

Matter 9 – Other housing policies

Issue

Whether the Local Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to the approach to housing density, meeting housing needs and Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople provision.

Relevant policies DEV1 to DEV3

Questions

Housing density (Policy DEV1 parts 5 and 6)

1. What is the basis for the minimum densities set out in Policy DEV1? Are they realistic and justified?

1. This part of the policy provides the densities at which development will be expected to occur, it suggests a minimum density of at least 130 dwellings per hectare (dph) on sites within the defined town centre, at least 50dph on sites within the wider town centre and adjacent to a district centre or in other locations well served by frequent bus or train services and at least 30dph on other sites within an existing urban area. The policy also suggests that densities of less than 30dph will only be appropriate where they are necessary to achieve a clear planning objective, such as to avoid harm to the character or appearance of an area.
2. The HBF has assumed these densities are to some extent based on the evidence within Appendix 3 & 4 of the SHLAA, which identify densities of developments in Warrington, some have been implemented, some are extant, and some are in the planning pipeline. It is not apparent how many of the schemes considered have met the policy requirements that are set out in the proposed Plan, including NDSS, M4(2) and M4(3), or Government requirements such as EV Charging, Biodiversity Net Gain or improvements to Part L of the Building Regulations all of which have the potential to impact on the density of the development. It is therefore not possible to determine if the minimum densities are realistic.

2. How will “locations that are well served by frequent bus or train services” be defined and is this sufficiently clear?

3. The HBF considers it is not sufficiently clear how locations that are well served by frequent bus or train services is defined and this may need to be clarified as part of the justification text for the policy. It may also need to be clear that this could change over time as services change.

3. Is the policy sufficiently flexible to allow particular circumstances to be taken into account?

4. The HBF generally supports the Council in setting a density policy and making efficient use of land in accordance with NPPF¹. However, the HBF does not consider that the policy is sufficiently flexible to allow particular circumstances to be taken into account. The HBF considers that it is important to ensure that the prioritisation of higher density

¹ Paragraph 124 & 125 NPPF 2021

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development does not compromise the delivery of homes in sustainable locations to meet local needs. The Council will need to ensure that consideration is given to the full range of policy requirements as well as the density of development, this will include the provision of M4(2) and M4(3) standards, the NDSS, the provision of cycle and bin storage, the mix of homes provided, the availability of EV Charging and parking, any implications of design coding and the provision of tree-lined streets, highways requirements, and the potential requirements in relation to Biodiversity Net Gain, changes to the Building Regulations requirements in relation to heating and energy and the Future Homes Standard.

5. The HBF is concerned that the use of higher densities has implications for the type, size and tenure of the homes provided and may mean that the Council is not always able to provide an appropriate housing mix across the Council area. This may mean that the homes delivered do not meet the housing needs of the local community or the market demand in the area. The HBF also considers it will be important to consider the future deliverability of intensely developed residential schemes, which will be dependent on the viability of PDL and demand for high density urban living post Covid-19.
6. The HBF recommends that the Council increases the flexibility of the policy to ensure that the density policies are realistic, achievable and will ensure the delivery of homes that area appropriate to market. This could be done through amendments to allow developers to take account of the evidence in relation to market aspirations, deliverability and viability as well as planning objectives in relation to any of the density requirements.

Meeting housing needs (Policy DEV2)

4. What is the evidence in terms of affordable housing need and what does it show?

7. The Local Housing Needs Assessment Update (LHNAU) (2021) report identifies a need for 423 affordable homes per annum in Warrington, this is an increase from the previous 377 affordable homes per annum identified in the previous assessment. The LHNAU suggests that there will be a need for both social and affordable rented housing, as well as affordable home ownership products.

5. What are the past trends in affordable housing delivery in terms of completions and housing forms? How is this likely to change in the future?

8. Table 1 below sets out the affordable housing delivery in Warrington over the last ten years, it shows that the affordable housing provision has ranged from 22 dwellings in a year to 227 dwellings, with an average of 128 affordable dwellings provided each year.
9. In the year 2020/21, 152 affordable dwellings were provided of these 43 (28%) were provided through S106 with no additional funding, in the previous year only 22 affordable dwellings were provided and 14 (64%) were provided through S106.

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Table 1: Affordable Homes provided in Warrington²	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Social Rent	110	93	3	3	36	9	5	12	14	17
Private Registered Provider HE/GLA funded	98	28								2
Local Authority HE/GLA funded	12									
Local Authority other funding		3	3					8		
Private Finance Initiative										
s106 nil grant		62		3	36	9	5	4	14	15
Affordable Rent		25	187	89	92	33	24	70	8	67
Private Registered Provider HE/GLA funded		25	161	81		33	16	61	8	58
Affordable Homes Guarantees				1	20					
Local Authority HE/GLA funded				7	54					
Local Authority other funding							4			
Right to Buy recycled receipts					18					
s106 nil grant			26				4	9		9
Intermediate Rent		4								
Private Registered Provider HE/GLA funded										
Private Registered Provider other funding		4								
Shared Ownership					17	30	14	18		68
Private Registered Provider HE/GLA funded						26	14	10		49
Affordable Homes Guarantees					17					
s106 nil grant						4		8		19
Affordable Home Ownership	77	105	22	20	4					
Private Registered Provider HE/GLA funded	77	101	12	8						
s106 nil grant		4	10		4					
Other				12						
Grand Total	187	227	212	112	149	72	43	100	22	152

² Data taken from DLUHC Live Tables on Affordable Housing Supply, Table 1011C: Additional affordable housing supply, detailed breakdown by local authority, completions. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1084700/Live_Table_1011.xlsx

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6. Should the threshold for seeking affordable housing reflect the definition of major housing development in the NPPF i.e. 10 dwellings or more or a site area of 0.5ha or more?

10. The HBF considers that the affordable housing threshold should reflect the definition in the NPPF³.

7. What is the basis for the percentages of affordable housing sought and are they justified?

11. The HBF considers this is a question for the Council.

8. Does the evidence on viability support the approach to affordable housing in Policy DEV2?

12. The Local Plan Viability Assessment (August 2021) highlights issues with affordability for some of the typologies and site allocations. Therefore, the HBF have concerns that this policy will lead to the non-delivery of homes in the Borough. It should be noted that the NPPF⁴ establishes the importance of viability to ensure that development identified in the Plan should not be subject to such scale of obligations and policy burden that their ability to be delivered might be threatened.

9. Is there sufficient flexibility to take account of site specific viability issues?

13. Part 8 of the policy introduces a level of flexibility into the policy, however, it is important that the policy is not set at a level that is unrealistic and requires significant numbers of applicants to need to demonstrate to the Council that their development is not viable.

10. In other respects, is the approach to affordable housing justified, effective and consistent with national policy?

14. The HBF does not wish to comment on this question at this time.

11. Is the approach to the mix of housing sizes and types justified? Is it intended to apply this policy to all developments regardless of size?

15. This policy states that residential development should provide a mix of different housing sizes and types and should be informed by the Borough-wide housing mix monitoring target [set out in table 3], the sub-area assessment contained in the most up to date local housing needs assessment and any local target set by a Neighbourhood Plan.

16. The HBF understands the need for a mix of dwelling types and is generally supportive of providing a range and choice of homes to meet the needs of the local area. It is, however, important that any policy is workable and ensures that housing delivery will not be compromised or stalled due to: overly prescriptive requirements; requiring a mix that does not consider the scale of the site; or the need to provide additional evidence.

17. The HBF has concerns that Table 3 provides a snapshot in time and may be superseded by more up to date and other sources of information. The HBF

³ Paragraphs 64 and 65 & Glossary of NPPF 2021

⁴ Paragraph 34 of NPPF 2021

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recommends a flexible approach is taken regarding housing mix which recognises that needs and demand will vary from area to area and site to site; ensures that the scheme is viable; and provides an appropriate mix for the location. The HBF considers that the Council should also consider additional information which might inform the housing mix, including information provided by the home building industry and registered providers.

12. Is there justification for the use of Nationally Described Space Standards in terms of need and the effect on viability?

18. PPG⁵ identifies the type of evidence required to introduce such a policy. It states that where a need for internal space standards is identified, local planning authorities should provide justification for requiring internal space policies. Local planning authorities should take account of the following areas: Need, Viability and Timing.
19. The Council will need robust justifiable evidence to introduce the NDSS, based on the criteria set out above. The HBF does not consider that the Council can provide the evidence to support the need for this optional standard as part of the policy and as such it should be deleted. The HBF considers that if the Government had expected all properties to be built to NDSS that they would have made these standards mandatory not optional.
20. The HBF notes that the Viability Assessment appears to have included average unit sizes that are lower than the NDSS unit sizes if using the greatest number of people or in many cases if taking an average of the unit sizes for each number of people. For example, an average unit size for a 3-bed house is taken as 89sq.m. in the viability assessment whilst the NDSS includes figures from 74sq.m for a 4 person 1 storey home right through to 108sq.m. for a 6-person 3 storey home, with an average of 92sq.m, across the 9 values provided. However, if consideration is also given to the density of development expected in parts of Warrington it may be common to have a greater proportion of 3 storey homes rather than one storey which would increase the unit size above the average figure from the NDSS, and definitely over that suggested by the Viability Assessment, as even the smallest of 3bed 3 storey homes is required to be more than 89sq.m within the NDSS.

13. How will “appropriate outdoor amenity space” be defined?

21. The policy and justification text do not appear to provide any detail as to what will be considered ‘appropriate outdoor amenity space’. The HBF considers it would be beneficial if more detail was provided as to what may be considered appropriate, but also allowing for flexibility to take into consideration any site specific circumstances which may influence what is considered to be ‘appropriate’.

14. Are the requirements for Accessible and Adaptable dwellings and Wheelchair User dwellings justified and consistent with national policy? How has the effect on viability been taken into account?

⁵ ID: 56-020-20150327

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22. This part of the policy states that the Council will seek that as a minimum all homes should be provided at M4(2) standard. It goes on to state that the Council will seek 10% of new housing at M4(3) standards.
23. The HBF is generally supportive of providing homes for older and disabled persons. However, if the Council wishes to adopt the higher optional standards for accessible & adaptable homes the Council should only do so by applying the criteria set out in the PPG. PPG⁶ identifies the type of evidence required to introduce such a policy, including the likely future need; the size, location, type and quality of dwellings needed; the accessibility and adaptability of the existing stock; how the needs vary across different housing tenures; and the overall viability.
24. The Local Housing Needs Assessment provides the Council's evidence for this policy. Unfortunately, this evidence is severely lacking on the majority of these elements. This lack of evidence does question how the percentages identified in the policy were derived. It is incumbent on the Council to provide a local assessment evidencing the specific case for Warrington which justifies the inclusion of optional higher standards for accessible and adaptable homes in its Local Plan policy. Based on the currently available evidence the HBF recommends that this part of the policy is deleted.
25. If the Council can provide the appropriate evidence and this policy is to be included, then the HBF recommend that the policy should:
- take into account site specific factors such as vulnerability to flooding, site topography and other circumstances which may make the site less suitable for M4(2) and M4(3) compliant dwellings as set out in PPG;
 - ensure that if step-free access is not viable that M4(2) and M4(3) should not be applied; and
 - ensure an appropriate transitional period is included.

15. Is the approach towards housing for older people justified? How would part 18 of Policy DEV2 be implemented in practice, what is meant by housing for older people and to what extent is this issue covered by the approach to Accessible and Adaptable dwellings and Wheelchair User dwellings?

26. This section of the policy looks for residential developments of 10 or more dwellings to provide housing for older people. Whilst the flexibility of the policy is appreciated in terms of the consideration of the location of site, the nature of the area and the type of development. It is not clear what will be required from the development, or how this might work with the requirements for M4(2) and M4(3) dwellings.

16. Is the approach towards self and custom build housing justified? How will it be implemented?

27. The HBF is concerned that from the policy it is not clear how the Council will ensure a sufficient supply of plots are provided for self-build and custom build housing.

⁶ ID: 56-007-20150327

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28. There are requirements for custom and self-build plots however set out within the individual site allocations requirements. The HBF considers that the provision of a certain percentage self-build plots on schemes above a certain size adds to the complexity and logistics of development and may lead to the slower delivery of homes. 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.
29. The PPG⁷ sets out how local authorities can increase the number of planning permissions which are suitable for self and custom build housing. These include supporting neighbourhood planning groups to include sites in their plans, effective joint working, using Council owned land and working with Home England. The HBF considers that alternative policy mechanisms could be used to ensure a reliable and sufficient provision of self & custom build opportunities across the Borough including allocation of small and medium scale sites specifically for self & custom build housing and permitting self & custom build outside but adjacent to settlement boundaries on sustainable sites especially if the proposal would round off the developed form.

17. Is the approach towards Houses in Multiple Occupation justified? How will the criteria in part 21 of Policy DEV2 be applied and defined, particularly criterion a)?

30. The HBF does not wish to comment on this question at this time.

Main modifications

22. Are any main modifications to the above policies necessary for soundness?

31. The HBF has provided some suggestions for modifications in relation to the questions above. These include potential for deletions for certain requirements or for inclusion of additional text in line with the NPPF and PPG.

⁷ ID: 57-025-20210508