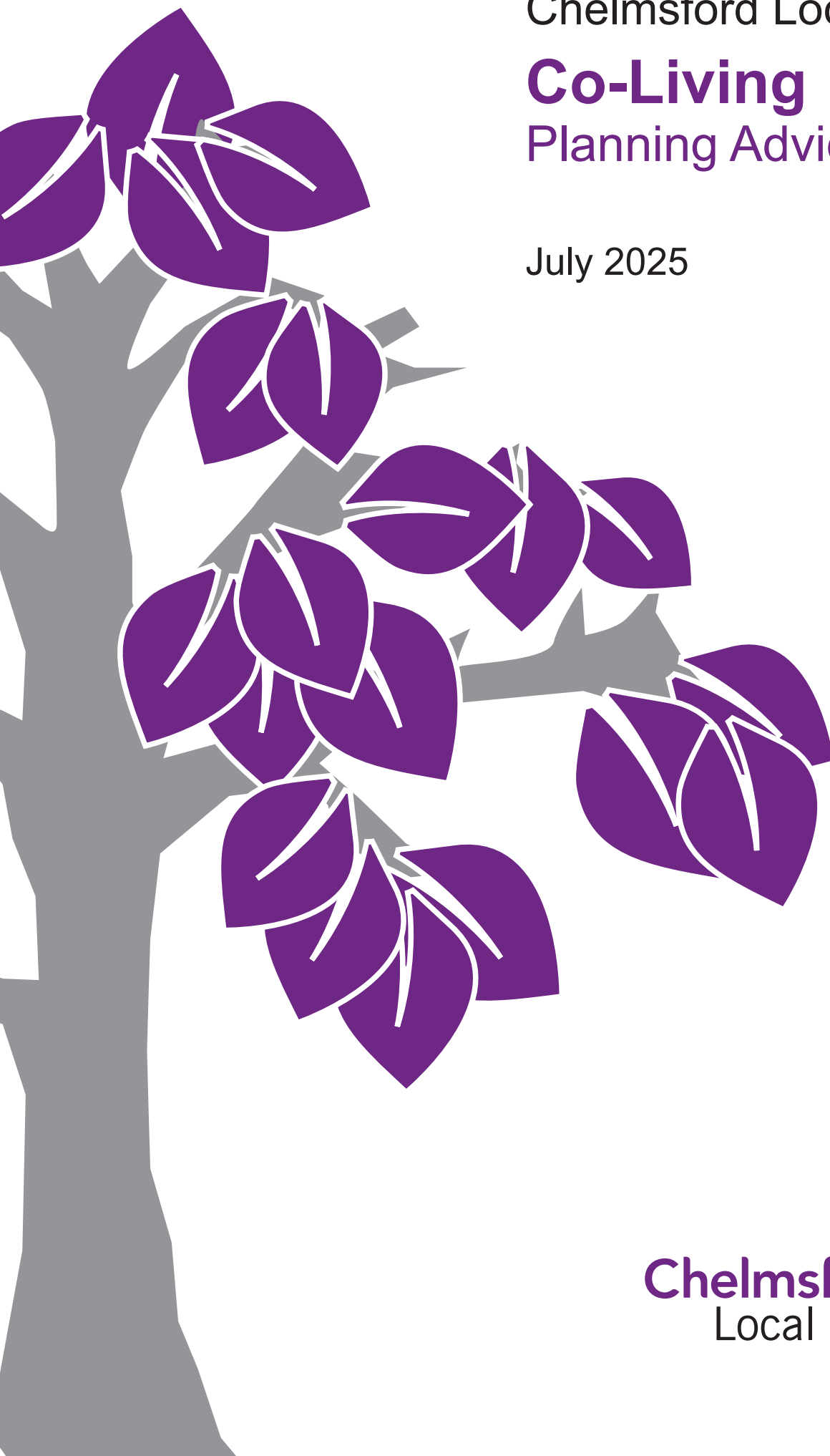


Chelmsford Local Plan

Co-Living

Planning Advice Note

July 2025



Co-Living: Planning Advice Note

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning Advice Note sets out Chelmsford City Council's approach to assessing development proposals for co-living proposals within the Council's administrative area.

2. Purpose and Status

- 2.1 The purpose of this Planning Advice Note is to provide practical guidance to potential co-living promoters or developers and aid decision making by the Council. This approved Planning Advice Note will be used as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

3. What is Co-living?

- 3.1 Co-living is a relatively new form of housing which is not specifically defined as a separate housing category in national planning policy or guidance. Subject to the nature of the specific proposals, the use is not classified in the Use Classes Order and generally classified 'Sui Generis' as Large-scale Purpose-Built Shared Living (LSPBSL).
- 3.2 Co-Living comprises buildings containing private individual rooms rather than fully self-contained units supported by significant communal spaces and facilities. They are different from other housing types, such as:
- Self-contained housing (Use Class C3). Apart from normally small private rooms, co-living provides communal spaces for large-scale shared dining, recreation, day-to-day servicing and often workspaces
 - Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) (Use Class C4) as co-living accommodates more people and have more extensive communal spaces and facilities
 - Hotels (Use Class C1) or Hostels (Sui Generis) as co-living has minimum tenancies, typically of no less than three months
 - Residential Institutions (Use Class C2) as there is no significant element of care or training provided in co-living
 - Student Accommodation as this has a focus on student's needs and often has links with universities
 - Cohousing which are housing schemes initiated, designed and run by a community of people who are willing to off-set personal space to enable community living.
- 3.3 Co-living generally provides accommodation for single-person households who cannot or choose not to live in self-contained homes or HMOs. They are leased on a short-term basis usually not exceeding 18 months and should not be used as a long-term housing solution. It should also not be used as a specialist residential accommodation product where residents have specific support needs.

4. Relevant Local Plan Policies

- 4.1 Co-living is new type of residential product which is not specifically referenced in national planning policy and no planning applications containing it have been considered by the Council to date. As such there is no specific planning policy covering its development. However, the following adopted local plan policies are relevant to its consideration:
- Policy DM2 – Affordable Housing and Rural Exception Sites requires 35% of the total number of residential units to be provided and maintained as affordable housing within all new residential development sites of over 11 residential units.
 - Depending on the specific nature of proposals the provisions and requirements of Policies DM24 – Design and Place Shaping Principles in Major Developments, DM23 – High Quality and Inclusive Design, DM25 – Sustainable Buildings, DM26 – Design Specification for Dwellings, DM27 – Parking Standards and DM28 – Tall Buildings, DM29 – Protecting Living and Working Environments will be relevant.
- 4.2 This Planning Advice Note will be updated with new planning policy references when the review of the adopted Local Plan has been examined and adopted.

5. Demonstration of need and demand

- 5.1 Co-living is a residential product that serves a relatively narrow sector of the housing market. Recent research indicates that existing co-living schemes focus overwhelmingly on more affluent single people or couples without children in the 18-35 age group. They attract young professionals who are attracted to a managed product typically close to city centre attractions and amenities.
- 5.2 There may be some local demand for this type of product for population groups identified above. However, proposals for co-living should demonstrate how they offer diversity in the size and type of the units proposed in order to contribute to the wider planning objective of creating mixed and sustainable communities.
- 5.3 To enable the Council to assess the suitability of the proposal having regard to the adopted local plan policies, proposals for co-living should be supported by detailed evidence to robustly demonstrate the level of need and demand for this type of development. The needs assessment should identify the target resident groups and the scale of the potential need, affordability and demand arising from them.
- 5.4 The needs assessment should show the availability and affordability of alternative rental options e.g. self-contained studio flats, HMOs, flat or house shares. This information should set out a clear breakdown of rents and charges indicating where services, utility costs and council tax are included in the standard rent/room rate and enable a fair comparison with the proposed up to date¹ housing costs.

¹Housing costs should be sourced from data not more than 12 months old

6. Locational Requirements

- 6.1 Chelmsford City Centre would generally be the only location where co-living would be acceptable due to the need for excellent accessibility to local services and facilities.
- 6.2 There is also significant need for self-contained housing (Use Class C3) including affordable housing within Chelmsford City Centre. Therefore, the Council will not support any co-living proposals on sites allocated for Use Class C3 housing within the adopted or emerging review of the Chelmsford Local Plan.
- 6.3 Where co-living is proposed, applicants should consider the options for delivering co-living as part of a mix of self-contained Use Class C3 housing to provide a more inclusive mix of housing types and tenures which has regard to accessibility needs of residents and visitors. In these circumstances the co-living element would be a separate block accessed independently within a wider mixed tenure scheme.

7. Affordable Housing

- 7.1 Policy DM2 of the adopted Local Plan requires 35% of residential units to be affordable on sites of 11 or more residential units. Although not self-contained dwellings, co-living does provide residential units as specified in Policy DM2. As co-living proposals will not meet internal space standards for self-contained dwellings, does not provide a mix of accommodation that addresses priority housing need and provides for shorter term accommodation needs, it would not be appropriate to have on-site affordable housing provided.
- 7.2 Therefore, a financial contribution (commuted sum) would be sought in lieu of provision on site affordable housing in accordance with the market values set out in the Council's adopted **Planning Obligations SPD** but using the smaller Net Internal Area of the private individual room component of a co-living scheme and the values in the latest published Local Plan Viability update Revisions to the Planning Obligations SPD is currently subject of separate consultation and future updates.

8. Design Standards and Communal Facilities

- 8.1 For co-living to be successful there needs to be functional, convenient and meaningful communal facilities provided and maintained to ensure residents can:
 - Cook, prepare and eat meals
 - Socialise and relax, including with guests and visitors
 - Work from home and
 - Do laundry.
- 8.2 Due to the smaller unit sizes in co-living proposals, it is recognised they are likely to be higher density than self-contained housing. Co-living proposals will be assessed against relevant design policies in the adopted Local Plan which includes scale range to ensure that the scheme optimises living conditions for its occupiers, is of high quality and contributes positively to local character and context.

- 8.3 In order to achieve these objectives, proposals are required to adhere to the following overarching design considerations:
- All private rooms should have at least one standard sized window located on a vertical façade;
 - Building frontages should be active, particularly those that face a street or public space;
 - Public realm and landscaping around the development should ensure that the scheme integrates effectively with its surrounding area;
 - A sufficient proportion of private rooms and all communal areas are accessible to those with reduced mobility;
 - Sufficient cores are included to serve the number of private rooms on each floor. These cores should be served by both lifts and stairs.
- 8.4 Co-living is expected to be located within the City Centre where a more flexible approach can be considered for the provision of vehicular parking to serve the proposals. If this is the case, it would be expected that there is focus on cycle parking. Where there is low or no existing public cycle parking provision within the immediate proximity of a proposal co-living promoters should consider providing in excess of the approved cycle parking standard except where there is an on-site bicycle hire scheme available free of charge to residents secured through a planning obligation or condition. Other sustainable transport measures and initiatives would be sought and governed by a Travel Plan.
- 8.5 Although co-living housing proposals are not dwellings (Use Class C3) and Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS) cannot be applied, proposals should not create sub-standard housing or negate the objective of communal living. Therefore the Council will have regard to the space benchmarks contained within the **Large-scale purpose-built shared living London Plan Guidance** published in February 2024. This includes a minimum of 18sqm and maximum 27sqm net internal area for each private unit/room. A mix of unit sizes should be provided to meet identified need within this size range.
- 8.6 A proportion of private units/rooms should be designed to be accessible and usable by those with reduced mobility. The starting point to determine this proportion is the Council's latest Strategic Housing Needs Assessment (SHNA) which currently shows that 2.5% of the projected population of Chelmsford aged between 16-65 will have impaired mobility across the plan period. Accessible units/rooms should be larger than standard units/rooms to ensure adequate space for manoeuvrability and usability. Therefore, accessible private units/rooms should be a minimum of 28sqm and maximum of 38sqm net internal area. In all regards the location of accessible private units/rooms within the development should comply with relevant Building Regulations and Building Safety legislation.
- 8.7 In complying with these space standards, consideration should also be given to both the length, height and width of rooms. Overly long and thin, or short and wide rooms should be avoided. A generous floor to ceiling height can make rooms feel larger and more open than low ceiling heights and so are encouraged. These principles should also apply to other areas of the building including communal areas and corridors.

- 8.8 Each private unit/room should have a private bathroom and small kitchenette. The space benchmarks are set out at Annex 1 of this note, relevant Chelmsford policies would replace any reference to London Plan policies. Planning applications should be accompanied by an accommodation schedule setting out each of the private room/unit's floorspace area in sqm and maximum occupancy as well as wardrobe/clothing storage areas in cubic metres. For accessible private units/room, the circulation space should be clearly labelled on a plan. Particular consideration should be given to the location of accessible private units/rooms to lift cores.
- 8.9 As the intention of co-living proposals is to function as shared living, they should be clearly designed to enable and promote a communal lifestyle. The quantum and quality of shared communal spaces will be very important to fulfil this objective. Shared kitchens, dining and lounge areas should be conveniently located and accessed within the building and managed in such a way that encourages social interaction. In buildings over three storeys these should be located in a number of locations within the block with communal spaces for social interaction on each floor to ensure they are convenient for residents. It also recognised that certain communal facilities such as laundry, shared kitchens and co-working space may need be focused at a smaller number of locations/floors within a block to provide a hub providing critical mass and to optimise the communal living experience. These facilities should not just be located at a single communal hub on a single floor. Plans should be provided that specify the cooking, dining and use of communal areas.
- 8.10 Other facilities such as larger lounges, workspaces, indoor recreational spaces and laundry (washing and drying) facilities could be focused at fewer locations within the building. Communal areas and circulation spaces should be accessible to wheelchair users and people with limited mobility. The building should be fully accessible in terms of entering/exiting, moving and moving around.
- 8.11 Co-living proposals should comply with Policy DM26 of the adopted Local Plan to ensure the provision of private outdoor amenity space which for flatted development should seek to provide private balconies for each unit. In addition, outdoor communal areas which are integral to the design of the proposals (for example courtyards, roof gardens/terraces) should be provided.

9 Management

- 9.1 Co-living development should be operated under single management. As a starting point tenancies should be provided for a minimum of six months to ensure the development does not function as a hostel or hotel. This period should be able to be reviewed to a minimum of three months if Co-living schemes can demonstrate the six month requirement results in significant rental voids above the standard 'churn' rate for this type of development. The units should not be marketed as student accommodation, specialist residential accommodation nor should they permit under 18 year olds to occupy the development.
- 9.2 A management plan should be submitted alongside any planning application for Co-living which shows how the development will be occupied, managed and maintained. This includes information and arrangements pertaining to the security and fire safety of the building and its occupants. The management plan will be secured through a planning condition or Section 106 Planning Obligation.

Annex 1 - Extracts from Mayor of London Guidance

Large-Scale Purpose-Built Shared Living Guidance

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In addition to the overarching design principles set out at Paragraph 8.3

Table 3.1 Recommended benchmarks of total internal communal amenity space provision (including the table 3.2 internal amenities as indicated in column 3)

Number of resident	Benchmarked internal amenity space
Up to 100	4 sqm per resident
Every additional resident from 101 to 400	3 sqm per additional resident
Every additional resident from 401	2 sqm per additional resident

Table 3.2 Recommended benchmarks: Communal areas and facilities

Communal area/facility	Required by policy or optional	Included in communal space requirement (table 3.1)?	Benchmark
Kitchen (section 3.4)	Required	Yes	0.5 sqm per resident, to include one cooking station per 15 residents and the other equipment identified in table 3.3
Dining space (section 3.5)	Required	Yes	Two dining spaces per cooking station; or number of dining spaces = 15% of total residents
Laundry and drying facilities (section 3.6)	Required	No (unless designed as part of a space that encourages residents to spend recreational time)	One washer and one dryer per 35 residents

Table 3.3 Indicative expected kitchen amenities

Kitchen amenity	Benchmark
Hob and oven; sink and draining board	One of each per 15 residents
Fridge with freezer, Dishwasher, Microwave, Base or wall units for food and utensil storage	Located within the kitchen; as appropriate to satisfy the needs of future residents and their visitors
Refuse space, including recycling	Located within the kitchen; as appropriate to meet the needs of all residents and their visitors

Table 3.4 Indicative expected private unit amenities

Room amenities	Additional notes
Double bed; desk with worktop space	-
Bedside cabinet	At least one is recommended
Wardrobe/clothing storage	A storage space of a least 1.2 cubic metres per person
Seating area	An armchair
Dining area	Seating area could be used for eating. If provided, it should be limited to two people dining
Bathroom with shower	Should have a standard size sink, a WC and a place to dry bath towel. Bath tubs are discouraged
Small kitchenette to allow preparation of convenience food	Should provide: sockets to plug in a toaster, a kettle and a non-convection microwave; sink and drainage space, and counter space. If hob is provided, then it should have no more than two plates. A mini fridge should fit under the kitchen counter. No freezer required

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