

Planning Policy  
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Dear Sir / Madam,

## **WEST LANCASHIRE LOCAL PLAN PREFERRED OPTIONS**

Thank you for consulting with the Home Builders Federation on the West Lancashire Local Plan Preferred Options consultation.

The HBF is the principal representative body of the house-building industry in England and Wales. Our representations reflect the views of our membership, which includes multi-national PLC's, regional developers and small, local builders. In any one year, our members account for over 80% of all new "for sale" market housing built in England and Wales as well as a large proportion of newly built affordable housing.

### **Vision and Objectives**

The HBF support the part of the vision which states that '*West Lancashire will play its part in providing a fantastic range of housing, at the right quality, as a fundamental factor in delivering economic growth and leaving a lasting, vital legacy for the next generations*'. The HBF also generally support Objective 1 which looks to provide a balanced mix of housing tenures and types, employment opportunities and access to services, and Objective 6 which seeks to provide a wide range of house types and tenures to meet the needs of West Lancashire's growing population.

### **Policy SP1: Delivering Sustainable Development**

The HBF is generally supportive of the first part of the policy which states that the Council will always work proactively with applicants jointly to find solutions which means that proposals can be approved wherever possible.

### **Policy SP2: Strategic Development Requirements**

This policy states that over the period 2012 to 2050 there will be a need for 15,992 new dwellings (net) as a minimum. The policy goes on to phase this development

proposing an annual requirement of 271 dwellings in the period 2012-2019, 396dpa between 2019 and 2027, and 475 dwellings between 2027 and 2050.

The HBF support the Council's decision to utilise a housing figure over and above that set out in the MHCLG Standard Methodology, which is considered appropriate to support growth in West Lancashire. The HBF support the uplift in the housing requirement to support the proposed Skelmersdale Rail Link and / or large scale logistics.

### **Policy H1: General Housing Policy**

This policy seeks a density of at least 30 dwellings per hectare, unless there is a good reason to go below this figure. The flexibility provided by this policy is noted, however it is not clear what may be considered a 'good reason'. The HBF recommend that amendments are made to the policy to retain the flexibility but to also create a little more clarity as to what would be considered a 'good reason' this could include allowing developers to take account of local and site characteristics, market aspirations and viability.

This policy also looks for all residential development to aim to provide a mix of house sizes and tenures as set out in a table in the policy. The HBF understands the need for a mix of house types, sizes and tenures and is generally supportive of providing a range and choice of homes to meet the needs of the local area. It is, however, important that any policy is workable and ensures that housing delivery will not be compromised or stalled due to: overly prescriptive requirements; requiring a mix that does not consider the scale of the site; or the need to provide additional evidence. The HBF recommends a flexible approach is taken regarding housing mix which recognises that needs and demand will vary from area to area and site to site; ensures that the scheme is viable; and provides an appropriate mix for the location.

### **Policy H2: Housing Site Allocations**

The HBF does not wish to comment upon the acceptability or otherwise of individual sites. It is, however, important that all the sites contained within the plan are deliverable over the plan period and planned to an appropriate strategy. The HBF would expect the spatial distribution of sites to follow a logical hierarchy, provide an appropriate development pattern and support sustainable development within all market areas.

The Council's assumptions on sites in relation to delivery and capacity should be realistic based on evidence supported by the parties responsible for housing delivery and sense checked by the Council based on local knowledge and historical empirical data.

### **Policy H3: Affordable Housing**

This policy requires affordable housing to be required on developments of 10 or more units, in Zone B it requires 10% and for Zone A 30%. The HBF does not dispute the need for affordable housing within West Lancashire and indeed supports the need to address the affordable housing requirements of the borough. The NPPF is, however, clear that the derivation of affordable housing policies must not only take account of need but also viability. Paragraph 34 of the NPPF (2018) established the importance

of viability to ensure that development identified in the Plan should not be subject to such scale of obligations and policy burden that their ability to be delivered might be threatened. The Council will need to confirm that this policy is not viable, through its evidence.

The Policy then goes on to set out the mix of housing size and tenure expected of the affordable housing. The HBF would be interested to know how this would sit with the NPPF (2018) requirement for major development to provide at least 10% of the homes for affordable home ownership, unless this would exceed the level of affordable housing required or significantly prejudice the ability to meet the identified affordable housing need.

#### **Policy H4: Housing for Older People**

This policy requires all new 1, 2 and 3-bedroom market and affordable dwellings will be required to meet Building Regulation M4(2): Accessible and Adaptable Dwellings, unless exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated as to why it would be inappropriate to meet this Standard. The HBF is generally supportive of providing homes that are suitable to meet the needs of older people and disabled people. However, if the Council wishes to adopt the higher optional standards for accessible, adaptable and wheelchair homes the Council should only do so by applying the criteria set out in the PPG.

PPG (ID 56-07) identifies the type of evidence required to introduce such a policy, including the likely future need; the size, location, type and quality of dwellings needed; the accessibility and adaptability of the existing stock; how the needs vary across different housing tenures; and the overall viability. It is incumbent on the Council to provide a local assessment evidencing the specific case for West Lancashire which justifies the inclusion of optional higher standards for accessible and adaptable homes in its Local Plan policy. If the Council can provide the appropriate evidence and this policy is to be included, then the HBF recommend that an appropriate transition period is included within the policy.

The PPG also identifies other requirements for the policy including the need to consider site specific factors such as vulnerability to flooding, site topography and other circumstances; and that policies for wheelchair accessible homes should only be applied to dwellings where the local authority is responsible for allocating or nominating a person to live in that dwelling.

The Policy also goes on to state that within Extra Care developments, where the development can be a mixture of C2 and C3 units, the Council will require a proportion of the C3 units to be affordable, in line with policy H3. Whilst some Extra Care developments will take the form of care villages many will take the form of a single phased development with all the units and the care facilities within one block. In such cases, dependent on the facilities they can either fall within Use Class C3 (low range) or C2 (higher range) and a judgement will need to be made in each case.

As previously, the HBF generally supports the provision of affordable housing, however, it is strongly recommended that if affordable housing is required from Extra Care Developments that the viability of this requirement is assessed.

### **Policy H8: Viability Appraisals on Residential Developments**

This policy states that for allocated sites as a general rule viability appraisals will not be accepted at application stage. The HBF does not consider that this is in line with the NPPF which states that it is up to the applicant to demonstrate whether particular circumstances justify the need for a viability assessment at the application stage.

It is noted that part I states *that 'where recent market transactions are used to inform the assessment of benchmark land value, there should be evidence that these transactions were based on a policy compliant development in line with this Local Plan'*. The HBF is intrigued to know how this will work for the in the short term following the adoption of the plan and very few or no sites will have been sold compliant to the new plan.

### **Policy IF1: Strategic Transport Infrastructure**

This policy looks for all new dwelling houses with at least one off-street parking space or garage space to provide an electric vehicle charging point and for all residential properties served by communal parking areas to provide at least one or 10% of parking spaces (whichever is greater) for use by electric vehicles with adequate charging infrastructure. Whilst the HBF do not oppose the provision of electric charging points, the policy as worded is currently considered to be overly onerous. An element of flexibility would be beneficial and is considered to be compliant with the NPPF, paragraph 105.

The HBF would also encourage the Council to work with the appropriate infrastructure providers to ensure a balanced and flexible optimised energy system that can cope with the potential for a mix of electrical heating systems and electric vehicle systems.

The HBF would also encourage the Council to consider the viability of the provision of electric vehicle charging points particularly if higher standards of charging points are required.

### **Policy GI4: Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows**

This policy states that 'where there is an unavoidable loss of trees on site, replacement trees will be required to be planted on site – where appropriate at a rate of two new trees for each tree lost'. The HBF would like to know what the justification and evidence is for this ratio of replacement. It is considered that if the Council are seeking a 'net environmental' gain that this could be achieved in many other ways than seeking a 2:1 tree ratio. The HBF recommends that this part of the policy is deleted.

### **Monitoring**

The HBF are concerned that the Preferred Options document does not appear to provide a monitoring framework. The HBF would expect the Local Plan to contain a monitoring framework with appropriate targets and triggers and appropriate remedial actions which would be taken if the targets or triggers are not met. In terms of housing such triggers for action could include the lack of a five-year supply or delivery which is below the anticipated housing trajectory, potential actions could

include working with developers, producing masterplans, allocating further sites, reducing Local Plan requirements or preparing a new Local Plan.

### **Future Engagement**

I trust that the Council will find these comments useful. I would be happy to discuss these issues in greater detail or assist in facilitating discussions with the wider house building industry. The HBF would like to be kept informed of the progress of the document. Please use the contact details provided below for future correspondence.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joanne Harding', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Joanne Harding**

**Local Plans Manager – North**

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