



ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

**ST HELENS BOROUGH
LOCAL PLAN 2020-2035**

**ST HELENS BOROUGH COUNCIL'S RESPONSE
TO INSPECTORS MATTERS ISSUES AND
QUESTIONS**

Matter 7 – Specific Housing Needs and Standards

SESSION 9 – 13:30 THURSDAY 17 JUNE 2021

May 2021

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Matter 7: Specific Housing Needs and Standards

(Policies covered: LPC01, LPC02, LPC03, LPC13 (Section 4))

Issue 1: Housing Mix

- 1. Is Section 1 of Policy LPC01 positively prepared, justified and effective in reflecting the needs of different groups in terms of size and type of housing?*

The housing mix and type promoted through Policy LPC01 is reflective of the needs identified in the SHMA and is therefore justified. Developer preference and the delivery of market homes within the borough has for a long time been skewed towards one and two bedroom properties, which make a better return on investment. In order to better meet needs, the Policy has set out a minimum requirement for different sized homes in developments. This demonstrates desire to create mixed and balanced communities across all locations in the borough. For affordable rented homes, smaller family homes are likely to reflect the needs and the policy sets out requirement as such.

Taking account of identified needs, the Policy seeks to ensure better levels of delivery by specifically seeking the integration of older people's housing into larger developments by seeking to implement optional standards as set out in Parts M4(2) and M4(3) of the Building Regulations 2010 (as amended) and setting requirements for bungalow development on larger greenfield sites. The policy is supportive to the people who wish to commission or build their own homes are provided the opportunity through the positive approach to small site development.

The policy is not considered to be too prescriptive since part C of the policy and paragraph 7.10 of the supporting text permit variations to the dwelling size mix if this can be justified based on the tenures and type of housing proposed, site location, area's characteristics, design constraints, scheme viability; and where shared ownership is proposed, the ability of potential occupiers to afford the homes proposed.

- 2. Does the reference to the 'latest SHMA' in Policy LPC01 result in a positively prepared and effective policy?*

Yes, the St. Helens SHMA update prepared by G L Hearn was published in January 2019 and provides the most up to date information since the publication of the Mid Mersey SHMA that was produced in January 2016. The document takes account of other updates in evidence base (such as ELNS Addendum Report, January 2019) in determining the housing need and setting the local plan housing requirement. Finally, this report also considers the latest data relating to affordable housing need, provides an updated assessment of specialist housing needs, and for older persons and housing mix. The report also updates assessment of housing needs in St Helens in accordance with the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). The reference to the latest SHMA therefore lends more credibility and confidence to the policy.

3. Taking into account the findings of the SHMAs and the need to make effective use of land, is the 5% requirement for bungalows on larger greenfield sites in Section 3 of Policy LPC01 justified (see SHBC001 – PQ60)?

Yes. The issue is extensively covered by our response to PQ60 (SHBC001). The Council acknowledges that the bungalow development may be considered as low-density development on larger greenfield sites, but one way to test the need to make effective use of land is done through the whole plan viability testing (SD0025). The outcome of the assessment suggests that as being viable. This particular approach also sits at the heart of the Policy, through which the Council seeks to achieve the housing delivery that makes an effective response to the needs of the diverse groups in the population. This approach complies with the advice in para 117-123 of the NPPF in assessing the effective use of land the need to make effective use. In particular, para 122 a) suggests Planning policies and decisions should support development that makes efficient use of land, taking into account the identified need for different types of housing and other forms of development, and the availability of land suitable for accommodating it. On that basis Section 3 of Policy LPC01 is justified.

4. Does Policy LPC01 make sufficient provision for the housing needs of older people?

The Council considers that Policy LPC01 makes sufficient provision for the housing needs of older population through number of measures that range from provision of accessible and adaptable homes, promotion of specific type of housing (bungalows). As such the Plan has responded to the evidence demonstrated by the SHMA (HOU001) which indicates that St. Helens has a population with a slightly higher proportion of older persons when compared with both the region and national average, which is likely to grow. The policy requirements have been tested against the viability assessment () and have been proved to be viable and deliverable. The Policy recognises that the housing needs of older people is a complex issue and as such older people do not fall within one distinct category, instead they have variable needs, which is addressed through other criteria in the policy. For example, as the population ages, many older residents may wish to downsize, and that Policy LPC01 Housing Mix will support the Council in ensuring that all new housing addresses variable needs of older people, by seeking a mix of housing, and for large sites expecting mix to be informed by local evidence.

5. Does Policy LPC01 make sufficient provision for the housing needs of those who wish to build their own homes?

Yes. The Policy sets out broad support for self-build and custom housing and expects major housing development applications to consider the register and whether provision should be included within the development. This approach balances the need to meet local demand on the register with the challenges of meeting the general housing need of the local population. Many people on the Council's register are interested in plots not on developer-led sites.

Whilst the provisions in Policy LPC01 would be unlikely to meet these preferences, national policy does not suggest that self/custom build housing should be exempt from the principle of actively managing patterns of growth.

6. *Should Policy LPC01 make reference to a need for detached houses based on the low number of such homes within the housing stock (paragraph 2.5.1 of the Plan refers)?*

The answer is no. It is acknowledged that historically the proportion of detached homes has been low in the Borough, there is insufficient local evidence to suggest that the Plan should seek to actively pursue to increase that proportion.

Issue 2: Housing Standards/Sustainable Design

7. *Is the application of the optional standards for accessible and adaptable standards and wheelchair users for larger greenfield developments through Section 2 of Policy LPC01 justified having regard to paragraph 127 of the Framework, the PPG and the evidence base?*

The Council considers the application of optional standards for accessible and adaptable standards and wheelchair users for larger greenfield developments through Section 2 of Policy LPC01 justified having regard to paragraph 127 of the Framework, the PPG and the evidence base. The requirements have been proposed based on the evidence collected through SHMA (HOU001), which was prepared taking account of the guidance in Planning Practice Guidance note 56 (Housing: optional technical standards) and a range of other data sources as signposted in the Housing Needs and Supply background paper (SD025). Primarily, the data shows that in general, St Helens has a higher level of disability when compared with the national position, and that an ageing population means that the number of people with disabilities is expected to increase substantially in the future. The policy requirements are therefore in line with the paragraph 127 of the Framework which seeks to ensure developments 'promote health and well-being'.

The NPPF states that local planning authorities should plan for the needs of different community groups, including older people. Specific parts of Policy LPC01 therefore seek to address this by requiring developers to make provision for accessible and adaptable homes on larger greenfield sites to make provision. These requirements are supported by viability testing which shows that base costs would only increase by modest amounts and represent a minimal cost in terms of overall scheme appraisals and that there is no negative impact on the viability (VIA001).

8. Is there any justification for the use of the Nationally Described Space Standard (see SHBC001 – PQ61)?

It is accepted that the Council cannot justify the implementation of the nationally described optional internal space standards into policy due to lack of sufficient evidence. Nevertheless, it is considered that the design of new dwellings is a matter that is supported by a core principle requiring high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all occupants of land and buildings. There is also policy on good design in the NPPF which includes in paragraph 57: “It is important to plan positively for the achievement of high quality design for all development”.

9. Should Policy LPC01 refer to a transitional period for the introduction of the optional standards?

No, the transition period can only be established when evidence in relation to emerging trends and the evidence regarding changing demographic profile and dwelling stock across the Borough.

10. Is the requirement within Policy LPC13 for strategic housing sites to provide at least 10% of their energy needs from renewable/low carbon sources justified and consistent with national policy?

The 10% requirement is equivalent to the now obsolete Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4. As a starting point for major developments, this represents a reasonable level. This has been accounted in the BCIS build costs in the Whole Plan Viability Assessment which in conjunction with other specific policy requirements open space provision (LPC05), accessible housing (DM12) and electric vehicle charging point (LPC08), and is considered viable on the whole plan viability basis. Therefore, the policy requirement is justified.

11. Is Section 4 of Policy LPC13 consistent with the Government’s current policy on energy performance set out in the Written Ministerial Statement of March 2015¹?

The 25 March 2015 Written Ministerial Statement (WMS) sets out the government’s new national planning policy in relation to the setting of energy standards for new dwellings. In response, the council proposes further modifications to LPC13 criterion 4 to ensure the Plan is fully compliant as set out below:

New developments for housing, employment or other uses will be required to meet high standards of sustainable design and construction and minimise carbon emissions equivalent to CSH level 4, i.e., 19% carbon reduction against Part L 2013 unless proved unviable.

¹ Energy performance standard equivalent to former CSH level 4

Issue 3: Affordable Housing

12. Is the zonal approach to the provision of affordable housing within Policy LPC02 positively prepared and justified by proportionate evidence, including the EVA?

The Policy adopts a zonal approach to the provision of affordable housing within Policy LPC02, which is justified by the evidence base and the viability assessment. It also is consistent with the NPPF insofar as the Framework paragraph 63 sets out variability in the affordable housing requirements. The Housing Needs and Supply background paper background paper explains the justification for the level of thresholds for different areas. In essence the affordable housing requirement of Policy LPC02 demonstrates differential viability across different zones as demonstrated by the St Helens Economic Viability Assessment, December 2018 (VIA001). In essence a site that is viable on in the higher value zone but would not be in the lower value zone. The policy also allows for site specific viability assessments to be undertaken where applicants consider that affordable housing and/or other policy costs are not viable. St Helens remains a number of areas that have witnessed high levels of deprivation, dereliction and sites with high remediation costs and the blanket approach to the affordable housing requirement would undermine the regeneration objectives of the Local Plan.

13. In particular:

a. Is the provision of 30% of affordable homes on greenfield sites in Zones 2 and 3 justified?

b. Are the differences between Zones 2 and 3 in relation to brownfield sites justified and clear to the decision maker?

Yes. St Helens Economic Viability Assessment, December 2018 (VIA001) demonstrates the requirement of or 30% of affordable homes on greenfield sites in Zones 2 and 3 is achievable and therefore justified. The Council believe the differences between Zones 2 and 3 in relation to brownfield sites are justified and clear to the decision maker. The affordable housing areas are clearly presented in the Plan (Figure 6.1, p. 85). As such the zones follow ward boundaries. Table 6.3 provides further clarity on different areas subject to different affordable housing requirements.

14. Is Policy LPC02 sufficiently flexible to take into account that circumstances will vary site-by-site (Section 4 refers)?

The Council considers that the criterion 4 of Policy LPC02 to provide sufficient flexibility to take account of the individual site circumstances with respect to responding to the affordable

housing requirement. Development outweigh the failure to provide the full affordable housing contribution.

15. Is there any justification for a rural exceptions site policy for affordable housing (see SHBC001 – PQ63)?

There is no justification for a rural exceptions site policy for affordable housing. The Council's confirmed through its response to the preliminary question (PQ63 in SHBC001), that there is lack of local evidence indicating the need for such a policy nor any need has been flagged for a policy to this effect through the plan making process. Notwithstanding the Plan does not actively set a rural exception sites and that some areas might benefit from such policy, but it is recognised that these areas are also benefited by the proximity to the large Green Belt allocations in respect of affordable housing.

Issue 4: Gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople

16. Is the evidence base supporting the need for 8 residential pitches and 3 transit pitches robust, taking into account factors such as existing provision, household growth, hidden need (those in bricks and mortar housing), unauthorised sites and encampments and any engagement with the traveller community?

The GTAA (GYP001) outlines the evidence behind the supporting need for 8 residential pitches and 3 transit pitches in SHBC Section 3 of this document provides details on the methodology used for the analysis which includes the use of the wide range of quantitative and qualitative data, analysis of short and long term needs which includes hidden need (from those living in 'bricks and mortar houses) and unauthorised sites and encampments including the nature of engagement with the members of the Gypsy & Traveller Community across the Merseyside and West Lancashire Area. This is also briefly mentioned in paragraph 6.9.2 in the Plan.

17. Should Policy LPC03 be modified so that it sets pitch targets for gypsies and travellers (paragraph 9 of Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) refers)?

No, the paragraph 6.9.3 sets pitch targets that align with paragraph 9 of Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS). This is in light of the PPTS being produced after the drafting of the Policy LPC03.

18. Is the need identified for the next 5 years or for later in the Plan period?

As outlined in Paragraph 6.9.3 of the Reasoned Justification of Policy LPC03, of the 8 permanent pitches required in St Helens: 6 were required between 2013 to 2018; 1 between 2018 and 2023 and 1 between 2023 and 2033. There is also a need for 3 transit pitches as outlined in the GTAA between 2013 and 2033.

19. Depending on the response to Q18, is the allocated residential site deliverable or developable?

Site GTA01 satisfies the criteria for site provision set out in Policy LPC03 and is considered to be deliverable by the Council. The policy provides detailed criteria in order to provide sufficient weight and clear direction for developers and the community. The site is located to the west of an existing provision at the Council owned Sherdley Road Caravan Park which provides further confidence on the deliverability of the site.

20. Are the criteria within Section 4 of Policy LPC03 fair and consistent with national policy in PPTS?

Yes, the criteria outlined in Section 4 ensure that provision for new sites protect the neighbouring amenity and site constraints as with all planning considerations. The criterion broadly aligns with Paragraph 13 of the PPTS which encourages integration with the local community, access and pressure on existing services, school provision, providing a settled base, considering environmental impact, avoiding high risk areas of flooding and reflecting traditional lifestyles.

Therefore, it is considered that the points within criterion 4 of Policy LPC03 are consistent with national policy.