

DRAFT – 9th January 2009

HIGHER DENSITY HOUSING – ACHIEVING HIGH QUALITY DESIGN

CHORLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

The Government requires within Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (PPS1) that new housing is developed on a much more sustainable basis than has been achieved in the recent past. The requirement to achieve higher density housing is contained within Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3). Both PPS1 and PPS3 are also material considerations in the determination of planning applications along with the Chorley Borough Local Plan and adopted Local Development Framework documents. 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.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDANCE NOTE

Higher density housing developments are increasingly being proposed in Chorley. Whilst these 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, the design of the car parking, traffic generation and inappropriate 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. This note aims to address these concerns and to secure well-designed, higher density housing schemes, only in appropriate locations, that respect the quality of surrounding areas.

FURTHER SOURCES OF ADVICE

This guide aims to provide an introduction to the subject area and to direct applicants to sources of further advice and to relevant supplementary planning guidance produced by the Borough and County Councils.

CHORLEY BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN 2003

There are a number of policies in the Local Plan, which are of particular relevance to securing well-designed housing and landscape proposals served by

appropriate infrastructure. Though other policies not listed will have to be considered, the key policies are:

GN1: Settlement Policy - main settlements.

This policy outlines the 'main settlements' within Chorley where there is a presumption in favour of appropriate development, subject to normal planning considerations and other policies and proposals of the plan.

GN5: Building Design and Retaining Existing Landscape Features and Natural Habitats.

This policy states that all development proposals need to be appropriately designed in terms of their external appearance and respect the character of the areas in which they are located.

GN9: Transport Accessibility.

This policy highlights the need for good transport links. Key aspects of sustainable development are reducing the need to travel and, where travel is necessary, increasing the use of public transport and modes other than the private car.

HS4: Design and Layout of Residential Developments.

This policy states that new housing development should be designed and laid out to a high standard, in order to create an attractive and safe environment in which people will choose to live.

Along with the Local Plan Policies there are also a number of Supplementary Planning Guidance documents linked to the policies. The main one concerned with design is the recently adopted Householder Design Guidance. This guidance focuses on all elements of householder design and is a useful tool for applicants and developers.

The adopted Sustainable Resources Development Plan Document aims, through the control of the grant of planning permissions, to secure the inclusion of sustainable methods of construction within residential, commercial and other developments that will reduce carbon emissions; manage water supplies; encourage the recycling of waste and promotion of renewable energy capture.

CONSULTATION

Following public consultation this guidance note will be used as an advisory document for the purposes of Development Control.

BACKGROUND

The Government advises local planning authorities to avoid developments of less than 30 dwellings per hectare (dph), and to seek greater intensity of development at places with good public transport accessibility.

Most housing in Chorley has been built at an average density in excess of 30 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, characterised by bungalows for example, that are attracting interest for redevelopment at higher densities. There are also potential sites in the town and neighbourhood centres where higher density housing is likely to be considered.

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 housing at densities over 30 dwellings to the hectare. Within the town centre and at other appropriate locations where there are pedestrian and cycle networks, a range of services and facilities and good public transport accessibility, the Council will promote and encourage the provision of significantly higher housing densities.

THE NEED FOR GOOD DESIGN

High quality and inclusive design should be the aim of all those involved in the development process. Developers should 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. The Council will reject poor design which is inappropriate in its context, or which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions.

UNDERSTANDING CONTEXT

The successful integration of new housing within its context is a key Government design objective. The Council recognises that there are historic buildings or areas and established, relatively low density residential areas, the special character and appearance of which make a significant contribution to the urban fabric of Chorley. A number of these buildings or areas have been designated as Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas. The Council will seek to ensure that the character and appearance of these assets is protected and, where possible, enhanced.

A thorough understanding of the wider context, the site and its immediate surroundings is therefore a crucial first step in working towards successful integration and should inform subsequent design decisions to be made by potential applicants. More detailed advice is contained in:

'By Design, Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice' available from CABI website (www.cabi.org.uk)

'Better Neighbourhoods, Making Higher Densities Work 2005' - CABI

'Design and Access Statements - How to Write, Read and Use Them - 2006' - CABI

Advice on design and crime prevention can be obtained from 'Safer Places – The Planning System and Crime Prevention', published by the DCLG and the Home Office (www.communities.gov.uk), and the Secured by Design website (www.securedbydesign.com).

COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT

The Council will 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. In exceptional cases, on appropriate sites, the Council will consider using compulsory purchase powers in order assist with; site assembly, making efficient use of land, and facilitating the provision of affordable housing.

DESIGN STANDARDS

Higher density does not imply poor design quality, overcrowding and reduced space standards. Conversely, the strict application of standards can lead to 'standardised developments' that fail to have a distinctive identity, are wasteful of land and infrastructure, and can lead to car dependency.

The Council believes that innovative designs that meet the housing 'standards' set out in other supplementary planning guidance notes/documents are achievable. The Council also recognises, however, that there may be circumstances that mitigate against the strict application of certain standards. In such cases it will seek to apply these flexibly in order to facilitate high quality, higher density housing development, whilst safeguarding amenities through design. For example, privacy can be protected by the careful consideration of the shape and disposition of windows and the layout and orientation of buildings.

DENSITY AS A MEASURE

A "net site density", which is the measure of density advocated by the Government, includes only those areas that will be developed for housing and directly associated uses. It includes access roads within the site, private garden space, car parking areas, incidental open space and landscaping and children's play areas where these are to be provided. Net site density excludes major distributor roads, primary schools, open spaces serving a wider area and significant landscape buffer strips.

The appearance of any scheme is as much to do with the scale and volume of the buildings as it is with the actual numbers of dwellings on a site. Low density development can appear overdeveloped by buildings when excessive use is made of large dwellings. Conversely, too many small dwellings can lead to an

environment dominated by the associated car parking. Higher density development does not necessarily mean cramming in more of the same, nor does it presume increasing the building content of the site above that which would previously have been acceptable.

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENTS

Under the Planning Legislation, applicants are required to produce Design and Access Statements. These should explain the design principles and concepts that have informed the development and the thinking behind a planning application. They should show also that the person applying for permission has thought carefully about how everyone, including people with disabilities, older people and people with very young children, will be able to use the places they want to build. Such statements should include a written description and justification of the planning application. Photographs, maps and drawings can further illustrate the points made. Design and Access Statements are needed with most types of application, but not householder applications.

Design schemes should emerge from a thoughtful consideration of the character of the local area, the context of the site, the attributes of the site itself, and a range of objectives for healthy and sustainable development. (SEE APPENDIX 1 – SITE APPRAISAL CHECKLIST).

The first stage comprises an initial information gathering and appraisal process. This includes a number of inputs which may well overlap, key among them being the need to appraise the site context, the site attributes and talk to planning and highways officers. The second stage involves considering all these issues together and producing a response in the form of a design concept (on larger sites, this may include two or three different options for development). The third stage requires that applicants discuss their design concept with Council officers and input their views into a draft scheme design. Depending on the size of the site, this may be an iterative process involving several revisions.

The final scheme design will emerge from this process, resulting in the submission of an application for planning permission. The application should include a Design and Access Statement as a key output, as well as the final scheme design. This Statement should summarise the design approach, illustrating the process of appraising the context and site, to emerge with a design concept. The concept diagram should be included. Any significant deviations from the design concept should be fully explained in the Design and Access Statement. Failure to do so could result in detailed proposals being refused.

The precise content and level of detail of the Design and Access Statement will vary according to the size of the site, its context, and the nature of the proposals. Advice on what is required will be provided on a case by case basis as part of the

process. For minor schemes, a covering letter may suffice, for others, a more detailed statement will be required.

Communities should be encouraged to participate in the design of new development to help prevent social exclusion, to encourage ownership and civic pride, and to incorporate local knowledge and community needs to help achieve higher standards of development. A public consultation event is advised for larger schemes and this informs a 'statement of community involvement' which sets out how the proposal has responded to community comments.

INFILL AND BACKLAND/GARDEN DEVELOPMENT

Small sites for individual or small groups of buildings within existing streets can constitute infill development. Those within the rear gardens of existing properties are called backland sites. Such sites can be found in a variety of locations including older urban areas or those more recently developed, and in areas with mainly residential buildings or those with a range of uses. Some locations, including those within Conservation Areas or adjacent to Listed Buildings, can be particularly sensitive.

In such instances context is especially important and standard 'off the peg' solutions will not be acceptable, rather, site-specific solutions are required.

The approach for infill development is as follows:

- Establish the capacity of the site first. What is the appropriate height, footprint and massing in relation to neighbouring buildings? Is it possible to reduce the space taken up by roads and thus, increase the site area?
- Where appropriate respect the existing building line and consider the appropriate frontage type (eg continuous or spaced, regular or irregular).
- Respect views to important or dominant buildings.
- Consider the nature and quality of existing buildings (are they listed? Old or new? Dominant or recessive in the street scene? Is there a prevalent architectural style?).
- Consider materials, in particular, in terms of colour and texture. Is there a local 'palette' on which the scheme can draw?
- Consider the prevailing rhythm/character of neighbouring buildings, in particular aspects like: the pattern, size and detail of windows and other openings, the integrity of horizontal elements such as: eaves and ridge lines, string courses and fascias at ground floor, the proportions of particular elements and, lastly, architectural detailing and embellishment (eg balconies, parapet details, chimneys etc.).

Design solutions for infill development can take three broad forms. A deferential approach (often where existing buildings are of high quality), a dominant approach (where existing buildings can be complemented by a new more striking addition) and a range of solutions between the two.

Backland Development

Similarly, in the case of backland development developers need to survey the physical features of the site and the characteristics of the area in which the site is located. The appraisal should highlight particular buildings, trees, important views or open spaces, hedges, ponds and new planting that contribute to site character. The results should then be presented on an annotated plan with a short written statement in support.

The survey should include a brief analysis of the opportunities and constraints presented by the site. Constraints may include access difficulties, changing land levels, conflicting land uses next to the site, or land liable to flooding. Opportunities will be presented by the presence of existing features such as trees and hedgerows or an attractive view, which can be used to influence design and layout. The use of off-the-peg dwelling types or the repetition of standard layouts and roads is unlikely to respond to context and should be avoided.

DEVELOPMENT BRIEFS

Development briefs should be prepared for sites of significant size, sensitivity or complexity. In some cases development briefs will be prepared by the Council, in others the developer will be expected to produce the brief for public consultation and the approval of the Council. There may also be instances when such briefs can be produced jointly. Please refer to 'Planning and Development Briefs: a guide to better practice' from the DCLG for further advice.

VARIETY AND INTEREST

On larger schemes, there should be a variety of building groups and street shapes, squares, courtyards, crescents and lanes. There should be a mix of house forms such as terraces, town houses, semis and detached houses and flats. There should also be a clear mix of housing densities, giving some areas of relative spaciousness and concentration, to provide variety in a development. Extensive sites should be broken down in scale using retained features, such as hedges, or new ones, such as tree belts, footpaths, or green spaces to separate different character areas.

Schemes should provide adequate space within the scheme for new structural and boundary landscaping and demonstrate that public space is easily accessible, safe and overlooked.

Different housing forms and tenures can also be successfully mixed on larger sites. Mixing dwellings provides varied building forms and a choice of units to meet local needs. The approach to larger scale development should not generally be towards universally high or low density development.

CAR PARKING STANDARDS AND DESIGN

The manner in which car parking is arranged has a significant effect on the quality of the development. Vehicles should not be allowed to dominate the space, nor inconvenience pedestrians and cyclists. Large forecourts of surface level car parking will not be considered appropriate, rather opportunities to accommodate car parking spaces to the side or rear of the building should be explored. Where expanses of car parking are required, hard and soft landscape solutions should be employed to reduce their impact.

Developers should consider sustainable drainage systems to ensure that rainwater is discharged from the site at a controlled rate. Developers are encouraged to explore building solutions that include secure basement or semi-basement parking within the main footprint of the building. The extent of any ground floor parking within the building footprint should not lead to the creation of inactive frontages, which reduce opportunities for natural surveillance. In all cases regarding site access and transport requirements, the views of the Lancashire County Council Highway Authority will be sought. The level of parking provision required for new housing developments will be based on the accessibility of the area by modes of transport other than the car. Account will also be taken of the type of households and the type of housing so that, where it can be demonstrated that car usage would be low, consideration will be given to reduced parking provision on site e.g. housing to meet special needs or for elderly residents. Generally, on larger schemes (above 30 dwellings) a maximum of 1.5 spaces per dwelling will be sought. Less provision will be required for small units within the town centre and the area. For more information please refer to Lancashire County Council Residential Parking Standards.

MOVEMENT

Schemes should demonstrate measures to facilitate safe and convenient walking and cycling routes to provide alternatives to using the car, ensuring that different parts of a development are properly linked to each other and to nearby shops, schools, open space, bus stops or adjacent countryside. Schemes should demonstrate how the need for safe and efficient vehicular access and movement has been combined with varied and stimulating public streets. Vehicular access points and the works required to facilitate safe access should be indicated, including emergency and service vehicle requirements.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The Council will seek the provision of affordable housing in accordance with Policy HS5 of the Adopted Chorley Borough Local Plan Review 2003 and national policy in PPS3, which sets a national indicative minimum site size

threshold of 15 dwellings. Therefore, the Council will seek a **minimum** proportion of affordable housing of 20% of the total number of units on suitable sites of 15 dwellings or more. The presumption is that affordable housing will be provided on the application site so that it contributes towards creating a mix of housing.

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Notwithstanding the key considerations set out above, principles of sustainability should be at the heart of any development proposal and developers are advised to adhere to the advice contained in the Sustainable Resources Supplementary Planning Document.

More specifically the Council will encourage the following:

Grouping buildings to minimise heat loss;

Designing for adaptability, (eg use of roofspace);

Achieving energy efficiency through orientation, insulation and use of energy efficient lighting (including external) and heating;

Considering the generation of electricity in homes or locally;

Considering the minimisation of waste and its re-use and recycling;

Considering water saving devices such as low volume taps, dual flush toilets and water/energy-efficient appliances;

Use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Solutions (SuDs) such as grey water systems, green roofs and porous hard landscaping/access ways;

INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure to serve new residential development may be required. The type and amount of provision required will depend on the amount and type of housing proposed and the level and quality of existing infrastructure and services in the local area, as evidenced by up to date surveys and other information sources. In some circumstances, for example where the site is not large enough, commuted payments will be sought.

SITE FACILITIES

Early consideration should be given to requirements for facilities such as recycling areas, bin stores, cycle stores and substations.

APPENDIX 1 - SITE APPRAISAL CHECKLIST

Adjacent land uses

Clearly identify adjoining land uses and buildings, addressing issues of privacy and overlooking.

Landform and topography

Survey of the site, showing levels and the precise location of features. Sections across the site can also be helpful.

Site boundaries

Identify existing boundary features and assess their importance in terms of privacy, security or screening and explore what treatments are typical of the locality.

Important views

Exploit important views into, through and out of the site and screen poor outlooks. Identify buildings or important landscape features should be identified.

Ecology, landscape structure, trees and hedgerows

Identify the ecological features of the site and assess the existing landscape structure. Prepare a Tree Constraints Plan should indicating the position, height, spread of crown, species, health and amenity value of all trees on site. Trees should be carefully surveyed and accurately plotted on the submitted site survey in accordance with BS5837 –Guide for trees in relation to construction (as amended). Highlight trees protected by preservation orders and identify trees and hedgerows worthy of retention that can be incorporated into the scheme layout. Carefully consider the setting afforded to major specimen trees and the space needed for trees and hedges to flourish without causing nuisance as well as the opportunities for new structural planting.

Drainage and water features

Highlight areas liable to flooding, ditches, streams and ponds and explore how they can be retained/designed to provide visual or natural interest. Consider Sustainable Urban Drainage solutions should be considered such as grey water systems, green roofs and porous hard landscaping/access ways.

Paths and rights of way

Identify footpaths and cycleways crossing or adjacent to the site should be identified. Incorporate rights of way and desire lines along their existing routes and consider opportunities to extend such links to nearby shops, schools, bus stops or the open countryside etc.

Buildings

Identify established building heights and assess how local design styles and forms can influence the proposed design and layout of streets and dwellings.

Consider whether existing buildings on the site can be converted to give character to a scheme. If demolition is the only option, explore how materials can be reclaimed, reused or recycled.

Archaeology

Identify known areas/features of archaeological significance and proposals for preservation and protection. Historic remains should normally be preserved in situ and advice from the County Archaeologist sought in this respect. Please refer to PPG16 – Archaeology and Planning for further guidance.

Services

Identify the availability and capacity of utilities and other services should be identified.