

## LOCAL PLAN SUB COMMITTEE - 25 SEPTEMBER 2019

### PART I – NOT DELEGATED

#### 5. LOCAL PLAN TOPIC PAPER: HIGH QUALITY HOUSING (DCES)

##### 1 Summary

- 1.1 This topic paper sets out the issues which the new Local Plan will need to address in relation to high quality housing pertaining to Residential Design and Layout and Accessible and Adaptable Buildings and proposes policy wording to be contained within the new Local Plan.

##### 2 Details

###### New Development

- 2.1 As well as securing an adequate supply of housing of a mix of sizes, types and tenures to meet needs in the District, to ensure the quality of life of Three Rivers' residents and communities it is essential that all housing that is provided is of high quality and that there is suitable accommodation to meet a range of needs.
- 2.2 In addition, the quality of existing housing should not be adversely impacted by new development.
- 2.3 Achieving this requires new development to be designed in accordance with the objectives and full range of policies of the Local Plan, as well as specific design principles for new homes set out in the Draft High Quality Housing Policy.
- 2.4 To deliver the step-change in housing required to meet needs in the area the draft policy confirms that new development should make the most efficient use of land without compromising the quality of the environment and residential areas in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requirement that policies optimise use of land and seek significant uplift in density in city and town centres and areas well served by public transport unless there are strong reasons why this would be inappropriate.
- 2.5 While there is a need to increase the density of development generally and encourage innovation in the delivery of new housing, it is also essential that new housing provided is of high quality and that the quality of the environment and existing residential areas is maintained or enhanced. The NPPF also acknowledges at paragraph 122 that development should take into account the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting (including residential gardens), and at paragraph 70 that there may be a case for policies to resist inappropriate development of residential gardens for example where development would cause harm to the local area.
- 2.6 Pressure for development including on garden land or for infill development can erode the particular character of an area or impact on the residential amenity of both existing and new occupants if not managed. However, taking a different approach to the established character of an area will not necessarily be harmful in all cases where it is informed by careful consideration for important elements of local character and the quality of the area. The draft policy sets out the factors that will be considered in determining whether a proposal may result in unacceptable harm to an area.

- 2.7 In particular, proposals for tandem development (one or more dwellings directly behind one another on the same plot and sharing the same access) or backland development (one or more dwellings provided to the rear of existing buildings with no street frontage and generally accessed by a long driveway) need to be carefully considered as these can often be inappropriate.

#### Subdivision of Dwellings

- 2.8 The subdivision of existing dwellings can also contribute a source of new housing supply and these types of applications can be a satisfactory way of raising densities in low density areas close to local transport nodes and local services.
- 2.9 However, whether or not subdivision is acceptable will depend on the characteristics of the building and area, and the standard of accommodation that can be created. Applications will therefore be carefully assessed to ensure that character and residential amenity are protected.<sup>1</sup>

#### Internal Space Standards

- 2.10 Delivering high quality housing requires careful consideration for the provision of usable internal space, as well as providing access to a suitable quantity and quality of external amenity space to support quality of life for residents.<sup>2</sup>
- 2.11 To provide for a suitable standard of accommodation, the Government has published nationally described space standards (NDSS) which set out optional requirements for the floor area of new dwellings depending on the level of occupancy, as well as floor areas and dimensions for key parts of the home such as bedrooms, storage and floor to ceiling heights.
- 2.12 The NPPF sets out that Local Plans may make use of these NDSS where the need for an internal space standard can be justified.
- 2.13 Monitoring information<sup>3</sup> shows that since April 2015 a total of 193 dwellings granted planning permission were smaller than the minimum nationally described space standards. It should be noted that there were no reasons or justification for refusing them in policy terms at the time.
- 2.14 As such, requiring new development to generally accord with NDSS would provide for improvement to the quality of housing being delivered and resulting benefit or the general health and wellbeing of the community and a more flexible and adaptable housing stock to be able to meet the needs of residents.

#### Accessible and Adaptable Dwellings

- 2.15 The National Planning Policy Framework states that local authorities should assess:
- “the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policies (including, but not limited to, those who require affordable housing, families with children, older people, students,

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<sup>1</sup> Part E (Resistance to Sound) of the Building Regulations sets out the soundproofing standards for new homes and conversions. It deals with dividing walls and floors, and also requires some sound insulation internally to protect bedrooms from noise.

<sup>2</sup> Amenity Space Standards were the subject of a report to the LPSC 8 August – design criteria

<sup>3</sup> Source – Measurements from Community Infrastructure Levy Forms from April 2015 to March 2019

people with disabilities, service families, travellers, people who rent their homes and people wishing to commission or build their own homes”.

- 2.16 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) in relation to Housing and Economic Needs no longer sets out the guidance for different types of housing but links to “separate guidance on identifying the housing needs of different groups<sup>4</sup> and housing needs of older and disabled people<sup>5</sup>”.
- 2.17 National Planning Practice Guidance makes it clear that accessible and adaptable housing enables people to live more independently, while also saving on health and social costs in the future and that an ageing population will see the numbers of disabled people continuing to increase<sup>6</sup>.
- 2.18 The Draft Local Housing Needs Assessment has provided an analysis looking at a range of disabilities and the number of people with and projected to have these disabilities.

Table 1: Projected changes to population with a range of disabilities – Three Rivers

Disability	Age range	2017	2036	Change	% change
Dementia	65+	1,244	2,101	857	68.9%
Mobility problems	65+	2,881	5,502	2,622	91.0%
Autistic Spectrum Disorders	18-64	537	637	100	18.5%
	65+	155	239	84	54.4%
Learning Disabilities	15-64	1,414	1,677	263	18.6%
	65+	350	528	178	51.0%
Challenging behaviour	15-64	26	31	5	18.6%
Impaired mobility	16-64	3,085	3,745	660	21.4%

Table 2: Estimated need for wheelchair user homes (2017 – 2036) – SW Herts

	Current need	Projected need (2017-36)	Total
Dacorum	225	572	797
Hertsmere	146	397	543
St. Albans	206	501	707
Three Rivers	131	349	480
Watford	138	444	582
South West Herts	846	2,263	3,109

- 2.19 The Draft Local Housing Needs Assessment has also provided a projection of the likely number of older persons that will be living in the District by 2036.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-needs-of-different-groups>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-for-older-and-disabled-people>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-for-older-and-disabled-people#accessible-and-adaptable-housing> Planning Practice Guidance Paragraph:002 Reference ID: 63-002-20190626

	2017	2036	Change in population	% change
Under 65	75,776	89,450	13,674	18.0%
65-74	8,866	12,176	3,310	37.3%
75-84	5,418	8,337	2,919	53.9%
85+	2,581	5,054	2,473	95.8%
Total	92,641	115,017	22,376	24.2%
Total 65+	16,865	25,566	8,701	51.6%

2.20 Many Local Authorities have previously had policies requiring developments to be built to the Lifetime Homes Standard. The Lifetime Homes Standard<sup>7</sup> is a set of 16 design criteria that provide a model for building accessible and adaptable homes and it was once the Government's intention that all new homes would be built to this standard by 2013. Changes were made to the Code for Sustainable Homes in 2010 to incorporate revisions to the Lifetimes Homes Standard.

2.21 As previously reported to the Local Plan Sub Committee, the Government withdrew the Code for Sustainable Homes in March 2015 as part of its move towards technical standards and the use of Building Regulations.

2.22 In October 2015, Part M of the Building Regulations were updated and included the introduction of new accessible housing standards. The standards have three categories:

- M4 (1) Category 1: Visitable Dwellings (mandatory<sup>8</sup>)
- M4 (2) Category 2: Accessible and Adaptable Dwellings (optional)

A new dwelling makes reasonable provision for most people to access the dwelling and incorporates features that make it potentially suitable for a wide range of occupants, including older people, those with reduced mobility and some wheelchair users.

- M4 (3) Category 3: Wheelchair User Dwellings (optional)

A new dwelling makes reasonable provision, either at completion or at a point following completion, for a wheelchair user to live in the dwelling and use any associated private outdoor space, parking and communal facilities that may be provided for the use of the occupants

2.23 The National Planning Policy Framework<sup>9</sup> states that planning policies for housing should make use of the Government's optional technical standards for accessible and adaptable housing, where this would address an identified need for such properties.

2.24 Planning Practice Guidance<sup>10</sup> also states that Local Plan policies for homes readily useable by a wheelchair user (M4 (3)) should only be applied to those dwellings

<sup>7</sup> In February 2008

<sup>8</sup> This is mandatory for all new dwellings unless one of the optional requirements M4(2) or M4(3) applies

<sup>9</sup> Page 39 Footnote 46 of the National Planning Policy Framework

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-optional-technical-standards#accessibility-and-wheelchair-housing-standards>

Paragraph: 009 Reference ID: 56-009-20150327

where the local authority is responsible for allocating or nominating a person to live in that dwelling. Therefore the draft policy requires a percentage of new homes to meet M4(2) requirements and a percentage of the affordable housing to meet M4(3) requirements.

- 2.25 The percentages sought for accessible and adaptable dwellings in the draft policy will be subject to a Whole Plan Viability Assessment which the NPPF requires to test the policies within the Draft Local Plan to consider whether those policies maintain the viability of development. The assessment will include modelling of all policy requirements likely to impact on viability, such as affordable housing, carbon reduction requirements, environmental standards, space standards, open space requirements, Community Infrastructure Levy etc.
- 2.26 It should be noted that where it is likely that a policy will impose greater financial burdens on developers, regard should be had to its potential adverse consequence on the delivery of other important policy objectives e.g. the provision of affordable housing.
- 2.27 The proposed Draft Residential Design and Layout and Accessible and Adaptable Buildings Policy is set out in Appendix 1.

### **3 Policy/Budget Reference and Implications**

- 3.1 The recommendations in this report are within the Council's agreed policy and budgets.

### **4 Financial, Legal, Equal Opportunities, Staffing, Environmental, Community Safety, Public Health, Customer Services Centre, Communications & Website, Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications**

- 4.1 None specific.

### **5 Recommendation**

- 5.1 That the Local Plan Sub Committee note the contents of this report and recommend to the Policy and Resources Committee the Draft Residential Design and Layout and Accessible and Adaptable Buildings Policy as set out in Appendix 1.

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#### **Background Papers**

National Planning Policy Framework (2019)

Planning Practice Guidance

Part M Building Regulations

(2015) [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/540330/BR\\_PDF\\_AD\\_M1\\_2015\\_with\\_2016\\_amendments\\_V3.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/540330/BR_PDF_AD_M1_2015_with_2016_amendments_V3.pdf)

Lifetime Homes

#### **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 Draft Residential Design and Layout and Accessible and Adaptable Buildings