

Warrington Local Plan Examination

Hearing Session Note Action 52

Matter 9 - Note setting out available evidence to support need for NDSS

2 November 2022

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Part 13 of Policy DEV2 requires dwellings to meet the Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS).
- 1.2 Further to discussion at the 'Matter 9: Other housing policies' hearing session, clarification has been requested by the Inspectors regarding evidence supporting the need for the NDSS and the Council's view on a possible transition period for implementation following adoption of the Local Plan. Further clarification is also provided in relation to disability grants in the context of NDSS.
- 1.3 This note provides the Council's response as requested.

2 The Nationally Described Space Standards

- 2.1 The Council is proposing in Policy DEV2 that all dwellings should meet the NDSS, noting that Planning Practice Guidance (018 Reference ID: 56-018-20150327) sets out that such standards should only be introduced by local planning authorities by reference in their Local Plan to the NDSS.
- 2.2 The Council is generally noting that schemes are more often than not meeting the NDSS in any case as developers move towards meeting this widely regarded national standard.
- 2.3 The Council has included these space standards within its recently adopted Town Centre SPD (2021), the implementation of which is already proving successful. There will of course continue to be instances when the nature of dwellings being proposed may not be suitable to meet the specified standards and this can be dealt with on a case by case basis as allowed for within the policy wording (Part 13 of Policy DEV2 states that the Council will seek to provide dwellings which meet NDSS) and through viability considerations. However, the Council considers it is appropriate to seek to implement these standards across all development in the Borough as a starting point in order to provide quality living accommodation which is easily adaptable to meet the varied needs of the local population and the increasing trend of people working from home.
- 2.4 As required in PPG (Paragraph 020 Reference ID: 56-020-20150327), 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 need, viability and the timing of adopting standards. These matters are considered below.

Need and Current Trends

- 2.5 In reviewing recent schemes which have been granted planning consent across the Borough, it has been noted that many are already achieving the internal space requirements set by NDSS.

2.6 The table below provides a summary of recent planning consents and identifies those where the standards have been meet:

Area	Site Name (SHLAA Ref)	Planning Application No.	Date of decision	Total units	Comments
Town Centre	Winwick Street/John Street, WA4 6NL (1029)	2017/31394	30/07/2018	362	Development is under construction. Duplex apartment types generally exceed NDSS – 9 duplex apartments in total. Some single storey apartment types meet NDSS but most do not.
	66 Sankey Street, WA1 1SB (3537)	2019/35397	24/02/2020	14	Development is complete. All units comply with the NDSS.
	Bank House, Bank Street, WA1 2AP (3572)	2020/36256	22/12/2021	80	Development not commenced. All units proposed are 1 and 2 bed apartments and with the exception of six 2 bed units that are 0.5m ² short, achieve the minimum standards for 1 and 2 bed units.
	Land at Stanley Street, WA1 1EZ (3150)	2020/37959	11/02/2022	39	Development not commenced. All units comply with the NDSS.
	NTH/Cockhedge, Warrington, WA1 2NH (2673a/b)	2020/41003	S106 Pending	900	Development not commenced. Design code commits to “All dwellings must be delivered to accordance with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities [DLUHC] Nationally Described Space Standards [NDSS] which will ensure that residents will benefit from homes where they can both live and work”.
	Land at 31–35 Winwick Street, WA1 7TT (1422)	2021/39444	Undetermined	26	Development not commenced. A minimum of 16 of the 26 units comply with the NDSS.
Inner Warrington	63 Mersey Street (3023)	2018/32177	11/04/2018	17	Development is complete. A minimum of 4 of the 17 units comply with the NDSS.
	Beers Building Co. Station Road, Latchford, WA4 2AD (1090 and 1090a)	2018/31871 2021/40307	13/12/2018 15/12/2021	189 9	Development is under construction. All duplex apartments comply with NDSS (96 duplex apartments) 6 of the 9 additional apartments exceed the NDSS.

	Spectra Building & Drivetime Golf Range, South of Centre Park, WA1 1QL (1715)	2019/35711	06/08/2021	513	Development is under construction. A minimum of 53 of the 513 dwellings/apartments comply with the NDSS.
Wider Urban Area	Omega Zone 6 Phase 2a (2135b)	2017/30837	28/11/2017	158	Development is under construction. Affordable units do not meet NDSS. Generally market housing exceeds NDSS.
	Gemini 16 (1825a)	2018/33778	08/04/2019	79	Development is under construction. A minimum of 41 of the 79 dwellings comply with the NDSS.
	Omega Zone 6 Phase 3a (2135d)	2019/35721	20/12/2019	180	Development is under construction. A minimum of 123 of the 180 dwellings comply with the NDSS. Affordable units do not meet NDSS. Generally market housing exceeds NDSS.
	Grappenhall Heys Phase 1b (1646b)	2020/38247	31/03/2021	110	Development is under construction. All dwellings comply with the NDSS.
	Omega Zone 6 Phase 3b (2135e)	2020/38148	22/06/2021	145	Development is under construction. The vast majority of the dwellings comply with the NDSS.
	Omega Zone 6 Phase 6 (will be 2135f in 22/23 SHLAA)	2021/40279	13/04/2022	195	Development not commenced. All dwellings comply with the NDSS.

- 2.7 In the Town Centre and Inner Warrington there is currently a mix of units being provided and in particular, in relation to apartments, some of these meet the NDSS and some do not. In the wider Borough NDSS are regularly being met in terms of market housing with more variation in affordable units. The Council considers that given the increasing trend to meet these requirements the local plan should seek to regularise this wherever possible.

Viability

- 2.8 Where viability or the nature of a specific scheme is a constraint to achieving NDSS, Policy DEV2 allows for flexibility in such instances and the onus will be on the developer to demonstrate that meeting the standards is not appropriate. However, the Council considers this should be the exception and the presumption should be to provide living accommodation which meets the standards in the first instance.
- 2.9 An example of a scheme where the Council has taken viability and the specific nature of a scheme into account in allowing an application that did not meet the NDSS is the Former Foxwood School development (SHLAA Ref: 2692/App Ref: 2020/36579). In this scheme in terms of internal space, the houses and apartments provided well over 90 per cent of the minimum gross internal floor area advocated in the NDSS but did not meet the requisite standards. However, the applicant provided a detailed justification setting out that if the units were increased in size to meet the room sizes advocated in NDSS, that they would not command proportionately higher rents in the area that they are located in the borough and that the viability of the scheme would be jeopardised. The additional construction cost for a fully NDSS compliant scheme was £1,079,329 higher and this would have been at the expense of four units on site, with a consequential loss of affordable housing. Hence, on balance, as the scheme provided the full required level of affordable housing it was considered with the overriding need for new dwellings in the borough (in particular those available for affordable rent) the size of the units was considered to be acceptable.

3 Timing of adoption standards

- 3.1 The Council is concerned that should a transitional period be imposed upon adoption of the plan, this may discourage the implementation of NDSS where they are already being achieved, as evidenced above. In particular in the town centre the assumption is already that new development will adhere to the space standards as set out in the adopted Town Centre SPD (2021).
- 3.2 The impression that the Council's Development Management Team has from the development industry is that the draft local plan is the transition document until adopted. Pre-application discussions that DM colleagues are involved in, where applications are likely to come forward post-adoption of the Plan, take in to account the requirements in the draft policies (in particular Policy DEV2) and currently that provides an expected lead-in time of around 12 months.

- 3.3 Therefore, the Council, is of the view that the presumption should be that NDSS should be met upon adoption of the plan.

4 Future Adaptations for Enhanced Accessibility

- 4.1 It is the Council's policy to allow elderly or disabled people to remain in their own homes for as long as possible, in order to avoid, wherever possible, placements into care homes and similar facilities. A chief mechanism for achieving this is the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), which funds works of up to £38,000 to enable properties to be adapted for special needs. The DFG covers a wide range of works, from wheelchair ramps and 'grab rails' up to homes extensions to provide dedicated disabled facilities.
- 4.2 For each application, the specific needs of the household are assessed by an Occupational Therapist, who then liaises with a building surveyor to discuss appropriate modifications to the property. Where such modifications are not feasible because of the constraints of the property, in terms of room sizes or general layout, other options may be pursued including relocation.
- 4.3 It is estimated by our Families and Wellbeing Directorate that over 20% of applications for adaptation are not pursued because the properties are unsuited to such works owing to size and/or configuration. In the majority of such cases, other accommodation is sought for the applicant. This financial year, the Council has administered five temporary relocations with grant aid, where homes were unsuited to adaptation.
- 4.4 Other applications are pursued but the cost is materially increased because of the need to remove internal walls in order to create wheelchair accessible rooms (albeit that this may still be a cheaper option than placing the resident in a supported facility). Typical issues include: repositioning of staircases away from the front door; need to relocate internal walls to create appropriately sized wet-rooms; need to remove walls to increase kitchen areas; relocation of bedroom and wet-room to ground floor; and installation of lift-systems. An approximate calculation of the extra spend for DFGs due to poor space standards is £458,000 per year, or £20,500 per property.
- 4.5 Taking into account paediatric cases, where approximately 90% of cases are necessarily extensions due to inadequate circulation space, an additional spend of £922,000 has been incurred.
- 4.6 Clearly, the adaptations of properties and the relocation of elderly or mobility-impaired households to wheelchair-accessible accommodation are a significant cost to the public purse (Warrington Borough Council spends approximately £3,000,000 per year via DFGs) that would not be necessary were properties designed to NDSS.