

Stoke-on-Trent Council
Planning Department
Civic Centre
Glebe Street
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
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21 June 2021

Dear Sir / Madam

STOKE ON TRENT LOCAL PLAN – ISSUES & OPTIONS CONSULTATION

Introduction

Thank you for consulting with the Home Builders Federation (HBF) on the above-mentioned consultation. The HBF is the principal representative body of the house-building industry in England and Wales. Our representations reflect the views of our membership, which includes multi-national PLC's, regional developers and small, local builders. In any one year, our members account for over 80% of all new "for sale" market housing built in England and Wales as well as a large proportion of newly built affordable housing. The following responses to specific questions in the Issues & Options consultation document were submitted via the Council's online consultation portal.

HOUSING

QUESTION 13 : Which of the housing requirements set out above do you think should be adopted?

As set out in the 2019 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the Council should establish a housing requirement figure for its whole area, which shows the extent to which its identified housing need can be met over the plan period (para 65). The determination of the minimum number of homes needed should be informed by Local Housing Needs (LHN) assessment using the Government's standard methodology unless exceptional circumstances justify an alternative approach (para 60). The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) sets out the standard methodology for calculating the LHN figure using demographic data (based on 2014 MHCLG Sub National Household Projections (SNHP)), an affordability adjustment (based on the latest ONS affordability ratios) and a Cities & Urban Centres uplift of 35% (ID 2a-004-20201216). Using the standard methodology, the minimum LHN for Stoke on Trent is 678 dwellings per annum based on 2014 SNHP, 2021 as the current year, 2020 affordability ratio of 4.37 and 35% Cities & Urban Centres uplift. This is identified in Growth Scenario A2 for 13,680 dwellings (684 dwellings per annum) between 2020 – 2040. As set out in the NPPG, the LHN is calculated



at the start of the plan-making process but this number should be kept under review and when appropriate revised until the Local Plan is submitted for examination (ID 2a-008-20190220). The minimum LHN may change as inputs are variable.

The NPPG also clearly states that the standard methodology is the minimum starting point in determining the number of homes needed. The 2019 NPPF seeks to achieve sustainable development by pursuing economic, social and environmental objectives in mutually supportive ways (para 8). The Council should seek to achieve a sustainable balance between employment and housing growth. The NPPG explains that “*circumstances*” may exist to justify a figure higher than the minimum LHN. The “*circumstances*” for increasing the minimum LHN are listed in the NPPG including, but not limited to, situations where increases in housing need are likely to exceed past trends because of growth strategies, strategic infrastructure improvements, agreeing to meet unmet need from neighbouring authorities or previous levels of housing delivery / assessments of need, which are significantly greater than the outcome from the standard methodology (ID 2a-010-2001216). Using an Experian Baseline economic growth model, Growth Scenario B demonstrates a need for 16,220 dwellings (811 dwellings per annum).

It is noted that the 2020 Housing Delivery Test (HDT) Results identify housing completions of 1,045 dwellings in 2019/20, which significantly exceeds the minimum LHN of 678 dwellings per annum and the adopted Joint Local Plan housing requirement of 675 dwellings per annum. The NPPG indicates that if previous housing delivery has exceeded the minimum LHN, the Council should consider whether this level of delivery is indicative of greater housing need (ID 2a-010-20201216). Recent housing delivery rates align with the Council’s past successes in growing the local economy (Growth Scenario D) and the Experian higher jobs growth model used in Growth Scenario C, which identifies a housing need of 21,480 dwellings (1,074 dwellings per annum).

As set out in the 2019 NPPF, the Government’s objective is to significantly boost the supply of homes (para 59). The Council has demonstrated that in Stoke on Trent, there are “*circumstances*” to justify a housing requirement above the minimum LHN. As set out in the NPPG, the Government is committed to ensuring that more homes are built and supports ambitious Councils wanting to plan for growth (ID 2a-010-20201216). The NPPG states that a higher figure “*can be considered sound*” providing it “*adequately reflects current and future demographic trends and market signals*” (ID 2a-015-20190220). However, the NPPG does not set any limitations on a higher figure, which is a matter of judgement. A minimum housing requirement based on Growth Scenario C of 21,480 dwellings (1,074 dwellings per annum) would support economic growth and deliver more affordable housing.

QUESTION 14 : How should the local plan seek to meet and distribute housing delivery across the city?

The Council's Housing Land Supply (HLS) should provide a sufficient supply of land to meet its housing requirement (minimum of 21,480 dwellings in Growth Scenario C), to ensure the maintenance of a 5 Year Housing Land Supply (YHLS) and to achieve HDT performance measurements.

Table 4 identifies a HLS of 17,789 dwellings comprising of :-

- 4,093 dwellings on sites with planning permission not yet completed as of 1 April 2020 ;
- 9,898 dwellings on sites considered deliverable / developable but without planning permission in 2019 SHLAA (5,632 dwellings on brownfield sites / 4,266 dwellings on greenfield sites) ; and
- 3,798 dwellings (211 dwellings per annum) on windfalls sites.

The Council should provide a short and long-term supply of sites on brownfield and greenfield land. As set out in the 2019 NPPF, at least 10% of the housing requirement should be accommodated on sites no larger than one hectare or else demonstrate strong reasons for not achieving this target (para 68a). The Council should confirm that this national policy requirement will be achieved. Housing delivery is optimised by the widest possible range of housing site sizes and market locations, which provides suitable land buying opportunities for small, medium and large housebuilding companies. The widest mix of sites provides choice for consumers, allows places to grow in sustainable ways, creates opportunities to diversify the construction sector, responds to changing circumstances, treats the housing requirement as a minimum rather than a maximum and provides competition in the land market. A diversified portfolio of housing sites also offers the widest possible range of products to households to access different types of dwellings to meet their housing needs.

Table 4 identifies that sufficient sites are available within the existing urban area to meet Growth Scenario A2. However, under Growth Scenarios B & C the identified urban capacity is exceeded and the release of land from the Green Belt would be required. As set out in 2019 NPPF, where fully evidenced and justified Green Belt boundaries can be altered in "*exceptional circumstances*" through the preparation or updating of Local Plans (para 136 & 137).

The Council's proposed windfall allowance of 211 dwellings per annum should be supported by compelling evidence that such sites have consistently become available and will continue to be a reliable source of supply as set out in the 2019 NPPF (para 70).

The Council should provide a trajectory illustrating the expected rate of housing delivery over the plan period and if appropriate to set out the anticipated rate of development for specific sites as set out in the 2019 NPPF (para 73). An accurate assessment of availability, suitability, deliverability, developability and viability of sites should be undertaken. It is critical that the Council's assumptions on lead in times and delivery rates are correct and realistic, which should be supported by parties responsible for the delivery of housing on identified sites.

QUESTION 15 : What approach should we take to ensure the right amount and type of affordable housing is delivered within the city?

Total affordable housing need should be considered in the context of its likely delivery as a proportion of mixed market and affordable housing developments. As set out in the NPPG, an increase in the total housing figures may be considered where it could help deliver affordable housing (ID 2a-024-20190220). The NPPG sets out that households whose needs are not met by the market, which are eligible for one or more of the types of affordable housing set out in the definition of affordable housing in Annex 2 of the 2019 NPPF, are considered in need of affordable housing (ID 67-005-20190722). The Council should confirm that the need for 139 affordable dwellings per annum identified in the Housing Needs Assessment (2020) conforms with the definition of affordable housing set out in the 2019 NPPF and the latest NPPG. It is acknowledged that the Council may not be able to meet all affordable housing needs but a housing requirement above the minimum LHN will make a greater contribution to delivering more affordable housing.

The Council's affordable housing tenure mix should accord with national policy. The 2019 NPPF expects at least 10% of homes to be available for affordable home ownership (para 64). The Written Ministerial Statement dated 24 May 2021 also requires 25% of affordable housing to be First Homes with further detail on implementation provided in the latest NPPG.

QUESTION 16 : How should we ensure that the Local Plan delivers the right types of housing?

All households should have access to different types of dwellings to meet their housing needs. As set out in 2019 NPPF, the housing needs for different groups should be assessed to justify any policies on the size, type and tenure of housing (paras 61 & 62). All policies should be underpinned by relevant and up to date evidence which should be adequate, proportionate and focussed tightly on supporting and justifying the policies concerned (para 31).

The setting of residential density standards should be undertaken in accordance with the 2019 NPPF (para 123), whereby in the circumstances of an existing or anticipated shortage of land for meeting identified housing needs then a minimum net density in suitable locations such as town centres and those benefiting from good public transport connections may be appropriate. A blanket approach to the intensification of housing densities everywhere would be inappropriate as a range of differing densities will be needed to ensure development is in keeping with the character of the surrounding area and to provide sufficient variety in house typologies to create balanced communities with the right types of new homes to meet the housing needs of different groups.

Market signals are important in determining the size and type of housing needed. An overly prescriptive policy approach setting out specific policy requirements for the types and sizes of dwellings is unnecessary. The Council

should ensure that appropriate sites are allocated to meet the needs of specifically identified groups of households rather than prescribing specific housing mixes for individual sites. The Local Plan should ensure that suitable sites are available for a wide range of different types of development across a wide choice of appropriate locations. The Council should consider allocating sites for older persons and other specialist housing subject to criteria such as the proximity of sites to public transport, local amenities, health services and town centres.

If the Council wishes to apply the optional standards for accessible & adaptable homes and / or the Nationally Described Space Standard (NDSS), then this should only be done in accordance with the 2019 NPPF (para 127f & Footnote 46) and the latest NPPG (ID 56-007-20150327 & 56-020-20150327). The Council should provide a local assessment, which justifies with credible and robust evidence its case. The Council should also acknowledge that implementation of the Government's proposed changes to Part M of the Building Regulations as set out in the "Raising Accessibility Standards for New Homes" consultation (closed on 1 December 2020) will supersede any proposed policy approach.

QUESTION 17 : How can we best deliver self and custom build?

The Council should support Self & Custom Build Housing. The NPPG sets out the key role that the Council should play in bringing forward suitable land for self & custom build housing (ID 57-025-20210508).

QUESTION 18 : Do you think schemes above a certain size should be required to provide a certain percentage of self-build plots?

The provision of a certain percentage self-build plots on schemes above a certain size adds to the complexity and logistics of development and slower delivery. The provision of self-build plots on new housing developments cannot be co-ordinated with the development of the wider site. At any one time, there are often multiple contractors and large machinery operating on-site, from both a practical and health & safety perspective, it is difficult to envisage the development of single plots by individuals operating alongside this construction activity. Furthermore, any differential between the lead-in times / build out rates of self-build plots and the development of the wider site will result in construction work outside of specified working hours, building materials stored outside of designated compound areas, etc and unfinished plots next to completed / occupied dwellings causing customer dissatisfaction.

Where plots are not sold, these plots should not be left empty to the detriment of neighbouring properties or the whole development. The timescale for reversion of these plots to the original developer should be as short as possible because consequential delay presents further practical difficulties in terms of co-ordinating their development with construction activity on the wider site. There are even greater logistical problems created if the original developer has

completed the development and is forced to return to site to build out plots, which have not been sold to self-builders.

As well as on-site practicalities, any impacts on viability should be tested and additional costs should be fully accounted for in the Council's viability assessment. The inclusion of self-build plots will have a fundamental bearing on the development economics of the scheme. Site externals, site overheads, and enabling infrastructure costs are fixed and borne by the site developer. The developer will also have borne up front site promotion costs, including planning and acquisition costs. It is unlikely that these costs will be recouped because the plot price a self-builder is able to pay is constrained by much higher build costs for self-build. Profit obtainable if the house was built and sold on the open market by the site developer is foregone. There are also worst-case scenarios of unsold plots remaining undeveloped and disruption if unsold plots are built by the site developer out of sequence from the build programme of the wider site or a return to site after completion of the wider site.

TRANSPORT

QUESTION 25 : Should all new developments contain electrical vehicle charging points (EVCPs)?

It is recognised that electric vehicles will be part of the solution to transitioning to a low carbon future. As set out in the Department of Transport consultation on Electric Vehicle Charging in Residential & Non-Residential Buildings (ended on 7th October 2019), the Government's preferred option is the introduction of a new requirement for EVCPs under Part S of the Building Regulations. The inclusion of EVCP requirements within the Building Regulations will introduce a standardised consistent approach to EVCPs in new buildings across the country.

However, until the introduction of proposed changes to Part S of the Building Regulations, the HBF consider that the physical installation of active EVCPs is inappropriate. The evolution of automotive technology is moving quickly therefore a passive cable and duct approach is a more sensible and future proofed solution, which negates the potential for obsolete technology being experienced by householders. A passive cable and duct approach means that the householder can later arrange and install a physical EVCP suitable for their vehicle and in line with the latest technologies.

In plan-making, viability is inseparable from the deliverability of development. At Examination, viability will be a key issue in determining the soundness of the Local Plan. Therefore, the viability of individual developments and plan policies should be tested at the plan making stage. Without a robust approach to viability assessment, land will be withheld from the market and housing delivery will be threatened. Viability assessment should not be conducted on the margins of viability. The Council's viability assessment should test the impact of provision of EVCPs on viability. The Government estimated an installation cost of approximately £976 per EVCP plus any costs for upgrading local electricity

networks, which under the Government's proposal automatically levies a capped figure of £3,600 on developers. These additional costs should be included in the Council's viability assessment. HBF Members have serious concerns about the capacity of the existing electrical network in the UK. The supply from the power grid is already constrained in many areas across the country. Major network reinforcement will be required across the power network to facilitate the introduction of EVCPs and the move from gas to electric heating as proposed under the Future Homes Standard (see HBF answer to Question 42 below). These costs can be substantial and can drastically affect the viability of developments. If developers are funding the potential future reinforcement of the National Grid network at significant cost, this will have a significant impact on their businesses and potentially jeopardise future housing delivery.

DESIGN

QUESTION 32 : Do we need additional measures, supplementary to national guidance and codes, in the Local Plan to achieve good design? (and if yes, what could those measures be?)

The Council's policy approach on design should accord with the 2019 NPPF, the latest NPPG, the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code. This approach should provide specific local guidance rather than repeating national policy or guidance. The use of any Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) should not convey development plan status onto a document, which has not been subject to the same process of preparation, consultation and examination, contrary to the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (Regulations).

BIODIVERSITY

QUESTION 38 : How do we best meet our obligations in meeting biodiversity requirements?

The Council's policy approach to biodiversity net gain should align with the Government's proposals as set out in the Environment Bill including a mandatory national requirement for biodiversity gain and transitional arrangements. In the Government's opinion, 10% strikes the right balance between the ambition for development and reversing environmental decline whilst providing certainty in achieving environmental outcomes, deliverability of development and costs for developers. The Government also intends to make provision for a transition period of two years. The specifics of this transition period will provide clear and timely guidance on understanding what will be required and when.

In plan-making, viability is inseparable from the deliverability of development. At Examination, viability will be a key issue in determining the soundness of the Local Plan. Therefore, the viability of individual developments and plan policies should be tested at the plan making stage. Without a robust approach to viability assessment, land will be withheld from the market and housing delivery will be

threatened. Viability assessment should not be conducted on the margins of viability. There are significant additional costs associated with biodiversity gain, which should be fully accounted for in the Council's viability assessment. The Government has confirmed that more work needs to be undertaken to address viability concerns raised by the housebuilding industry in order that biodiversity net gain does not prevent, delay or reduce housing delivery.

SUSTAINABLE BUILDING DESIGN

QUESTION 42 : What level of sustainable building design standards do you consider should be required for future developments?

Today's new homes are already very energy efficient with lower heating bills for residents in comparison to older existing homes. Energy performance data has shown that 8 out of 10 new build dwellings have an A or B energy efficiency rating, compared to only 3% of existing properties. In November 2019, the average new build buyer in England saved £442.32 every year on heating costs compared to owners of existing dwellings.

Nevertheless, the HBF recognise the need to move towards greater energy efficiency via a nationally consistent set of standards and timetable, which is universally understood and technically implementable. The Government Response to The Future Homes Standard : 2019 Consultation on changes to Part L (conservation of fuel and power) and Part F (ventilation) of the Building Regulations for new dwellings dated January 2021 provides an implementation roadmap, the Government's aim is for the interim Part L (Conservation of fuel and power), Part F (Ventilation) & Overheating Regulations to be regulated for in late 2021 and to come into effect in 2022. The 2021 interim uplift will deliver homes that are expected to produce 31% less CO2 emissions compared to current standards. To ensure as many homes as possible are built in line with new energy efficiency standards, transitional arrangements will apply to individual homes rather than an entire development and the transitional period will be one year. This approach will support successful implementation of the 2021 interim uplift and the wider implementation timeline for the Future Homes Standard from 2025. The Future Homes Standard will ensure that new homes will produce at least 75% lower CO2 emissions than one built to current energy efficiency requirements. By delivering carbon reductions through the fabric and building services in a home rather than relying on wider carbon offsetting, the Future Homes Standard will ensure new homes have a smaller carbon footprint than any previous Government policy. In addition, this footprint will continue to reduce over time as the electricity grid decarbonises.

The HBF support the Government's approach to the Future Homes Standard but there are difficulties and risks to housing delivery given the immaturity of the supply chain for the production / installation of heat pumps and the additional load that would be placed on local electricity networks in combination with Government proposals for the installation of EVCPs in new homes (see HBF answer to Question 25 above). In autumn 2020, the HBF established a Future Homes Task Force to develop workable solutions for the delivery of the

home building industry's contribution to meeting national environmental targets and objectives on Net Zero. Early collaborative work is focussed on tackling the challenges of implementing the 2021 and 2025 changes to Building Regulations successfully and as cost-effectively as possible, in particular providing information, advice and support for SME developers and putting the customer at the centre of our thinking.

The HBF consider that the Council should comply with the Government's intention of setting standards for energy efficiency through the Building Regulations. The key to success is standardisation and avoidance of individual Councils specifying their own policy approach to energy efficiency, which undermines economies of scale for product manufacturers, suppliers and developers. The Council should not need to set local energy efficiency standards to achieve the shared net zero goal because of the higher levels of energy efficiency standards for new homes proposed in the 2021 Part L uplift and the Future Homes Standard 2025.

It is noted that for the moment in its Response to the Future Homes Standard consultation, the Government has confirmed that the Planning and Energy Act 2008 will not be amended, therefore the Council will retain powers to set local energy efficiency standards for new homes. However, the Government's Planning for the Future White Paper sets out that a simpler planning process improves certainty. The Government has also acknowledged the need to clarify the role of Councils in setting energy efficiency requirements for new homes that go beyond the mandatory standards set out in the Building Regulations. The Housing, Communities & Local Government Committee have opened a new inquiry into "Local Government and the path to net zero". The aim of the inquiry is to scrutinise the Government's plans to make all new homes "zero carbon ready" by 2025, through the introduction of the Future Homes Standard, and to explore how Local Government can help the UK to reduce its carbon emissions to "net zero" by 2050. The deadline for the submission of evidence on the role of Councils in determining local energy efficiency standards was 30 April 2021.

In plan-making, viability is inseparable from the deliverability of development. At Examination, viability will be a key issue in determining the soundness of the Local Plan. Therefore, the viability of individual developments and plan policies should be tested at the plan making stage. Without a robust approach to viability assessment, land will be withheld from the market and housing delivery will be threatened. Viability assessment should not be conducted on the margins of viability. There are significant additional costs associated with the Future Homes Standard. The Government's estimated cost for 2021 interim uplift is £4,847, which should be fully accounted for in the Council's viability assessment.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the Council finds these responses are helpful in preparing the next iteration of the Stoke on Trent Local Plan. In the meantime, if any further assistance or information is required, please contact the undersigned.

Yours faithfully
for and on behalf of **HBF**



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