

Report of	Meeting	Date
Corporate Director (Business) (Introduced by the Executive Member for Business)	Executive Cabinet	12 February 2009

HIGHER DENSITY HOUSING – ACHIEVING HIGH QUALITY DESIGN

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To summarise the main contents of the Higher Density Housing – Achieving High Quality Design - Guidance Note 2009.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. To approve this Higher Density Housing – Achieving High Quality Design – Guidance Note 2009 for public consultation and then use it as a Development Control tool when judging the merits of higher density housing applications including back garden development.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

3. This Higher Density Housing Guidance Note provides an introduction to the subject area and will enable a structured and thorough approach to be taken to the consideration of higher density housing proposals. This is in line with the Council's Strategic objectives of; developing the character and feel of Chorley as a great place to live, and strengthening Chorley's economic position in the Central Lancashire sub-region.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

(If the recommendations are accepted)

4. The Higher Density Housing Guidance Note directly supports the Corporate Strategy aims of developing the character and feel of Chorley as a great place to live, and strengthening Chorley's economic position in the Central Lancashire sub-region.
5. It updates previous guidance notes relating to this subject area and responds to Government Planning Policy Statement 1 : Delivering Sustainable Development and Planning Policy Statement 3 : Housing. These require local authorities create more sustainable residential environments.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

6. None

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

7. This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Strengthen Chorley's Economic Position in the Central Lancashire Sub-Region	√	Develop local solutions to climate change.	√
Improving equality of opportunity and life chances	√	Develop the Character and feel of Chorley as a great place to live	√
Involving people in their communities	√	Ensure Chorley Council is a consistently top performing organisation	

BACKGROUND

8. The Government requires that new housing is developed on a much more sustainable basis than has been achieved in the recent past. Low density housing development is considered wasteful of land resources and is unlikely to sustain local services and public transport, ultimately adding to social exclusion. The efficient use of land, as one element of the move to create more sustainable residential environments, is therefore a key Government objective.
9. Most housing in Chorley has been built at an average density in excess of 30-35 dwellings per hectare, which represents an efficient use of land. There are, however, a number of older housing areas and lower density modern housing areas that are attracting interest for redevelopment at higher densities. Many of these areas are on the edge of neighbourhoods outside the town centre, and along main roads into and around the town. There are also sites in the town and neighbourhood centres where higher density housing could potentially be introduced as part of a mix of uses.
10. Development on previously developed land at higher densities contributes to meeting Chorley's housing needs and reduces the pressure for greenfield housing sites. Accordingly, the Council will promote and encourage the provision of higher density housing but only at appropriate locations. Such locations are likely to be within the town centre and at other locations where there are pedestrian and cycle networks, a range of services and facilities and good public transport accessibility.
11. Although higher density housing developments are often in line with Government guidance on density, some have caused concern because of their perceived negative impact. Matters of concern include the design and bulk of the building, compromised privacy, reduced garden size, the effect on daylight and sunlight, the design of the car parking, traffic generation and changes to the character of the surrounding area. There is also a concern that such developments are taking place in a piecemeal manner without contributing to infrastructure and to affordable housing provision.
12. There have been requests from a number of householders for the Council to explore the possibility of designating Conservation Areas as a way of controlling such development proposals. However, the Council considers that Conservation Area designation would not prevent such development as it could be designed in such a way as to be in keeping with the "special architectural or historic interest, character and appearance of the area" (National Planning Policy Guidance Note 15) and therefore be deemed acceptable.

HIGHER DENSITY HOUSING – ACHIEVING HIGH QUALITY DESIGN – GUIDANCE NOTE

13. The Council considers the issue as twofold:
 - There is a need to resist inappropriate, poor quality back garden development (and higher density development generally) that fails to respect its context.
 - In instances where development may be considered appropriate, there is a need to provide guidance to developers on the 'elements' of context that they will be expected to respond to. Then if they fail to meet certain design criteria, proposals will be resisted.
14. The issue is not limited to conservation areas, or proposed conservation areas, and so the Council considers it more prudent to introduce this generic advice note. This approach is fully compliant with central government advice that careful attention to design is particularly important where the proposal involves an intensification of the existing urban fabric. It points out that more intensive development is not always appropriate, but if done well, imaginative design and layout can lead to more efficient use of land without compromising the quality of the local environment.
15. The guidance note will aim to address these concerns and to secure well designed, higher density housing schemes **only in appropriate locations** that respect the quality of surrounding areas. It will form the basis for developers to undertake character assessments as part of their design and access statements in planning applications, including consulting with residents. Under this guidance the Council can also work with residents (and developers if appropriate) in specific areas to produce character statements, endorsed by local residents, that would be considered as part of the planning application process.

The Guidance will:

- Assist the Council in rejecting of poorly designed schemes which are inappropriate to context, or which fail to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions.
 - Encourage developers to seek to combine potential sites and take a more comprehensive view of development where this would achieve a high quality residential development, the more efficient use of land and a scheme that satisfies affordable housing and infrastructure needs.
 - Allow a flexible approach to development in appropriate locations, applying 'standards' less strictly in order to facilitate high quality, higher density housing development, whilst safeguarding amenities through design.
16. The objectives are to:
 - Promote good design practice by providing specialist design advice and to raise awareness and understanding of good design practice.
 - Encourage developers to think imaginatively about designs and layouts that make more efficient use of land and contribute positively to making places better for people without compromising the quality of the environment.
 - Protect the built heritage from damaging change by the use of planning enforcement powers through the local plan and local development framework and the development control process
 - Develop an information base on the built character of Chorley.

17. The Guidance Note stresses the importance of understanding and responding to the context of the proposed development. It advocates an initial information gathering and appraisal process from which a design concept evolves. Such preparatory work is demonstrated in the Design and Access Statement, a statutory tool required at planning application stage.
18. The Guidance Note goes into significant detail covering issues such as design standards, density, design and access statements, landform and topography, landscape, development briefs, car parking standards and design, and affordable housing.
19. It specifically covers infill and back garden development where the onus is on the applicant to demonstrate that the land in question is capable of accommodating the development without compromising the character of the area or surrounding residential/neighbour amenity. In all cases the developer will be required to look at issues such as potential capacity, existing building lines, and the character of existing buildings and spaces. Such an appraisal should highlight particular buildings, trees, important views or open spaces, hedges, ponds and new planting that contribute to site character.
20. The Regeneration and Urban Design Section is already working to raise design awareness and promote good design practice with; colleagues within the Council, external bodies, developers and applicants.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

21. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Corporate Directors' comments are included:

Finance		Customer Services	
Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	
Legal		No significant implications in this area	√

JANE MEEK
CORPORATE DIRECTOR (BUSINESS)

Background papers to this report.

Background Papers			
Document	Date	File	Place of Inspection
Higher Density Housing – Achieving High Quality Design 2009	January 2009	***	

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Peter McAnespie	5286		***