

# Epsom Civic Society

shaping the future, safeguarding the past

Stephen Williams MP,  
Parliamentary under Secretary for Communities and Local Government,  
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Our Ref: ECS/RHA/13-17

Dear Mr Williams,

Epsom Civic Society was founded in 1959 and has a membership of 2000. Our strap line expresses our objectives accurately and succinctly. I have been asked to write to you regarding an issue about which the ECS committee is becoming greatly concerned, namely minimum standards for the size of dwellings, expressed through the gross internal area or GIA.

The current demand for housing is clearly leading to the size of dwellings becoming increasingly small with commensurately small rooms and inadequate storage space, and being crammed together on ever smaller plots. Unfortunately, this is being exacerbated by various Government initiatives.

The desire to put back into active use, through permitted development rights, buildings which would otherwise stand empty is a sensible objective, particularly if this can be used to help to address the current housing shortage and perhaps, in so doing, to re-invigorate our town centres. However, this has been put into operation without appropriate safeguards, such as providing the means by which the local planning authority can control the adequacy of the size of the resulting dwellings. Inevitably, we are beginning to see applications for changes of use for un-let office premises which are clearly of insufficient size.

Overall, there is a clear need to be able to impose a minimum area for housing of different types. We are beginning regularly to see applications for houses and apartments which are simply inadequate to accommodate the reasonable needs of daily life. Additionally, evidence is beginning to emerge of the adverse impact on the mental and physical health of people living in such substandard properties.

Many potential standards exist, from the early Parker-Morris standards to the draft proposal of the Mayor of London, as well as various other planning authorities, such as Dublin. We urge you to take whatever steps are necessary, as a matter of urgency, to bring a degree of common sense to this issue.

Yours sincerely,

**Robert Austen**

For Epsom Civic Society  
Robert Austen

cc Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP  
Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP  
Kris Hopkins MP

