

Consultation briefing: Enhancing the accessibility, adaptability and usability of Scotland's homes



Chartered
Institute of
Housing
Scotland

Introduction

The Scottish Government is consulting on a review of the [Housing for Varying Needs \(HfVN\) design guide](#). The guide, which was published in 1998, sets out the standards that should be met by all homes receiving grant funding through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP). The standards provide a greater level of accessibility than general building standards, although building standards have advanced to some extent during this time.

The revised HfVN standards will only apply to new affordable housing delivered through AHSP and accommodation provided through the Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation Fund. The Scottish Government has also committed to introducing a new Scottish Accessible Homes Standard (SASH) for homes across all tenures through updating building standards and guidance from 2025/26.

The consultation paper sets out proposals to update Part 1 of the HfVN design guide and considerations for SASH. [The consultation](#) will remain open until 16 October.

Current standards and the need for change

All new homes built in Scotland, regardless of tenure, need to meet the minimum requirements set out in the [Building \(Scotland\) Regulations 2004](#) and the accompanying [Building Standards Technical Handbooks](#). HfVN provides additional standards for affordable housing incorporating a “barrier free” approach to accessibility and guidance on good practice to allow flexibility and adaptability over time. HfVN is published in two parts:

- Part 1 covers the design of self-contained houses and flats.
- Part 2 covers the provision of homes for people who need housing with “integral support” which usually includes accommodation with communal spaces and facilities.

Changing demographics such as our ageing population, and people’s desire to stay living in their own home for longer mean that these standards need to be revised. The consultation also makes reference to the need for new homes to be digitally enabled, and for greater consideration of space for home working or study and outdoor space following the pandemic.



[Interim site design guidance](#) for Gypsy/Traveller sites specifies that new pitches and amenity blocks should meet the relevant requirements of HfVN and so should be taken into account in this review, ensuring Gypsy/Traveller needs are embedded within the revised standard and guidance.

The proposed changes to HfVN only cover Part 1 of the design guide relating to new affordable homes and Gypsy/Traveller accommodation. Part 2 of the guide covering housing with integral support will not be considered at this time.

Proposed updates to HfVN Part 1

The consultation proposes updating the language used throughout the guide, especially where certain terms are out of date and could be considered offensive.

In general, it also suggests removing clauses which have been superseded by building standards and therefore already apply to all new build homes.

It is proposed that the revised HfVN would include the following definitions for each group of need:

- **General needs:** the needs of the general population, where housing is not purpose built for a particular client group.
- **Older people:** generally defined as those aged 65 or older.
- **Ambulant disabled people:** people with a range of mobility or dexterity impairments, but whose disability permits them to walk with or without the use of aids and some may occasionally use a wheelchair.
- **Wheelchair users:** people who use a wheelchair most or all of the time.

The consultation proposes removing Sections 1 to 5 of Part 1 which relate to assumptions about people's ability to reach things within the home, space to use equipment like walking aids, the location of homes and design of the surrounding environment.

It is suggested that these considerations are now very familiar to affordable housing providers and that information on delivering sustainable communities is included in the AHSP [process and procedures guidance note](#). It is therefore proposed that the HfVN guidance should focus on technical criteria.

The consultation also proposes removing Section 20 of Part 1 which covers refurbishment and adaptations. It is suggested that as HfVN is providing guidance on new homes, these sections are no longer required. The revised guide would specify that where AHSP projects involve refurbishment of existing homes or conversion of non-residential properties, HfVN standards should be applied.

Changes to technical guidance relating to the design of homes are proposed with estimated cost implications (depending on the size of dwelling) stating that the Scottish Government is seeking to strike a balance between delivering good quality, accessible homes while maximising the number of homes that can be delivered. It is stressed that flexibility in grant funding means that in some cases, specialist housing that must go beyond the HfVN standards could still be supported where needed.

A more detailed list of key proposals is included at appendix 1.



Proposals for Scottish Accessible Homes Standard

While the revised HfVN Part 1 guide will directly inform the all-tenure SASH, the consultation suggests that there are some aspects of HfVN that would not be appropriate or necessary to include in general building standards. The consultation invites comments on proposed principles which will inform SASH and updated building standards to be introduced from 2025/26.

It is suggested that all design criteria for general needs housing highlighted “as standard” in the consultation paper are transposed to the Building Standards Technical Handbooks with some exceptions:

- Clauses which are already superseded by building standards and proposed to be removed from HfVN.
- Clauses which relate to building works which fall out of the scope of building regulations or relate to legislation of wider statutory consents such as planning consent.
- Clauses relating to specific user groups such as buildings designed for wheelchair users.

Indicative costs to the private sector are not set out in the consultation paper but it is stated that costings will be explored with private sector stakeholders through the consultation process.

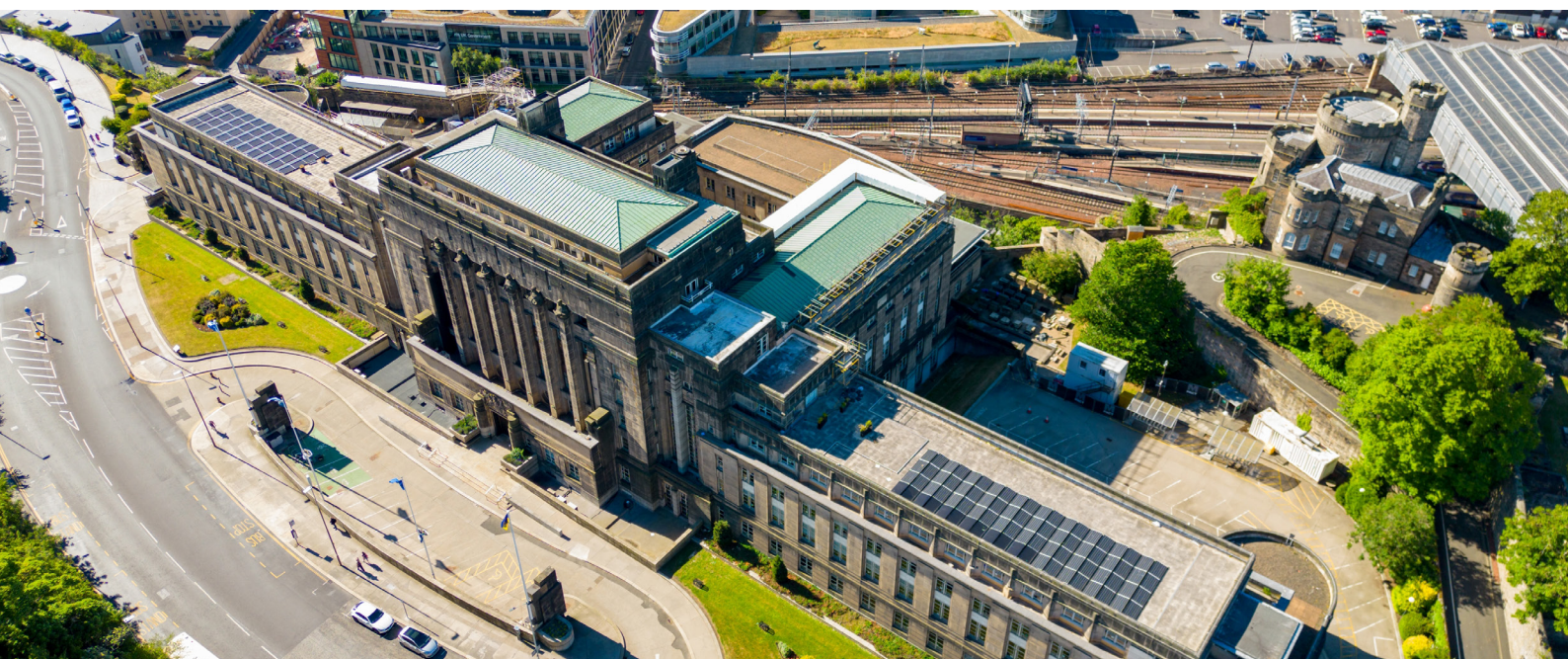
The CIH View

We welcome the Scottish Government’s commitment to delivering more accessible homes that better reflect modern living and working habits, and can be more easily adapted to meet changing needs over time.

However, we are disappointed that there will still be two distinct standards – SASH applying to all homes through building standards, and some additional standards for affordable housing set out in HfVN.

While we appreciate that any progress is beneficial, we should be aiming for the same standards across all of Scotland’s homes so that whether you are a homeowner, private or social tenant you can expect the same quality of housing.

We will be responding to this consultation and would value feedback from CIH Scotland members. If you would like to send comments to us or share your organisation’s response, please email scotland@cih.org.



Appendix 1: Key proposed updates to HfVN Part 1

- **Entrances to individual dwellings:** Step free accessible thresholds for all entrances to individual dwellings.
 - Delivered “as standard” to all dwellings except those designed for wheelchair users.
 - No additional cost.
- **Entrance to communal access areas:** Greater space allowance where a communal entrance door opens outward.
 - Delivered “as standard” in all dwellings where the communal entrance door opens outwards.
 - Estimated £27 per dwelling.
- **Entrance doors to communal access areas:** Increasing the minimum clear width of entrance doors to communal areas.
 - Delivered “as standard” in all buildings.
 - No additional cost.
- **Door ironmongery for communal entrance doors:** Automatic opening and powered swing doors for communal entrances.
 - Delivered “as standard” in all buildings.
 - Estimated £1,733 per dwelling.
- **Circulation in communal access areas:** Minimum clear opening width of 850mm for internal doors within communal access areas.
 - Delivered “as standard” in all buildings.
 - No additional cost.
- **Differentiating between storeys in buildings containing dwellings:** Decorating different floors of multi-story buildings in distinguishing tones to help people navigate the building.
 - Delivered “as standard” in all buildings.
 - No additional cost.
- **The door and frame:** Increasing minimum clear width of entrance doors to dwellings.
 - Delivered “as standard” in all buildings.
 - No additional cost.
- **The door and frame:** Doors to individual dwellings may be personalised (subject to planning restrictions) to help distinguish from other doors.
 - This new clause would not have to be delivered as standard but may help people living with dementia.
 - No additional cost.

- **The area inside the door:** Increased size of circulation area inside the main entrance door – at least 1,200mm by 1,200mm, extending beyond the door swing at least 600mm by 1,200mm.
 - o Delivered “as standard” for all dwellings except for those designed specifically for wheelchair users where separate standards would apply (below).
 - o No additional cost.
- **The area inside the door (wheelchair user):** Increased size of circulation area inside the main entrance door – at least 1,800mm by 1,800mm, extending beyond the door swing at least 500mm by 1,200mm.
 - o Delivered “as standard” in dwellings specifically designed for wheelchair users.
 - o Estimated £940 - £1,600 per dwelling.
- **Passages:** Increased width of corridors.
 - o Delivered “as standard” in all buildings.
 - o Estimated up to £1,360 per dwelling.
- **Circulation within two-storey houses:** Through floor lift installation in dwellings that have been designed for wheelchair users and are constructed over more than one level.
 - o Delivered “as standard” in homes specifically designed for wheelchair users.
 - o Estimated £21,400 per dwelling.
- **Internal doors and frames:** Increased clear opening width of internal pass doors.
 - o Delivered “as standard” in all buildings.
 - o No additional cost.
- **Specific needs:** Increased space for turning in the living rooms and bedrooms of dwellings designed for wheelchair users.
 - o Delivered “as standard” in homes designed for wheelchair users.
 - o Estimated £4,940 - £6,160 per dwelling.
- **Living rooms:** Provision of space for a desk or workplace with a chair in all dwellings.
 - o Delivered “as standard” in all buildings.
 - o No cost estimates provided.
- **Kitchen units and storage:** Lighting under kitchen wall units to help with food preparation etc.
 - o Delivered “as standard” in all buildings.
 - o Estimated £100 - £200 per dwelling.
- **General considerations for kitchens in dwellings for wheelchair users:** Additional space in kitchens.
 - o Delivered “as standard” in homes designed for wheelchair users.
 - o Estimated £1,235 - £1,835 per dwelling.
- **General requirements for bathrooms:** Electrical connection and capped drainage where a wet floor shower facility is not already being provided to allow for future installation.
 - o Delivered “as standard” for all dwellings except for those designed specifically for wheelchair users where separate standards would apply.
 - o Estimated £260 per dwelling.

- **Additional WCs:** Where an accessible bath or shower is not included on the principle living level, provisions should be made to allow future installation.
 - o Delivered "as standard" for all dwellings except for those designed specifically for wheelchair users where separate standards would apply.
 - o No additional cost.
- **General provision for wheelchair users:** The bathroom should allow for a wet floor shower and include plumbing and drainage for the installation of a bath in future if not already included.
 - o Delivered "as standard" in homes designed for wheelchair users.
 - o No additional cost.
- **General provision for wheelchair users:** Additional space in bathrooms to turn without being impeded by the door and allow space for a helper.
 - o Delivered "as standard" in homes designed for wheelchair users.
 - o Estimated £640 - £760 per dwelling.
- **WCs for wheelchair users:** WCs in all dwellings should include a suitable electricity supply to allow for future installation of washing and drying facilities.
 - o Delivered "as standard" in all buildings.
 - o Estimated £40 - £80 per dwelling.
- **Window design:** A new clause specifying the minimum glazed area of the living room to allow for natural light.
 - o Delivered "as standard" for all buildings.
 - o No additional cost.
- **Electric power:** Requirement for additional power sockets to be included in all homes to allow flexible use of space and technology and support future installation of a stair lift if required.
 - o Delivered "as standard" in all buildings.
 - o Estimated £400 - £520 per dwelling.
- **Digital connectivity:** A new proposal for all homes to be digitally enabled.
 - o Delivered "as standard" in all buildings.
 - o No cost estimate provided.
- **Private external sitting areas and gardens:** Homes to have private or communal outdoor space with room for people to sit, including balconies for flatted developments where private or communal outdoor space cannot be provided.
 - o Delivered "as standard" in all buildings.
 - o No cost estimate provided.