the right place to cater for the normal out of door activities of the residents, and that the various types of open space provided form part of an overall pattern of open space provision at various scales of residential development.

0.2 Limitations

0.2.1 The way in which people use the space inside and outside their dwellings is highly complex and varies enormously with individual’s attitudes and desires and the opportunities which his environment presents to him. Many activities which will take place on estates such as exercising dogs, or flying kites are difficult or impossible to quantify - but must nevertheless be catered for. Activities will also overlap - the same space may be used in many different ways by different people, at different times of the day. The space standards set down here are necessarily limited to the more basic and obvious activities. They must be seen as a basic skeleton around which to build a housing layout. Environmental quality must be the overriding objective of housing layout design. Quantitative space standards such as these are a part, but only a part of this objective.

0.2.2 Because the occupancy rate of privately built housing cannot be predicted precisely for each dwelling, the standards are expressed in ‘per dwelling’ areas. ‘Dwellings’ are divided into two broad categories - i.e. ‘Family Dwellings’ - having 2 or more bedrooms, and ‘Non-Family Dwellings’ - having one bedroom. Lower space standards are allowed for the latter on the basis of the assumptions that families with children are not likely to live in one bedroom houses (on new estates) and that children generate the greatest demand for space in a household.

0.2.3 The standards do not make reference to specific dwelling types (e.g. flats, maisonettes, houses) although the underlying assumption is that most family dwellings will be houses on the ground. Exceptionally family dwellings may be built in other forms, and when this is done the problem of open space in relation to the individual dwelling must be rigorously thought through from the basic principles.

0.2.4 Spaces are considered as private, communal or public depending on how they are used, not on their ownership. Although in many cases ownership and use coincide, this is not necessarily the case (e.g. in co-ownership housing all space and dwellings are communally owned, but only certain spaces are communally used).

0.2.5 Standards laid down for ‘Non-Family Dwellings’ are intended to apply to small dwellings built for sale or let to the general public, and are not intended to apply to housing for specialised groups of people (e.g. homes for elderly people, special hostels for students). Standards for specialist groups will be established. However note should be taken of the requirements of other County standards particularly in relation to car parking.

0.2.6 Maintenance

The problem of maintenance of communal and public areas has not been resolved.

0.2.7 Small Groups of Dwellings

No satisfactory solution in terms of standards has been found to the problem of an irregular build up of small groups of dwellings, which individually do not justify public open space provision but which eventually coalesce to form a built up area, deficient in open space. The preparation of local plans is probably the only way to deal properly with this type of situation.

0.3 Organisation of this note

The standards are divided into four broad categories:-

1) Standards applicable to any housing.
2) Standards application to any Family housing.
3) Standards applicable to groups of more than 50 Family dwellings.
4) Standards applicable to Non-Family housing.

The standards applicable to any housing are concerned with access and circulation space, and with space for car parking and garaging.

The standards applicable to any Family housing are concerned with the provision of space near or adjacent to the dwelling for family activities and give two alternative ways of providing this - The ‘Outdoor Room’ standard and the ‘Common Garden’ standard.

The standards applicable to groups of more than 50 family dwellings are concerned with the provision of play and recreation space for activities which cannot be easily accommodated in private gardens, communal gardens or public circulation space. These are mostly children’s play activities.
Groups of less than 50 dwellings are exempted from this requirement, provided that they are self-contained groups, not forming part of, or a phase of, a larger development. This is because in groups as small as this the number of children likely to use a playground, especially where private or communal gardens are available would be too small to justify its provision.

The standards applicable to Non-Family dwellings are concerned with provision of space around the dwellings for the activities of the occupiers, and give two alternative ways of providing this - a private open space standard, or a communal open space standard.

Standards are followed by short explanatory notes where necessary.

**Standards**

1. **Standards applicable to any Housing**

1.1 Public Open Space

1.1.1 Access and Circulation Space

Pedestrian circulation space should be planned as an overall system connecting dwellings as directly as possible with each other, with public open spaces within the estate and with shops, primary schools, bus stops and other destinations outside the estate.

It should be possible to reach all the public areas of the estate without having to use steps, or gradients steeper than 1:9.

In estates of Family dwellings, footpaths should incorporate widenings for children’s play. These should be not less than 25m² in area and not more than 50m apart.

1.1.2 Vehicle Circulation Space

Vehicle routes leading directly to dwellings must be designed for pedestrian safety. Pedestrians should have priority over vehicles in these areas.
2. Standards which apply to any Family Housing

2.0 Introduction

All family dwellings must be provided with space close to the dwelling for the activities of the family. This may be done in one of two ways - either by providing enough Private Open Space around the house to accommodate all the activities, or by providing a Communal Open Space shared between several dwellings to accommodate some of the activities and a small Private Open Space near the dwelling for activities which cannot be accommodated in the Communal Open Space.

The 'Outdoor Room standard' (see 2.1 below) covers the first way, and the 'Common Garden' standard (see 2.2) covers the second.

2.1 ‘The Outdoor Room Standard’

2.1.1 Enough Private Open Space must be provided adjacent to the dwelling to accommodate all the activities shown in figures 1 - 4. In general the overall area should not be less than 50m² (approx. 590 sq. ft.). (This assumes an ideal plan shape and a flat site. More plan area will be needed if the space includes parts which are unusable because of excessive slope.)

2.1.2 Space must be allowed for extensions which may reasonably be expected to be made by the owner, as permitted development. (See Appendix 1).

2.1.3 All parts of the space (with the exception of any part solely intended as a sitting out area) must be accessible from the public circulation areas of the estate without having to pass through a living or dining room. The access must be at least 900mm wide (about 3ft).

(This is to allow dirty or messy articles e.g. garden tools, to be moved to the garden without disturbing the living areas of the house).

Where possible it is preferable to provide a wider access about 3m (10 ft) wide so that caravans or boats can be stored in the “outdoor room”. Economic considerations make it unreasonable for this level of access to be demanded in all cases.

2.1.4 The space must receive adequate daylight and sunlight. (See Department of Environment publication ‘Sunlight and Daylight, planning criteria and design of buildings’.)

2.1.5 At least the sitting out area must be reasonably free from overlooking from other dwellings, their private open space, communal open space and public open space. (See Appendix 2 for suggested ways of achieving this.)

2.2 The Common Garden Standard

2.2.1 The Private Open Space

a. Each dwelling must have adjacent to it a private open space of at least 16m² area, in one piece as a general purpose outdoor area. (16m² is about 172 sq. ft.)

(This private space of 16m² is the absolute minimum which could be used as a sitting out space or private patio by a family. (See figure 2) It must not be encroached on by stores for bins or fuel, by car space or by circulation space leading to the house entrances).

b. Space (in addition to the 16 m² minimum) must be allowed for extensions which may reasonably be expected to be made by the owner as permitted development. (See Appendix 1).

c. The space must be accessible from the public areas of the estate (or communal areas of the estate when these are directly accessible from the public areas), without having to pass through a living or dining room. (See explanatory note to 2.1.3 above).

d. The space must receive adequate daylight and sunlight (See DoE publication “Sunlight and Daylight”).

e. The space must be reasonably free from over-looking from other dwellings, their private open spaces, communal open spaces or public open spaces. (See Appendix 2 for suggested ways to achieve this).

2.2.2 Communal Open Space

a. Each dwelling must have, in addition to private open space required in 2.1 above, access to a communal open space which has an area of at least 35m² for each dwelling served. (35m² is about 377 sq. ft.)

b. Part of the space must be within 50m of every dwelling served.

c. The space must be accessible on foot from every dwelling served without having to cross any road having a peak traffic flow greater than 30 vehicles/hour.

d. The space must receive adequate daylight and sunlight. (DoE)

e. The space must be overlooked by as many of the dwellings served as possible. (Overlooking is desirable both for the supervision of children and so that as many houses as possible benefit from the appearance of the space).
f. A detailed landscape scheme for the space must be submitted to and approved by the planning authority.

g. Arrangements for continuing maintenance of the space must be made.

3. Standards applying to groups of more than 50 Family Dwellings

3.0 Introduction

Where dwellings are built in self-contained groups of less than 50 (i.e. groups not forming part of a larger scheme) or at densities less than 16/ha (about 6.5 per acre) no public open space provision other than for access and circulation is required.

3.1 For self-contained Groups

Where dwellings are built in self-contained groups of between 50 and 100 dwellings they must meet the following additional requirements for Public Open Space:-(see diagram paragraph 0.3).

3.1.1 A single space of at least 1000m$^2$ must be provided (about 10.760 sq. ft.).

3.1.2 At least half the space must be hard surfaced and suitable for children’s activities such as riding bicycles and kicking footballs.

3.1.3 The space must be not more than 200m from any dwelling served, and should preferably be situated centrally in the group.

3.1.4 The space must be accessible on foot from every dwelling in the group without having to cross any road with a peak traffic flow greater than 30 vehicles/hour.

3.1.5 The space must be overlooked from dwellings and from public ways. (This is to provide for casual supervision of children’s play. Overlooking from houses is necessary as there is seldom enough traffic within residential areas for casual supervision from public ways to be effective).

3.1.6 A detailed landscape scheme for the space must be submitted to and approved by the planning authority.

3.1.7 Arrangements for the continuing maintenance of the space must be made.

3.1.8 Measures must be taken to prevent the spread of noise from the play areas to surrounding houses.

3.2 Groups of dwellings over 100 dwellings

3.2.1 Where dwellings are built in groups of more than 100 dwellings public open space must be provided at the rate of 1000m$^2$ for the first hundred and an additional 5m$^2$ for each subsequent dwelling. No single space should be less than 1000m$^2$ in area. (5m$^2$ is about 55.8 sq. ft.).

3.2.2 The design standards stated in 3.1.2 - 3.1.8 shall apply.
4 Standards for Non-Family Houses

4.0 Introduction

Schemes for Non-family housing must satisfy either a Private Open Space standard or a Communal Open Space standard.

4.1 Private Open Space

4.1.1 Enough private open space must be provided adjacent to the dwelling to accommodate the activities shown in figures 5 - 7.

4.1.2 Space must be allowed for extensions which may reasonably be expected to be made by the owner as permitted development. (See Appendix 1.)

4.1.3 The area in any case to be not less than 25m² exclusive of space for permitted development where needed. (25m² is about 270 sq. ft.)

4.1.4 All parts of the open space (with the exception of any part solely intended for use as a sitting out area) must be accessible from the public circulation areas of the estate without having to pass through a living or dining room. The access must be at least 900mm wide. It is preferable that this access should be about 3m wide so that caravans or boats can be accommodated. Economic considerations make it unreasonable to demand this level of access in all cases.

4.1.5 The space must receive adequate daylight and sunlight. (See DoE publication "Sunlight and Daylight").

4.1.6 At least the sitting out area must be reasonably free from overlooking from other dwellings and their private open space, communal open space and public open space.

4.2 Communal Open Space

4.2.1 Each dwelling must have access to a communal open space which has an area of at least 20m² for every dwelling served. (20m² is about 215 sq.ft.)
4.2.2 At least part of the space must be within 50m of every dwelling served.

4.2.3 The space must be accessible to every dwelling on foot without having to cross any road having a peak traffic flow greater than 30 vehicles/hour.

4.2.4 The space must receive adequate daylight and sulight. (See DoE publication "Sunlight and Daylight").

4.2.5 A detailed landscape scheme for the space must be submitted to and approved by the planning authority.

4.2.6 Arrangements for continuing maintenance of the space must be made.

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Appendix 1 – Permitted Development

Permitted development under the General Development Order, 1973 gives five types of development which are permitted within the curtilage of a dwelling house (Schedule 1, class 1, GDO 1973). Where the open space standards require space for permitted development, they refer to types 1, 2, 4 & 5. Type 3 allows certain types of development to cover “half the total area of the curtilage excluding the ground area of the original dwelling-house” and therefore cannot be simply allowed for as any increase in the area of the curtilage would allow a corresponding increase in the area of permitted development. Type 1, the limited “enlargement, improvement or other alteration at a dwelling house” is the most potentially space demanding of the remaining 4, and allowance should be made for a single storey extension, of the permitted maximum volume.

The description of permitted development in Schedule 1, class 1, of the General Development Order is quoted in full below:

Class 1 - Development within the curtilage of a dwelling house.

1. The enlargement, improvement or other alteration of the dwelling house so long as:

   a) The cubic content of the original dwelling house (as ascertained by external measurement) is not exceeded by more than 50 cubic metres, or one-tenth, whichever is the greater, subject to a maximum of 115 cubic metres;

   b) The height of the building as so enlarged, altered or improved does not exceed the height of the highest part of the roof of the original dwelling house;

   c) No part of the building as so enlarged, altered or improved projects beyond the forwardmost part of any wall of the original dwelling house which fronts on a highway.

Provided that the erection of a garage, stable, loosebox or coach-house within the curtilage of the dwelling house shall be treated as the enlargement of the dwelling house for all purposes of this permission including the calculation of cubic contents.

2. The erection or construction of a porch outside any external door of a dwelling house so long as:

   a) The floor area does not exceed 2 square metres;

   b) No part of the structure is more than 3 metres above the level of the ground;

   c) No part of the structure is less than 2 metres from any boundary of the curtilage which fronts on a highway.

3. The erection, construction or placing, and the maintenance, improvement or other alteration, within the curtilage of a dwelling house, of any building or enclosure (other than a dwelling, garage, stable, loosebox or coach-house) required for a purpose incidental to the enjoyment of the dwelling house, as such, including the keeping of poultry, bees, pet animals, birds or other livestock for the domestic needs or personal enjoyment of the occupants of the dwelling house, so long as:

   a) No part of such building or enclosure projects beyond the forwardmost part of any wall of the original dwelling house which fronts on a highway;

   b) The height does not exceed, in the case of a building with a ridged roof, 4 metres, or in any other case, 3 metres;

   c) The area of ground covered by buildings within the curtilage (other than the original dwelling house) does not thereby exceed one half of the total area of the curtilage excluding the ground area of the original dwelling house.

4. The construction within the curtilage of a dwelling house of a hardstanding for vehicles for a purpose incidental to the enjoyment of the dwelling house as such.

5. The erection or placing within the curtilage of a dwelling house of a tank for the storage of oil for domestic heating so long as:

   a) The capacity of the tank does not exceed 3500 litres;

   b) No part of the tank is more than 3 metres above the level of the ground;

   c) No part of the tank projects beyond the forwardmost part of any wall of the original dwelling house which fronts on a highway.
Appendix 2 - Privacy in Gardens

The private open space standards make the requirement that at least the sitting out space must be reasonably free from overlooking from other dwellings, their private open spaces, communal open spaces and public open spaces.

Overlooking from ground level is easily dealt with by some form of screen, but overlooking from the upstairs windows of the house next door is more difficult to deal with. Figures 1 to 5 show some possible ways of solving the problem.

Figure 1
From Public Spaces and Adjacent Private Space

Screen fences 1.5m or more high give visual protection when the ground levels of the area to be screened and the adjoining areas are the same.

Figure 2
From Upper Floors of Adjoining Dwellings

a. By staggered layout

b. By projecting the cross wall
   (This must be designed with great care)
c) By projecting outbuildings

Outbuildings minimises overlooking from the side

d. By using a pergola (Particularly useful with "Town Houses")

A semi-transparent pergola can provide privacy without seriously affecting the daylight to rooms.