

Home Builders Federation

Matter 11

BRAINTREE SECTION 2 LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION

Matter Main Matter 11

A Prosperous District – Homes - Policies LPP 33 – LPP 43

Are the above policies justified by appropriate available evidence, having regard to national guidance and local context?

No. The Council state in policy LP37 that they will require residential development to be built in accordance with the national technical housing standards. Whilst this does not state that nationally described space standards will be applied the Council's intention to do so is confirmed in paragraph 6.117 of the Local Plan. Firstly, the Council's intention to apply the NDSS should be clearly set out in the policy. Secondly if the Council intends to apply the NDSS it must have the necessary evidence to support its introduction.

It is important to recognise that the optional technical standards can, as set out in paragraph 56-002 of Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), only be introduced where they are needed and where they do not impact on the viability of development. The application of space standards has been considered in the viability assessment, however no we could not find any evidence as to the need for such standards that has been published by the Council.

Whilst the HBF share the Council desires to see good quality homes delivered within Braintree we also consider that space standards can, in some instances, have a negative impact upon affordability issues and reduce customer choice. In terms of choice, for example, some developers will provide entry level two, three and four-bedroom properties which may not meet the optional nationally described space standards, but which would allow on lower incomes can afford a property which has their required number of bedrooms. Given the poor affordability of property in the area it is important that the Council can provide, in line with PPG, robust evidence that there is a need to introduce the optional space standards – that these standards are a must have rather than a nice to have policy.

The HBF is also not aware of any evidence that market dwellings in Braintree that do not meet the NDSS remaining unsold or that those living in these dwellings consider that their housing needs are not met. There is no evidence that the size of houses built are considered inappropriate by purchasers or dwellings that do not meet the NDSS are selling less well in comparison with other dwellings. The HBF in partnership with



National House Building Council (NHBC) undertake an annual independently verified National New Homes Customer Satisfaction Survey¹. The latest survey published in 2021 demonstrates that 92% of new home buyers would purchase a new build home again and 91% would recommend their housebuilder to a friend. The results also conclude that 94% of respondents were happy with the internal design of their new home, which does not suggest that significant numbers of new home buyers are looking for different layouts or house sizes to that currently built.

Given that there is little to suggest that development below space standards is an endemic concern within Braintree we would suggest that the fourth paragraph in LPP37 and the second sentence of paragraph 6.117 are deleted from the plan. This would give the Council greater flexibility to maximise the number of sites that are developable as well as extending consumer choice to more households.

Given the lack of evidence we would expect the NDSS requirement to be removed from the local plan. However, in the event that it is retained, transitional arrangements must be suitably addressed as required by NPPG. A transitional period would allow developers to factor in the additional cost associated with this policy into future land deals.

Do the policies provide clear direction as to how a decision maker should react to a development proposal?

The policy could be written more clearly with regard to the thresholds at which the contribution for affordable housing is required to ensure that it is implemented in the required manner. We would suggest the following wording to ensure clarity:

~~A threshold of Sites delivering 15 dwellings or 0.50ha will apply in the main towns of Braintree (including Great Notley, Bocking and High Garrett), Witham and Halstead will not be required to provide affordable housing or a financial contribution towards affordable housing.~~

~~A threshold of Sites delivering 11 dwellings or more with a maximum combined gross internal floor space of 1,000sqm will apply in all other areas of the district will not be required to provide affordable housing or a financial contribution towards affordable housing.~~

Are the Council's proposed modifications to the policies necessary for soundness?

We could not find the justification for the proposed modification (MM41) to LP37 to require 90% of affordable homes to be built to the optional Building Regulations M4(2) or M4(3). Some evidence as to the need for such homes is provided in the SHMA update from 2015 but this is relatively cursory and does not consider existing housing stock and whether those with a long-term limiting illness or disability will need to move in order to meet their needs for a more accessible home. Whilst it would appear likely that part M4(2) will be made mandatory through proposed changes to the Building Regulations this is still to be confirmed by the Government and as such it is important that the Council's proposed modification to LP37 is justified.

The HBF consider it the case that new homes built to the mandatory part M4(1) will be suitable for a significant proportion of the population throughout their lifetime. However,

¹ www.hbf.co.uk/documents/10871/S030a - HBF 2021 Brochure - V5.pdf

we recognise that there will be a need for some new homes to be built to higher accessibility standards for those whose needs are not addressed by current building regulations. Footnote 46 at paragraph 127 of the 2019 NPPF states that the optional technical standards can be used where there is an identified need and reflects the position set out in the Written Ministerial Statement published in 2015 against which this policy should be examined. How needs are assessed is then set out in paragraph 56-007 of PPG. As mentioned above some evidence is provided in the 2014 SHMA and 2015 SHMA update.

However, whilst the potential number of people in Braintree with mobility difficulties and disabilities is important to consider it is also necessary to consider the potential the accessibility and adaptability of the existing stock. Without detailed stock assessment it is necessary to consider whether those people with a need to adapt their home will be able to make that adaptation to their existing home or whether they will need to move. For example, the English Housing Survey 2014/15 indicates in its main findings that 9% of all households in England had a long-term illness or disability that required adaptation to their home. Applying this to the number of households in the area as of 2013, 61,945 households², would result in around 5,575 households requiring adaptations at the start of the plan period. On the basis of the Councils' delivery trajectory this would increase to 6,990 by 2033.

However, not all of those who need their home adapting will need to move to ensure their needs are met. Adaptations can often be made to an existing home to meet an individual's needs, allowing them to stay within their own home. The English Housing Survey found that in 2014-15, 81% of households that required adaptations in their home due to their long-term limiting disability considered their current home to be suitable for their needs. This would suggest that 19% of those who need to adapt their homes would be likely to have to move home to meet their needs. Therefore, using this evidence, over the plan period there will potentially be around 1,300 households who will need move to a home that can be adapted to meet their needs – around 8% of expected growth. We recognise this is national data but without local evidence as to how many of households will need to move to meet their needs for adaptations it provides a useful indication as future needs.

Given that national policy requires the adoption of the optional technical standard to address an identified need we would suggest that the Council have not provided sufficient justification for proposed modification MM41 and as such it is not necessary to make the policy sound.

First homes

Whilst the Council are not required under the transitional arrangements to include a reference to first homes in the local plan the Written Ministerial Statement does state that planning inspectors should consider whether a requirement for an early update of the local plan might be appropriate in order to support the Government's desire to see First Homes requirements introduced at the earliest opportunity. We would suggest that an early review is committed to within LPP33 to include the provision of First Homes and ensure that the plan is consistent with national policy.

In addition, in relation to LP33 & LP34- Affordable Housing and Affordable Housing in Rural Areas:

² ONS Household Projections

- On what evidence has the 30% and 40% thresholds been set?
- Is the requirement for 15 dwellings or 0.5ha sufficiently clear?
- How was the threshold of a village population of 3,000 identified?

See comment above.

In relation to LPP37 - Housing Type and Density:

Are the Council's requirements in relation to custom and self-build housing reasonable and necessary? On what evidence has the threshold been set?

No comment

In relation to LPP42 Residential Conversion of Buildings in the Countryside: are the requirements of the policy and supporting text, reasonable, necessary, and consistent with national policy?

No comment

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