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Date: 5<sup>th</sup> January 2017

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**Sent by Email only**

Dear Sir / Madam,

## **Local Plan: Draft Development Management Policies**

1. Thank you for consulting with the Home Builders Federation (HBF) on the Draft Local Plan: Development Management Policies document.
2. The HBF is the principal representative body of the house building industry in England and Wales and our representations reflect the views of our membership of multinational PLCs, through regional developers to small, local builders. Our members account for over 80% of all new housing built in England and Wales in any one year including a large proportion of the new affordable housing stock.
3. The Council will recall that the HBF provided comments to the previous Issues and Options consultation upon the Development Management DPD. We are pleased to note that a number of our previous comments have been taken on board. There are, however, still a number of issues which we consider require further consideration.
4. A key over-arching theme is the need for greater flexibility within the document and its policies. Many policies appear overly prescriptive with a large list of requirements, for example **Policies DM1 and DM2**. To ensure these policies are workable it is important that the various criteria are only applied where appropriate, practicable, achievable and economically viable. Without the inclusion of such flexibility appropriate developments are unlikely to come forward. This will only slow housing delivery and reduce investment in South Lakeland. The NPPF is clear that flexibility is a critical component of any plan (paragraphs 14, 21, etc.) it is therefore recommended that further consideration is given to the inclusion of greater flexibility throughout this document.
5. The HBF would like to submit the following brief comments upon individual policies and issues. A more detailed response will be provided at subsequent phases of

preparation of the Development Management Policies document. To enable a full response at the next stage of consultation it is important that the Council provides a comprehensive evidence base, including a updated viability assessment which takes full account of the policies within the proposed Development Management Policies document.

### **Policy DM11: Accessible and Adaptable Homes**

6. The draft policy seeks to require all new properties meet the optional Building Regulations accessibility standard M4(2) category 2. It is noted that the Council's evidence is included within the September 2016 Optional Housing Standards Evidence Paper (hereafter referred to as the Evidence Paper).
  
7. The HBF is supportive of providing homes for older and disabled persons. We also do not dispute the evidence provided within the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) in relation to the likely future needs of older and disabled people. It is, however, considered that the policy lacks finesse by requiring blanket requirements with no regard to the type or location of the housing being provided. This is a key element of the evidence base identified within the PPG (ID 56-07). The policy as currently drafted would apply equally to retirement homes near urban centres, apartments within the urban area, family housing and executive housing in suburban or rural locations. This blanket requirement does not take account of the needs or requirements of these various groups or the desirability of older and disabled persons to be situated closer to services and facilities.
  
8. It is also unclear how the percentages identified in the policy have been derived, or why all new build dwellings should meet M4(2). Whilst there is an aging population table E4 of the SHMA identifies that the vast majority of older people, nearly 80%, want to stay in their current home and will not be seeking to purchase a new market property. Furthermore not all buyers will require this standard and it may effectively mean purchasers pay more for something they may not need or desire. This may have a detrimental impact upon affordability.
  
9. In terms of the accessibility and adaptability of existing housing stock, figure 6 of the Evidence Paper, indicates that a number of adaptations are required. It is, however, unclear how many properties this actually relates too as many are likely to be double counted. There is also no assessment of the stock which meets future needs.

10. In terms of viability evidence the Council simply assumes that because the Lifetime Homes standard was included within the initial viability assessment only the difference need be applied. This is considered overly simplistic, not least because build costs have risen since the publication of the Government's impact analysis contained in figure 9 of the Evidence Paper. It is also noted that paragraph 37 suggests that because of the increase in size this will attract additional sales revenues. Whilst this may occur to some extent there is a market driven price cap within areas. Therefore, it is unlikely developers will be able to achieve the linear relationship between additional size and additional revenue assumed in the viability analysis. Any consequent increase in price will also have a negative impact upon affordability. The background report does not fully address this.
11. The HBF therefore recommends that further evidence is provided by the Council and the policy amended accordingly.
12. The Council's decision not to seek to introduce the optional nationally described space standard is supported. The introduction of the space standard would not only have significant impacts upon affordability, which is already problematic, across South Lakeland. It would also reduce choice. This is because many developers have entry level two, three and four bed properties, some of which may not currently meet the space standard. These types of properties provide a valuable product for those with a need for a certain number of bedrooms, due to family or other requirements, but who are unable to afford larger larger two, three and four bed properties. The consequent increase in costs and reduction in variety would have a further detrimental effect upon affordability and delivery. Given the Council is already struggling to meet its affordable housing needs the decision not to introduce the nationally described space standard is considered to be a justified and appropriate approach within South Lakeland.

### **Policy DM12: Self-Build and Custom Build Housing**

13. The policy seeks to support and encourage self-build and custom build housing. This is considered a justified and appropriate approach in South Lakeland. The penultimate paragraph indicates that in areas of strong demand the Council will encourage developers to provide self-build plots. Whilst the HBF does not object to this wording it should be made clear within the supporting text that this is not a mandatory requirement as it would provide significant uncertainty for the development industry.

## **Affordable Housing in Designated Rural Areas**

14. This section of the consultation paper discusses the Court of Appeal decision on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2016 and its impact upon affordable housing thresholds in designated rural areas and the Vacant Building Credit. The Council has provided an interim position statement in advance of developing a new affordable housing policy in designated rural areas.
  
15. The interim statement is at variance to national policy set out within the written ministerial statement, dated November 2014, and the PPG. This is unjustified and unsound due to the fact it is not consistent with national policy. Whilst the HBF notes existing local policy it is doubtful this would outweigh national policy in the case of an appeal. To ensure that applicants are not forced to appeal to deliver developments consistent with national policy it is recommended that the Council reconsider its interim policy.
  
16. It should also be noted that it would be highly unlikely that the interim policy, as drafted, could successfully be included within Development Management DPD as it would clearly be unsound.

## **Information**

17. I trust that the Council will find the foregoing useful. I would be happy to discuss the above comments in more detail if required.
  
18. The HBF would like to be kept informed of progress upon the Development Management document as well as any other planning documents. As the regional representative for planning issues across the north of England I would be pleased if you would ensure that my contact details are retained for such purposes.

Yours sincerely,

*MJ Good*

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