

## **DCLG Consultation Response: Planning for the right homes in the right places**

### **Your details:**

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Are the views expressed on this consultation your own personal views or an official response from an organisation you represent?

- Personal View
- Organisational Response

If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please tick the box which best describes your organisation:

- Local Authority (including National Parks, Broads Authority, the Greater London Authority and London Boroughs)
- Neighbourhood Planning Body / Parish or Town Council
- Private Sector Organisation (including housebuilders, housing associations, businesses, consultants)
- Trade Association / Interest Group / Voluntary or Charitable Organisation
- Other (please specify)

Please provide the name of your organisation:

Surrey Heath Borough Council

### **Section 1: Proposed approach to calculating the local housing need**

#### **Question 1(a):**

Do you agree with the proposed standard approach to assessing local housing need? If not, what alternative approach or other factors should be considered?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure / don't know

Comments:

The current process of calculating objectively assessed housing need leaves substantial room for interpretation. We therefore support the principle of a standardised methodology which would remove dispute over how housing need is calculated and speed up the local plan process.

However it is important to take account of constraints on new development. Surrey Heath is impacted by the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area and , like most of Surrey, is heavily constrained by the Green Belt and other nationally important designations. These designations impose severe limitations on our ability to meet local housing need. In the interests of transparency and consistency, it is essential that constraints on development are taken in account when determining housing need for each authority.

We note that the data table accompanying the consultation includes a figure for each local authority area of land that is constrained, but this figure plays no part in the standardised methodology and makes no reference to Special Protection Areas. SHBC believe that the local housing need figure needs be modified by the constraints in each authority. This would provide a mechanism that recognises the Government's dual goals of meeting housing demand wherever possible, while at the same time protecting the Green Belt. Recognition of nationally important constraints in setting a housing need figure could replace the arbitrary 40% cap proposed in the consultation, and further speed up the local plan process by removing another area that is often subject to dispute at examination.

The standardised methodology has the potential not only to simplify and speed up local plan preparation, but also to address the balance to be struck between meeting housing need and protecting the Green Belt.

**Question 1(b):**

How can information on local housing need be made more transparent?

Comments:

SHBC welcomes the Government's proposal to clearly catalogue and display every local authority's housing need figure. Improved transparency can be achieved by including the ONS figures used for projected household growth and affordability ratio within the adjoining data table.

**Question 2:**

Do you agree with the proposal that an assessment of local housing need should be able to be relied upon for a period of two years from the date a plan is submitted?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure / don't know

Comments:

Any period of less than two years would put local authorities under increased pressure between submission and adoption.

**Question 3:**

Do you agree that we should amend national planning policy so that a sound plan should identify local housing needs using a clear and justified method?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure / don't know

Comments:

SHBC welcomes the Government's proposed amendment to national planning policy that will minimise delays in the examination of a local plan, as well as reduce costs to the local authority.

**Question 4:**

Do you agree with our approach in circumstances when plan makers deviate from the proposed method, including the level of scrutiny we expect from the Planning Inspectors?

- Yes
- No

Not sure / don't know

Comments:

It is important that any deviation from a standardised method is met with scrutiny to ensure that each local plan is sound.

**Question 5(a):**

Do you agree that the Secretary of State should have discretion to defer the period for using the baseline for some local planning authorities? If so, how best could this be achieved, what minimum requirements should be in place before the Secretary of State may exercise this discretion, and for how long should such deferral be permitted?

Yes

No

Not sure / don't know

Comments:

It is not clear from the consultation how this would be applied.

**Question 5(b):**

Do you consider that authorities that have an adopted joint local plan, or which are covered by an adopted spatial development strategy, should be able to assess their five year land supply and/or be measured for the purposes of the Housing Delivery Test, across the area as a whole?

Yes

No

Not sure / don't know

Comments:

Not applicable to Surrey Heath

**Question 5(c):**

Do you consider that authorities that are not able to use the new method for calculating local housing need should be able to use an existing or an emerging local plan figure for housing need for the purposes of calculating five year land supply and to be measured for the purposes of the Housing Delivery Test?

Yes

No

Not sure / don't know

Comments:

It is not clear from the consultation how this would be applied.

**Question 6:**

Do you agree with the proposed transitional arrangements for introducing the standard approach for calculating local housing need?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure / don't know

Comments:

The paper states that a number of plan makers have already made significant steps in their plan, and the Government wants to encourage them to complete their plan whilst avoiding further delays that could undermine the delivery of new homes. Since it is not known when the revised NPPF shall be published, the transitional period is currently of an undetermined length. This means many authorities will not be clear on whether to proceed with their current OAN or to change to the new figure proposed in this consultation. Until the revised NPPF is published, the Government should refrain from imposing a time limit on plan submission before the new figure must be used.

**Section 2: Statement of common ground**

**Question 7(a):**

Do you agree with the proposed administrative arrangements for preparing the statement of common ground?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure / don't know

Comments:

We agree that local authorities should only be signatories to those strategic issues covered in the statement of common ground in which they have an interest, and that authorities can be signatories to more than one statement where appropriate. In Surrey, and the South East more generally, the overlap of interests and issues between authorities that belong to different HMAs is significant. The administrative arrangements set out should allow a local planning authority to be a signatory to several statements, but be clear on which strategic issues are relevant to them.

**Question 7(b):**

How do you consider a statement of common ground should be implemented in areas where there is a Mayor with strategic plan-making powers?

Comments:

No comment .Not applicable to Surrey Heath

**Question 7(c):**

Do you consider there to be a role for directly elected Mayors without strategic plan-making powers, in the production of a statement of common ground?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure / don't know

Comments:

No comment .Not applicable to Surrey Heath

**Question 8:**

Do you agree that the proposed content and timescales for publication of the statement of common ground are appropriate and will support more effective co-operation on strategic cross-boundary planning matters?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure / don't know

Comments:

SHBC agrees with the proposed content and timescales for statements of common ground.

**Question 9(a):**

Do you agree with the proposal to amend the tests of soundness to include that:

i) plans should be prepared based on a strategy informed by agreements over the wider area; and

ii) plans should be based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic priorities, which are evidenced in the statement of common ground?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure / don't know

Comments:

SHBC believes that irrespective of the statement of common ground and discussion on cross-boundary working, it may not always be possible for neighbouring authorities to agree on all cross boundary issues. Subject to proper scrutiny of the degree of co-operation undertaken, the lack of agreement should not necessarily lead to a Local Plan being found unsound.

**Question 9(b):**

Do you agree to the proposed transitional arrangements for amending the tests of soundness to ensure effective co-operation?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure / don't know

Comments:

SHBC supports the proposed transitional arrangements; the new tests of soundness cannot be applied until 12 months after the revision to the NPPF to allow for the 12 month period in which a statement of common ground is produced.

**Section 3: Planning for a mix of housing needs**

**Question 10(a):**

Do you have any suggestions on how to streamline the process for identifying the housing need for individual groups and what evidence could be used to help plan to meet the needs of particular groups?

Comments:

SHBC agrees with the Government in that the current methodology for identifying the housing need for individual groups is complicated, and can be time consuming and costly. We therefore welcome a streamlining of the process. However, the consultation does not set out how evidence for meeting the housing needs of specific groups will be produced. There needs to be further details on how the process will be streamlined before seeking comments.

**Question 10(b):**

Do you agree that the current definition of older people within the National Planning Policy Framework is still fit-for-purpose?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure / don't know

Comments:

The current definition of 'older people' is very broad in that it includes anyone above the age of retirement. It would be useful to update the definition to move away from 'retirement' and become more focused on the typical needs of elderly people, which could include the need to downsize, the need for retirement or sheltered housing and those with support or care needs.

#### **Section 4: Neighbourhood Planning**

##### **Question 11(a):**

Should a local plan set out the housing need for designated neighbourhood planning areas and parished areas within the area?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure / don't know

Comments:

Housing need for designated neighbourhood planning areas and parished areas within a borough or district should reflect the spatial strategy set out in a Local Plan.

##### **Question 11(b):**

Do you agree with the proposal for a formula-based approach to apportion housing need to neighbourhood plan bodies in circumstances where the local plan cannot be relied on as a basis for calculating housing need?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure / don't know

Comments:

It is too simplistic to calculate what percentage the population of a neighbourhood planning area is of the overall population in the local planning authority area.

#### **Section 5: Proposed approach to Viability Assessment**

##### **Question 12:**

Do you agree that local plans should identify the infrastructure and affordable housing needed, how these will be funded and the contributions developers will be expected to make?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure / don't know

Comments:

SHBC supports the Government's proposed changes to viability assessments.

**Question 13:**

In reviewing guidance on testing plans and policies for viability, what amendments could be made to improve current practice?

Comments:

The Government should consider recommending a standardised methodology for calculating viability for plan making purposes, as this area of work is subject to the same level of dispute as that applying to housing demand forecasts.

**Question 14:**

Do you agree that where policy requirements have been tested for their viability, the issue should not usually need to be tested again at the planning application stage?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure / don't know

Comments:

SHBC welcomes this initiative which should ensure that policy requirements, such as the delivery of infrastructure and affordable housing, are being met in full.

**Question 15:**

How can Government ensure that infrastructure providers, including housing associations, are engaged throughout the process, including in circumstances where a viability assessment may be required?

Comments:

The Government should consider publishing guidance that encourages engagement with housing associations and infrastructure providers in developing Local Plan policies.

**Question 16:**

What factors should we take into account in updating guidance to encourage viability assessments to be simpler, quicker and more transparent, for example through a standardised report or summary format?

Comments:

Uniformity across viability assessments would be welcomed for improved transparency and simplicity. A preferred approach to calculating costs as well as the use of standard terms,

pre-defined in a glossary, would make assessments easier to understand and therefore more transparent.

**Question 17(a):**

Do you agree that local planning authorities should set out in plans how they will monitor and report on planning agreements to help ensure that communities can easily understand what infrastructure and affordable housing has been secured and delivered through developer contributions?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure / don't know

Comments:

SHBC agrees with the principle of reporting infrastructure and affordable housing provision. Most planning authorities already do report these in the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).

**Question 17(b):**

What factors should we take into account in preparing guidance on a standard approach to monitoring and reporting planning obligations?

Comments:

The Government needs to consider how the monitoring of this information will sit alongside the Annual Monitoring Report to avoid reporting duplication.

**Question 17(c):**

How can local planning authorities and applicants work together to better publicise infrastructure and affordable housing secured through new development once development has commenced, or at other stages of the process?

Comments:

it would be useful to publish the infrastructure and affordable housing provisions secured at the application stage, with this then being reviewed and updated throughout the process of development. This will improve the transparency of developer contributions, as well as highlighting any changes that may occur.

**Section 6: Planning fees**

**Question 18(a):**

Do you agree that a further 20 per cent fee increase should be applied to those local planning authorities who are delivering the homes their communities need? What should be the criteria to measure this?

- Yes

- No
- Not sure / don't know

Comments:

A further 20 percent increase should be applied to local planning authorities who are delivering the homes their communities need; not as a reward but as a necessity to ensure their planning departments are able to increase both capacity and capability. The Government must be careful to ensure that the criteria for being able to charge an increased fee is not simply the number of homes being built; authorities such as SHBC which is heavily constrained should not be penalised owing to their surroundings.

**Question 18(b):**

Do you think there are more appropriate circumstances when a local planning authority should be able to charge the further 20 per cent? If so, do you have views on how these circumstances could work in practice?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure / don't know

Comments:

SHBC considers that local planning authorities should be able to charge the further 20 per cent without stringent criteria.

**Question 18(c):**

Should any additional fee increase be applied nationally once all local planning authorities meet the required criteria, or only to individual authorities who meet them?

- Apply nationally
- Apply to individual authorities only
- Not sure / don't know

Comments:

**Question 18(d):**

Are there any other issues we should consider in developing a framework for this additional fee increase?

Comments:

Fees should reflect the amount of time and resources needed to process different applications.

**Section 7: Other issues**

**Question 19:**

Having regard to the measures we have already identified in the housing White Paper, are there any other actions that could increase build out rates?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure / don't know

Comments:

The Government must consider how it can prevent high volume housebuilders from land banking, which slows built out rates. More could be done to encourage the smaller housebuilders back into the market, but not at the expense of developer contributions or affordable housing provision.