

Issue 1 – Housing [Policies DM3 TO DM5 inclusive and DM7]

Are the housing policies consistent with the NPPF, the London Plan and the Core Strategy and/or supported by clear and robust evidence; are they reasonable and realistic, clear, deliverable and appropriate to local needs and circumstances, including in relation to affordable housing?

Tetlow King Planning submit this Position Statement on behalf of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum (THHF). This details our response to *Issue 1 Housing* raised by the Inspector regarding Tower Hamlets Managing Development DPD.

Tower Hamlets Housing Forum is a group of Registered Providers who wish to continue to work in partnership with the borough's housing and planning departments to meet the growing need for affordable housing in the borough.

Policy DM3 – Delivering Homes

THHF support the principle of the policy, and welcome the amendments proposed and clarifications by the council which are currently subject to agreement as part of the Statement of Common Ground and which clarify elements of the policy. With the inclusion of these amendments we are content that the policy on affordable rent is clear, realistic and based on robust evidence. As such we consider part 1 of the policy to be sound, will support the delivery of affordable housing and will be flexible to respond to changing local needs and circumstances.

However, THHF have concerns with Part 3(a)(iii) which specifies that off-site affordable housing will only be acceptable where *'it can provide a minimum of 50% affordable housing overall'*. It is accepted and supported that off-site affordable housing will only be provided as an exception to on site provision, but it is considered this element of the policy is over restrictive and may prevent delivery of additional affordable housing coming forward. For example, in a case where viability for a development shows on site delivery can only provide 10% affordable housing, but off site could provide 25% affordable housing, there is a clear benefit in providing the off-site affordable housing. However, should the off-site provision be set at 50% affordable housing overall, this would in all likelihood mean that the developer would select to revert to 10% on site i.e. less than the amount which could have been secured from an off-site solution. Given the need for affordable housing in the borough it is important that the policy is flexible to ensure where there is a clear benefit for affordable housing being provided off-site that this is recognised and can be delivered. This would be in line with para 50 of the NPPF which seeks off-site provision of broadly equivalent value where it can be robustly justified and contributes to creating mixed and balanced communities. Para 50 is particularly clear in that such policies *'should be flexible to take account of changing market conditions over time'*. As such we suggest the following wording to part 3(a)(iii):

'It can provide a level of affordable housing or a type of affordable housing which will deliver greater benefits than an on-site solution'

It is considered this provides a sensible balanced approach whereby the council can seek to ensure 50% affordable housing is sought from off-site provision, but also allows the flexibility for cases where a lower than 50% provision has clear advantages over a likely on-site solution.

Policy DM4 Housing standards and amenity space

THHF supports the policy which seeks high quality, well designed and sustainable housing. We welcome table 3 which reflects the minimum standards for new development as set out in the London Plan 2011. However, as set out in previous representations, there needs to be an appropriate balance between the standards being sought and circumstances related to individual schemes. In particular, Part 1 (b) is unsound as its requirement is not justified by an evidence base and its requirement could prevent the provision of affordable housing units should it not be possible to provide separate kitchen and living rooms. As a result it is considered this requirement would neither be effective nor deliverable.

Part 1(b) would also be contrary to NPPF para 59 which sets out that, *'design policies should avoid unnecessary prescription or detail and should concentrate on guiding the overall scale, density, massing, height, landscape, layout...'* This is also contrary to the London Plan and the Interim London Housing Design Guide as they do not specifically state that kitchen and living areas should be separate in affordable homes. Instead they provide guidance on how these areas can be combined.

THHF understands the aspiration to have separate living rooms and kitchens, and RPs always try to provide separate kitchens in 3-bed and above family accommodation, but in practice this is not always achievable in all affordable units. For example, this requirement would be difficult to achieve with single aspect units which need to ensure good levels of ventilation, daylight and privacy to each habitable room and the kitchen. These requirements would be restricted if separate living / kitchen areas were required, given the limited opportunities within single aspect units. Equally the policy could result in smaller bedrooms, as more internal space is required to provide the separate kitchen / living areas. In short the adverse impacts of this policy would be either the provision of smaller and inappropriate bedrooms or fewer dwellings overall in developments.

As mentioned above high quality standards are already established and new developments, including affordable housing, are required to be in line with such guidance. This includes the Interim Design Guide which sets out balanced standards to ensure appropriate living standards can be met, not just for kitchen / living areas but for units as a whole. It specifically sets out standards for combined floor areas for living / kitchen / dining space and these are considered appropriate and sufficient guidance. Further to this, affordable housing is also required to meet HCA design standards.

As such, it is considered that sufficient standards are in place to ensure appropriate space for kitchen and living areas can be provided, along with RPs already providing separate areas where possible for 3-bed plus family accommodation. There is no evidence to suggest that such a restrictive standard is required and it is therefore considered unsound. The first sentence of the policy is sufficient to ensure adequate internal living space, along with the London Plan, Interim Design Guide and HCA Standards. Part 1(b) should therefore be removed.

In addition to the above, a flexible and reasonable, approach should be recognised when requiring conversions to meet design standards. Whilst THHF welcome and seek to ensure conversions meet current design standards, there may be particular circumstances where meeting all design standards is not possible. For example, where it is not structurally possible to meet standards within the confines of the existing building, subject to the conversion works, particularly where the

development will provide much needed affordable housing. As such, to ensure the policy is appropriate and can be deliverable for conversions specifically, we suggest the following wording to be incorporated into the supporting text:

'It is recognised that there will be some circumstances where proposals involving conversions will not be able to meet design standards, eg. where structurally it is not possible to comply. Such cases will be considered on their individual merits as part of planning application process'

Policy DM5 Specialist Housing

We support the policy to provide for the specialist housing needs of the borough and part 2 which allows for loss of specialist housing where it can be demonstrated that there is no longer an identified need for its retention. However, if part 2 is proven, this presents a valuable opportunity to provide affordable housing as a suitable alternative in its place. As such we request that affordable housing is stated as the 'ring-fenced' alternative use where loss of specialist housing is unavoidable.