

Scrutiny Review – Affordable Housing & Planning Policy

Recommendations

1. The policy should be revised as part of the Local Development Framework (LDF). The assessment should consider whether the overall target for affordable housing being sought should be maintained at its current level or increased slightly to take account of the latest housing needs data. Consideration should also be given to lowering the current 15 unit threshold for triggering the provision of affordable housing. Such an assessment will need to pay careful attention to land supply, market conditions, viability and the likely level of public subsidy available.
2. The new policy should reflect latest Government policy and guidance and aim to support the development of mixed and sustainable communities. Where possible the Council should seek to promote choice by ensuring that a range of house and tenure types are available across a given area and avoid high concentration of any one particular tenures or property type.
3. The policy should pay particular attention to affordability and be evidence based in terms of the preferred mix and tenure sought. It should be flexible so as to respond to changing needs and aspirations of those seeking housing at any given time over the period of the Plan.
4. The Project Board believes that the primary need will continue to be for social rented housing as evidenced by the 2005 Housing Needs Survey and 2006 Housing Market Assessment. Nevertheless the committee also recognises that the provision of other tenures of affordable housing, such as shared ownership housing, can be justified in some circumstances where it helps improve the economics of provision on marginal sites or aids the councils wider economic & regeneration aims. This might be particularly relevant where high levels of social rented homes already exist and a degree of tenure diversification is sought.
5. In considering individual planning applications the Council should refer to the most recent housing need and housing market data available. This should include a consideration of levels of homelessness and demand as expressed through the Council's housing registers and the waiting lists
6. The Project Board believes that the council should, after taking account of relevant factors, specify size and type of affordable housing that in their judgment, is needed in particular locations and if appropriate on specific sites.

7. In determining the type of affordable housing that is required on specific sites this should be achieved through policy, guidance and control measures. Developments should ensure that a good mix of housing is provided, both houses & flats, and in particular that families, the elderly and those with disabilities are suitably catered for.
8. The Project Board believes that given the level of demand for affordable housing and the scarcity of available housing land, the emphasis should remain for on site provision of affordable housing. Off site contributions or commuted sums should only be considered in the most exceptional circumstances where the Council believes it is desirable in terms of helping support the development of a more mixed community and where it will provide an equivalent contribution in lieu of on site provision.
9. Affordable housing should be of a high quality and affect a high standard of environmental sustainability. Homes should be of an Eco Homes standard 'very good' as a minimum and should be built to 'Lifetimes Homes' standard. Affordable homes should be well integrated within market housing sites and indistinguishable from those homes for outright sale in terms of style, location and build quality. The Project Board feels that small clusters of affordable housing rather than monolithic blocks of a single tenure are desirable.
10. Any new affordable housing policy should be regularly reviewed through annual monitoring reports to assess whether it achieving the desired outcomes.