

City Management Plan workshop briefing notes

Housing Provision

What are the issues?

In order to comply with Planning Policy Statement 3 : Housing (PPS3), and ensure that we create sustainable, mixed communities where housing needs are met, the City Council aims to deliver a mix of housing sizes and types, both market and affordable. Housing needs to support a wide range of households, including the accommodation requirements of specific groups such as, those on low incomes, students, and in particular, families with children, older people, and people with special needs and disabilities. In order to achieve and exceed its regional housing targets set by the Mayor, 680 additional homes p.a. need to be provided across the city. These are expected to be delivered by:

- change of use from offices, other commercial uses and some redundant public sector uses, such as hospital sites;
- housing required by the mixed use policy; and
- building to higher densities on existing housing sites.

In order to meet the targets we also need to protect existing housing, protect flats from 'de-converting' into fewer larger homes, prevent the use of homes as short term lets or temporary sleeping accommodation, and bring vacant property and former temporary sleeping accommodation back into permanent residential use. We will need to ensure that new housing is sustainable and meets Lifetime Homes standard, and that land is used efficiently to optimise the housing potential of development sites,

without compromising townscape, need for amenity space, or residential standards and amenity.

To comply with PPS3 we are currently preparing, with our partner boroughs in the North London sub-region, a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) which will set out Westminster's housing needs and requirements; including unit sizes (in terms of number of bedrooms) for different tenures, and wheelchair housing needs. Unfortunately, publication of this document has been delayed to late summer 2009.

What have you told us?

- All communities should have a mix of housing and tenures
- Although the number of new units is important, so is the need for good design and sustainable features
- Housing standards need to be discussed
- Developers are best placed to decide the mix and size of market housing
- Density bands should be removed
- Policy to prevent 'de-conversions' is a good idea
- If de-conversions are allowed, there should also be the possibility to request a payment to the Council's Affordable Housing Fund per each unit lost
- Family sized homes may not be desirable in the central area



City of Westminster

PLANNING & CITY DEVELOPMENT

6pm to 9 pm, 9th July 2009

17th floor City Hall - Committee Rooms 3 & 4

- There is a strong case for a two-tier approach across the City to acknowledge the differences in infrastructure to support 'family living' across the City, particularly in areas of the CAZ where a lower proportion of larger unit housing might be advocated in recognition of the different environmental characteristics of places like Soho and Covent Garden in particular.
- Is there a proven demand for family sized units in parts of Westminster such as Soho or Victoria where the residential environment may not be as suitable as other parts of the City? In such cases, the LPA may consider accepting financial contributions from developers which they could then invest into the delivery of family housing in parts of Westminster where there is more of a demonstrable need.
- The family housing areas should be maintained
- De-conversions should be permitted in the Family Housing Areas
- The unit size mix in residential schemes should be flexible and reflect the schemes location and physical constraints.
- Provision should be made for student accommodation (and it needs less amenity/car parking space than general housing)
- Policy should support the replacement of non-purpose built with purpose built student housing, which provides a higher quality living environment for those studying at the university.
- Car parking standards need to be reviewed. It would be wrong to discourage residential development because of car parking constraints.
- Car free housing should be encouraged, provided they cannot apply for residents' parking permits
- New homes need new open space
- Minority private interest in preserving residential amenity should not outweigh the wider interest of meeting housing need and other development.
- Need to tackle non-permanent residents and vacant homes
- Policies need to include flexibility to allow site specific circumstances and scheme viability to be a material consideration when determining the type of housing provision on sites
- Whilst a diversity of housing types and sizes is necessary, affordability lies at the heart of this issue
- More recognition of the role of studio and 1 bed units in providing affordable accommodation for workers in the central area
- What about schemes where RSL may just want to provide 'older people' housing for example, rather than meeting all size and tenure requirements?
- Low cost accommodation, such as hostels and HMOs, is a vital component of housing mix and needs to be protected
- UDP hostel policy should continue in the CMP
- The LPA should consider ways in which the Council may act to reduce and prevent the accumulation of vacant property for investment purposes and as second homes, e.g. the use of legal conditions to ensure homes are occupied for a minimum number of days per year.
- All empty houses and flats should be examined to see whether there are means by which they could be brought back into the housing market





Current Unitary Development Plan Policy 2007

H 1 protects housing and residential floorspace. H 2 prevents the use of housing by non permanent residents. TACE 3 prevents the change of use of lawful temporary sleeping accommodation, formerly used for residential use, to a hotel. Policy H 5 seeks an appropriate housing size mix including 33% family units and 5% of family units to be 4 bed plus. It designates 6 Family Housing Areas where conversions of houses into smaller units are not permitted, and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) are not protected. Hostels and special needs housing are protected under H 6 unless they are surplus to the existing operator and there is no demand from another organisation. New hostel applications will be assessed with reference to impact on residential amenity. HMOs are protected under H 7 (except in family housing areas). Policy H 8 provides for all new homes to meet Lifetime Homes standard and a 10% wheelchair housing proportion in larger schemes. H 10 sets out provisions for gardens, and community facilities in residential developments. H 11 sets 4 different density bands, calculating using habitable rooms per hectare, to apply to different parts of the city and has an upper limit of 850 hr/ha. Policy STRA 16 protects the residential environment and residents' amenities.

Core Strategy Publication Draft 2009 (subject to agreement)

Housing Delivery – CS 7 states that: the Council will work to achieve and exceed its borough housing target; residential uses, floorspace and land will be protected; proposals that would reduce the number of residential units will not be acceptable except in the case of reconfiguration or redevelopment of affordable housing; the number of residential units on development sites will be optimised.

Meeting Housing Needs – CS 8 states that: Residential developments will provide an appropriate mix of units in terms of size, type, and affordable housing provision. Hostels, HMOs, and specialist housing floorspace will be protected.

Residential Design Quality – states that housing should provide well-designed, high quality living environments both internally and externally.

Residential Amenity – states that new development should not result in a material loss of residential amenity and should improve the residential environment where possible.

The City Council is preparing two Supplementary Planning Documents to address Residential Standards and Sustainable Design. These will be subject to separate consultation next year.

The policies in full and reasons for them can be viewed at:

<http://www.westminster.gov.uk/environment/planning/ldf/corestrategy.cfm>

Further information

The London Plan – Consolidated with Alterations Since 2004 (February 2008)

Adopted Unitary Development Plan (January 2007)

Core Strategy Publication Draft (February 2009)

Housing Needs Study

What should we do?

You may comment in writing on any housing issue that is not covered in the Core Strategy, and the list of UDP housing policies, above, provides a guide to the type of issues that will need to be addressed in the CMP. The discussions at the workshop will address the following matters:

1. Efficient use of housing land and housing density. PPS3 and the London Plan state that we should maximise the potential of housing sites. The Council needs to ensure that policies enable us to create homes and neighbourhoods where people want to live, whilst maximising the numbers of units on sites without compromising the need for sustainable residential quality (in terms of design, open space provision, parking, energy generation, etc.). The conservation area status and small scale of most residential developments in Westminster means that density is not a major factor in assessing most planning applications. The density policy will need to conform to the London Plan (table 3A.2 Density matrix uses both habitable rooms and dwellings per hectare) and reflect the differing townscape character of different parts of the city.

2. Unit size mix

PPS3 states that the evidence on need and demand will inform unit size mix that will be required on sites.

The Sub-Regional Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), when published, will set out the dwelling sizes needed to meet need and demand in the market and affordable sectors. This then needs to be translated into policy to be applied to individual schemes.

3. Accommodating families

PPS 3 states that LAs need to plan for families with children and the London Housing Strategy is seeking 40% of new homes to be family sized. However, in Westminster almost half families with children only have one child so should family housing in the Westminster context include 2 bed/4 person homes?

4. Residential amenity

Maintaining and protecting residential amenity will ensure that Westminster remains a place that people want to live and is vital in the context of a densely built up borough, much of which is characterised by mixed uses operating side by side.

5. HMOs and hostels

There is considerable pressure to change hostels and HMOs to conventional housing but these types of accommodation often meet the needs of those with special needs or those who cannot afford market housing.

6. Student accommodation

There is a rising trend in London for applications for student accommodation. Whilst providing for a need, development of student accommodation, in particular that provided on a purely commercial basis, has a serious opportunity cost as it could be developed for homes for long term residents, including affordable housing.

The Housing Workshop will cover the above topics and also issues related to affordable housing, the background to which can be found in the Affordable Housing briefing note.

The agenda for the Housing Workshop is as follows:

Welcome and introduction

Cllr Roe – Cabinet Member for Housing

1. Efficient use of housing land

1a. How should we optimise the number of new dwellings in residential schemes without compromising design and amenity, and open space and other community needs?

1b. Should 850hr/ha remain the upper density limit in Westminster or could the upper limit of 1100 hr/ha in the London Plan be applied to the Paddington Opportunity Area?

1c. Given the market trend for very large homes with large room sizes and ancillary space, should we calculate density by using dwellings per hectare rather than habitable rooms?

1d. The Core Strategy protects the number of residential units in schemes. Is it acceptable to lose one (or more) residential unit in the case of a house de-conversion or redevelopment of sub-standard residential units?

1e. Where a de-conversion is allowed in the market sector, should there be the possibility to request a payment to the Council's Affordable Housing Fund per each unit lost?

15mins

2. Unit size mix

2a. The SHMA will set out the dwelling sizes re. bedrooms and bed spaces, required for market and affordable housing, which will then be translated into policy. Should we use different sizes for affordable housing and market housing, or should the sizes be tenure neutral?

2b. Should we allow intermediate housing providers to provide solely studio and one bedroom intermediate homes for outright sale to those eligible for intermediate housing on small sites?

10mins

3. Accommodating families

3a. Do you consider it important to safeguard existing houses in the market sector from conversion to smaller units in parts of Westminster considered to be particularly suitable for families,?

3b. Do you think that in the Westminster context 'family homes' should include 2 bedroom 4 person dwellings?

3c. Should we be asking for family sized homes in new developments in busy central areas?

15mins

4. Residential Amenity

4a. How should we balance protecting residential amenity with the need for growth?

4b. How can we ensure that new housing developments are attractive places where people want to live?

10mins

5. HMOs and Hostels

5. Are there any exceptional circumstances that would justify the loss and change of use of HMOs and hostels to other forms of residential accommodation?

5 mins

(cont.)

6. Student Housing

6a. How can we ensure that student housing is of high quality and meets the needs of students studying in Westminster; rather than being a market response to the stalling in the housing market, and a means of bypassing affordable housing requirements?

6b. Should normal policy requirements such as affordable housing, housing mix and parking be required in student housing schemes?

10mins

BREAK – 15 mins

7. Affordable housing

7a. Should the proportions of affordable housing required take into account existing use value as is the case in current UDP policy?

7b. Do you support the continued use of 'staircasing' the affordable housing requirement for smaller schemes (say between 10 and 24 units or 1000 – 2500 sq m gross external floorspace)?

7c. Should a lower proportion of affordable housing be required inside Core CAZ, named CAZ streets, and Paddington Opportunity Area, as is the case in current UDP policy, to reflect the fact that most sites in these locations can be developed for commercial use?

7d. Do you think the Social/Intermediate split should be applied flexibly to individual schemes within an overall aim of achieving a 60:40 ratio city-wide (or 70:30 as set out in the London Plan)?

7e. If we were to adopt a flexible approach to individual schemes, what factors should be taken into consideration, for example should new social

housing units be limited in areas which already have say more than 50% of households living in social housing?

7f. How can we ensure Intermediate Housing is affordable to a range of eligible households, not just those in the highest income range?

7g. How can we ensure the affordability of service charges and car parking.

7h. Do you support a land value area approach to payments in lieu?

1 hour 15 mins

Other Issues

Any other issue that the chair agreed needed to be discussed at this workshop?

Any other issues that Council should be aware of in its lobbying process?

10 mins

Contact

Margaret Handovsky
City Planning Group, Westminster City Council
11th Floor, City Hall, 64 Victoria Street
London SW1E 6QP
020 7641 1818
mhandovsky@westminster.gov.uk