

Guildford Borough Local Plan Housing Density Policy. INFORMATION SHEET

The Council wishes to hear your views on its Housing Density Policy in the Draft Local Plan.

Background

We have been reviewing our Local Plan for some time and are keen to adopt it as soon as possible. However, prior to adoption we wish to hear your views on the proposed Housing Density Policy (Policy 99H10).

The Government expects Local Plans to include housing policies which maximise the use of previously developed (brownfield) land. As Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 states:

“Local Planning Authorities should...examine critically the standards they apply to new development...to avoid the profligate use of land.”

PPG3 goes on to say that making efficient use of land is not incompatible with achieving high standards of design.

The Local Plan Inspector identified the need for a Housing Density Policy in the Draft Local Plan:

“The Plan does not contain a density Policy. The advantages of such a Policy could be that...there would be an opportunity to obtain smaller dwellings on any site coming forward for development, not just the larger, while density could be a factor encouraging developers to look to providing smaller dwellings.”

We have responded to this with a policy, which we believe strikes the right balance between the efficient use of urban land and protecting established local character. We consulted widely on this policy at the beginning of the year and received very little adverse comment from local groups.

The Housing Density Policy

In summary, Policy 99H10 expects:

- A mix of dwelling sizes and types
- Density of between 30-50 dwellings per hectare.
- Higher densities in locations with good public transport.
- Exceptionally, lower densities on sites under 0.4 ha (1 acre).

The Policy we consulted upon allows the density of development to be lowered, as an exception, on sites of less than 0.4 hectares (1 acre) where local context and character and site constraints may make it difficult to achieve higher densities.

Current Context

We planned to adopt the Local Plan, including Policy 99H10 (with some minor changes), on 6 September 2002. However, the Government Office for the South East (GOSE) has raised objection to the wording of Policy 99H10 in particular the criteria used for defining sites where lower densities may, as an exception, be acceptable. GOSE has the power to stop us from adopting the Plan and direct a change to it. However, such action can be avoided if a satisfactory agreement is reached on the best way forward.

GOSE considered that the area criteria for identifying “exception sites” was too high and should be reduced from 0.4 hectares with a strong preference that 0.1 hectares would be the most appropriate threshold. They have however indicated that they would probably not raise objection to a threshold of 0.2 hectares but might exert their powers to impose a lower threshold if we fail to amend the policy.

A Way Forward

A revised wording of the Policy, which reduces the threshold for exception sites from 0.4 hectares to 0.2 hectares was drafted which also incorporated some other minor changes, in accordance with GOSE’s requests.

Whilst we have some reservations about the implications of the revised “exception site” threshold there is a recognised need to adopt the Plan as quickly as possible. Other policies within the Local Plan enable us to resist badly designed and unneighbourly development. It should be emphasised that all residential development is subject to Policy 99H4 which states that development should be in scale and character with the area, have no unacceptable effect on neighbours amenities and have no unacceptable effect on the adjacent buildings and immediate surroundings.

The benefits of Policy 99H10 are that it should increase the supply of smaller houses, to meet the identified housing needs of the Borough, and possibly result in more affordable housing. It should also reduce the pressure on greenfield land for development. The Council is committed to producing further design guidance, which will help ensure that new development is of a high quality and we will consult widely on this in due course.

We welcome any comments that you may have on the Housing Density Policy, in particular the “exception site” size threshold. Please ensure that any correspondence is received by **29 November 2002** in order that your views can be taken into account when Council representatives meet with the Government Office of the South East in early December to discuss Policy 99H10 further.

For further details please contact Kate Hilson, Planning Policy Team Tel: 01483 444662.

Link to Planning Policy Guidance Note 3: <http://www.planning.detr.gov.uk/ppg3/2.htm>

Link to Deputy Prime Minister’s Speech to Urban Summit 31 October 2002: <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/about/ministers/speeches/prescott/311002.htm>

Link to Density Direction: <http://www.planning.odpm.gov.uk/circ0102/index.htm>