

## **CABINET**

**19 OCTOBER 2010**

### **MEDWAY HOUSING DESIGN STANDARDS SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT AND BUILDING FOR LIFE IMPLEMENTATION**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Jane Chitty, Strategic Development and Economic Growth

Report from: Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture

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#### **Summary**

The Medway Housing Design Standards are a proposed Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) that will provide developers, landowners and their advisors with clear advice on minimum layout and space standards that will be expected in the design of new housing and the conversion of existing properties. Compliance will be a consideration in the consideration of planning applications.

Building for Life has been developed by CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment), and the Home Builders Federation.

Cabinet approval is sought to consult with developers, designers and planning agents on both the draft Medway Housing Design Standards and the adoption of the Building for Life document in Medway.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

- 1.1 The proposed Medway Housing Design Standards SPD is within the council's policy and budget framework. It expands upon and provides further details to the saved Local Plan policies BNE1: General Principles for Built Development and BNE2: Amenity Protection.
- 1.2 The proposed SPD contributes to achieving the target set in the Local Area Agreement indicators for new homes supported by appropriate infrastructure.
- 1.3 Building for Life has been developed with the specific aim of helping local authorities to deliver on the policies set out in Planning Policy Statement 3. The score derived from the BfL assessment will be used as a basis for judging the quality of submissions for residential planning permission in Medway but the assessment method is a tool, not a policy. The use of this tool is supported by the council's policy framework.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 Major housing projects in Medway include Rochester Riverside, Gillingham Waterfront, Chatham Centre and the new settlement at Lodge Hill, Chattenden. At a smaller scale many existing properties are being converted to residential use. There are concerns in some cases over the internal space and general amenities available to residents.
- 2.2 It is important to ensure that all new development:
- provides a standard of accommodation that enables occupants to comfortably undertake their day-to-day living activities;
  - is flexible and generous enough to allow adaptation to meet future demands and cater for changing lifestyles;
  - combines efficient land use with the environmental benefits of well-designed, well-managed housing.
- 2.3 In meeting these objectives, space standards (including room sizes) are of key importance and lie at the core of the Medway Housing Design Standards SPD. In addition, guidance is provided on a range of related issues such as privacy, security and sunlight.
- 2.4 Building for Life is the national standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods. It has been developed by CABI and the Home Builders Federation and provides a method of assessing new housing developments against 20 criteria that embody a vision of functional, attractive and sustainable housing (see Appendix 1 for the 20 criteria).
- 2.5 Both the proposed Medway Housing Design Standards SPD and Building for Life support the same overall effort to improve the quality of residential development in Medway. The Building for Life criteria support an evaluation process that is broad-based, indexing a development by its performance across a range of issues. The Medway Housing Design Standards differ in that they are technical *requirements* that will be a consideration in the granting of planning permission.
- 2.6 In addressing the proposed Medway Housing Design Standards and the twenty Building for Life criteria developers and their agents will benefit from a clear understanding of the methods that Medway Council will use to evaluate and assess proposals for residential development.
- 2.7 **Please note that copies of the Medway Housing Design Standards and Building for Life assessment tool have been circulated separately to Cabinet Members, Group Rooms and will be available at the Council's main receptions and on the Council's website via <http://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=115>**

**Further copies will also be available from the Cabinet Office. Please contact 01634 332509/332008 for further details.**

### **3. Options**

- 3.1 Option 1 - proceed with consultation on the proposed SPD to allow progress towards adoption and on the implementation of Building for Life.
- 3.2 Option 2 - delay progress towards adoption of the proposed SPD in view of the possibility that dwelling space standards may be introduced at the national level, but continue with the implementation of Building for Life.
- 3.3 Option 3 - delay progress towards adoption of the proposed SPD and do not implement Building for Life.
- 3.4 The most effective way to introduce minimum design standards would be through changes to the planning and building regulation system at the national level. In the absence of a definite commitment to this from central government and a clear timetable for implementation, it is essential that local minimum design standards are progressed for adoption to allow enforcement in the interim period at local level.
- 3.5 The benefits of Building for Life are that:
- It provides a nationally recognised framework of what constitutes good housing so assisting in transparent and consistent decision making within existing policy frameworks;
  - It will be used to inform the development of further policies on housing design and quality;
  - It will be used as a constructive tool for negotiation and discussion to assist officers in providing advice to applicants;
  - It will support planning officers in dealing with housing design matters and raise general awareness of residential design quality;
  - Formal assessments of applications will be used as an evaluation pro forma in decision making and allow comparison between schemes;
  - It provides a means of specifying a target level of residential design quality in the Core Strategy and demonstrating progress in achieving that target.
- 3.6 There are no obvious disadvantages to the implementation of Building for Life. Officer and Planning Committee member training will be required but is to be resourced out of existing budgets and should be considered an investment in staff development and robust planning decision-making. Applicants may raise initial concerns that the use of Building for life represents an additional administrative burden. However, these are likely to be allayed through experience of the benefits of using Building for Life to structure pre-application negotiations.

### **4. Advice and analysis**

- 4.1 There is a substantial and growing evidence base supporting the case for the introduction of minimum housing design standards. Recent research has been commissioned and published by CABI, the HCA (Housing and Communities Agency) and the Mayor of London. Much of this work has been undertaken in support of development of the London Housing Design Guide (Interim Edition published August 2010) and the HCA Proposed Core Housing

Design and Sustainability Standards Consultation (currently under review following consultation).

- 4.2 The proposed Medway Housing Design Standards have been selected to align with the Interim Edition of the London Housing Design Guide. This is a set of standards supported by rigorous testing and a robust evidence base that is simple to apply and will be familiar to many developers and their advisors operating in Medway.
- 4.3 Space is a key factor influencing the flexibility and adaptability of dwellings. In this sense the SPD supports principles of sustainable development by helping to ensure that compliant dwellings offer the flexibility that allows adaptation to changing needs. All of the requirements of the Medway Housing Design Standards will contribute to ensuring the enduring popularity and function of housing developments, supporting the creation of sustainable communities.
- 4.4 A Diversity Impact Assessment screening will be undertaken in parallel with the public consultation exercise to anticipate whether a full impact assessment will be required.

## 5. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
Cost and delivery impact 1 – viability.	Impact on viability of development due to reduced site capacity and increased construction costs to developers.  <b>This risk is rated B-2.</b>	In general, short term viability impacts must be weighed against ensuring the longer term sustainability of Medway’s housing stock and experience suggest that developers adapt to new standards mitigating any initial viability impacts over time.
Cost and delivery impact 2 – stifling innovation.	Criticism from developers and other stakeholders that standards lead to a ‘tick-box’ approach that stifles the innovation required to make constrained, difficult sites viable.  <b>This risk is rated C-2.</b>	In some circumstances flexibility in application of the standards may be justified. Such cases will be determined at the discretion of Planning Committee with reference to officer recommendations.

<p>Reduced credibility of the Building for Life tool.</p>	<p>Some Building for Life criteria require fine evaluative judgement of response to context and architectural quality. Inconsistent interpretation of the criteria could undermine the credibility of the Building for Life assessment method and therefore the benefits that it can provide.</p> <p><b>This risk is rated B-2.</b></p>	<p>Informal assessments: to be supported by training workshops for Officers.</p> <p>Formal assessments: support for the authority of the judgement of accredited assessors.</p> <p>Member training to reinforce understanding of the application of Building for Life.</p>
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## 6. Consultation

- 6.1 In preparing development planning documents to be adopted, the Council is required to meet a minimum level of public involvement under the *Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004*. The SPD will be subject to rigorous procedures of consultation and be in conformity with the Statement of Community Involvement.
- 6.2 The proposed public consultation from Monday 1 November until Friday 10 December 2010 will exceed the minimum level of public involvement required, in order to ensure a level of engagement that is adequate to fully address the concerns of developers and other consultees.
- 6.3 Building for Life (BfL) is an aid to the assessment of the design quality of planning proposals. It is not a planning policy in its own right. Public consultation over its use by the Council in its capacity as Local Planning Authority is not therefore required by statute. However, BfL works best when designers and developers are aware of the BfL judging criteria. Consultation will raise awareness and allow any concerns to over its use to be addressed. Information on the implementation of BfL will therefore be included with the consultation on the Medway Housing Design Standards.

## 7. Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 7.1 The Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the Building for Life assessment tool on 29 September 2010 as pre-decision scrutiny. The Committee recommended to Cabinet the Building for Life assessment tool for approval.
- 7.2 The Committee will consider the Medway Housing Design Standards Supplementary Planning Document in February 2011 following the consultation process and prior to submission to Cabinet in March 2011.

## 8. Financial and legal implications

- 8.1 If adopted the housing design standards will become a supplementary planning document prepared in conformity with 'saved' Medway Local Plan Policies BNE1 and BNE2 and in accordance with the provisions of the

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. As an adopted supplementary planning document the development framework will carry considerable weight in the determination of future planning applications.

- 8.2 In order to be adopted as a supplementary planning document the preparation of and consultation of the Medway Housing Design Standards must be in accordance with the Town & Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004 (as amended).
- 8.3 Adoption of the Medway Housing Design Standards SPD will assist the Council in demonstrating that they are applying consistent standards in assessing housing design and so should help in defending appeals against the refusal of planning permission. This objective will also be supported by Cabinet approval of the implementation of Building for Life as the basis for judging the quality of submissions for residential planning permission in Medway.
- 8.4 There are no anticipated significant financial implications of the following recommendation.

## **9. Recommendation**

- 9.1 That Cabinet approves statutory consultation on the draft Medway Housing Design Standards commencing 1 November 2010.
- 9.2 That Cabinet agrees to consultation with developers, designers and planning agents on the implementation of the Building for Life assessment tool for judging the quality of submissions for residential planning permission in Medway.

## **10. Suggested reasons for decision(s)**

- 10.1 To allow progress towards adoption of the draft Medway Housing Design Standards as an Supplementary Planning Document and to support implementation of the Building for Life assessment tool.

### **Lead officer contact**

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### **Background papers**

- Housing and Communities Agency Proposed Core Housing Design and Sustainability Standards Consultation
- London Housing Design Guide - Interim Edition - Mayor of London
- Draft London Housing Design Guide: Cost and Delivery Impact Assessment, Pre Publication Draft
- Housing Design Standards Evidence Summary July 2010 Mayor of London
- Medway Local Plan Adopted May 2003
- Medway Council's guide to producing Supplementary Planning Documents

## Building for Life – the 20 criteria

<b>Environment and Community</b>	1. Does the development provide for (or is close to) community facilities such as a school, parks, play areas, shops, pubs, or cafes?
	2. Is there an accommodation mix that reflects the needs and aspiration of the local community?
	3. Is there a tenure mix that reflects the needs of the local community?
	4. Does the development have easy access to public transport?
	5. Does the development have any features that reduce its environmental impact?
<b>Character</b>	6. Is the design specific to the scheme?
	7. Does the scheme exploit existing buildings, landscape, or topography?
	8. Does the scheme feel like a place with a distinctive character?
	9. Do the buildings and layout make it easy to find your way around?
	10. Are streets defined by a well-structured building layout?
<b>Streets, Parking and Pedestrianisation</b>	11. Does the building layout take priority over the streets and car-parking so that highways do not dominate?
	12. Is the car parking well integrated and situated so that it supports the street scene?
	13. Are the streets pedestrian, cycle and vehicle friendly?
	14. Does the scheme integrate with existing streets, paths and surrounding development?
	15. Are public spaces and pedestrian routes overlooked and do they feel safe?
<b>Design and Construction</b>	16. Is public space well designed and does it have suitable management arrangements in place?
	17. Do buildings exhibit architectural quality?
	18. Do internal spaces and layout allow for adaptation, conversion, or extension?
	19. Has the scheme made use of advances in construction or technology that enhance its performance, quality and attractiveness?
	20. Do buildings or spaces outperform statutory minima, such as Building Regulations?