

## Home Builders Federation

### Matter 3

## COLCHESTER LOCAL PLAN PART 2 EXAMINATION

### Main Matter 3 – Environmental Assets Policies

*Are the Environmental Assets Policies set out in CLP Section 2 justified by appropriate available evidence, having regard to national guidance, and local context, including the meeting the requirements of the CS?*

The Council are proposing a modification to part (v) of ENV1 to require a minimum net gain in biodiversity of 10%. The HBF recognises that should the Environment Bill become an Act then all development will be required to achieve this level of biodiversity net gain, however until this legislation is enacted the 2012 NPPF states at paragraph 109 that the planning system should seek to achieve net gain where possible. As the Council will be aware the plan is submitted as sound and modifications should only be made to the plan to rectify an issue of soundness. The proposed modification is one that whilst in line with a potential future requirement is not required to ensure the soundness of the local plan as it is submitted and when considered against the 2012 NPPF.

Whilst we understand the Council's desire to adopt the proposed level of net gain in the Environment Bill it must also be remembered that this Bill includes provisions to allow a transitional period with regard to the application of the proposed net gain requirements. As such requiring a 10% from the adoption of this local plan may not be consistent with any transition arrangements. In addition, the policy as written would not prevent the Council from implementing any future legislation regarding net gain but does ensure flexibility depending on how and when the 10% requirement is implemented by Government.



## Home Builders Federation

### Matter 14

#### COLCHESTER LOCAL PLAN PART 2 EXAMINATION

#### **Main Matter 14 – Affordable Housing, Development Density, Housing Diversity and Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople**

*Are the policies relating to Affordable Housing, Development Density, Housing Diversity and Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople justified by appropriate available evidence, having regard to national guidance, and local context, and CLP 1?*

The Council's affordable housing policy, DM8, requires all major residential development to provide 30% of their homes as affordable dwellings. However, we are concerned that the policy does not reflect the fact that some development scenarios face a more challenging market than others. In our representations we highlighted the fact that the viability assessment shows flatted development to be unviable with all the policy requirements placed on such schemes. We recognise that the study states that such schemes would be unviable without any policy costs due to development costs and the relatively lower values that can be achieved but given the encouragement given to higher density development by the Government we consider it necessary to amend the policy to expressly remove flatted development from providing affordable housing.

Whilst we welcome the flexibility within the policy that allows for a reduction in affordable housing contributions, we do not believe that this gives a sufficiently strong signal to the market to encourage the development industry to bring forward flatted schemes. However, an amendment as suggested above would provide a signal to the development industry that the Council is supportive of such development and would give confidence to the house builders to bring forward flatted schemes in Colchester. Such an approach would potentially bring forward sites that could deliver a wider choice of market housing that would support first time buyers and others seeking lower cost options.

*Do policies DM8 to DM11 provide a clear direction as to how a decision maker should react to a development proposal?*

The policy is not clear with regard to the tenure mix for affordable housing. The third paragraph states that there is an overwhelming need for affordable rented properties but provides no indication as to the tenure mix that is expected on each site. It is helpful to provide clarity in the policy as to the expectations with regard tenure mix to both the applicant and decision maker. We would also recommend that a clear statement is

made that the Council will consider an alternative tenure mix where the proposed mix renders a development unviable.



## Home Builders Federation

### Matter 15

#### COLCHESTER LOCAL PLAN PART 2 EXAMINATION

#### **Main Matter 15 – Housing Standards, Domestic Development and Design and Amenity Policies**

*Are the Housing Standards, Domestic Development and Design and Amenity Policies justified by appropriate available evidence, having regard to national guidance, and local context, and CLP 1?*

The 2015 Written Ministerial Statement, now reflected in footnote 46 to paragraph 127 of the 2019 NPPF, requires the Council to have evidence that the optional standard such as the Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS) are needed if they are to be adopted in the local plan. The Council therefore need robust justifiable evidence to introduce any of the optional housing standards, based on the criteria set out in Planning Practice Guidance. However, we could not find any justification in the evidence base or the local plan itself to support the adoption of NDSS. Therefore, whilst the Council has considered the impact of these standards on viability they cannot be adopted if there is no evidence to suggest that they are needed.

Whilst the HBF shares the Council desires to see good quality homes delivered within Colchester we also consider that space standards can, in some instances, have a negative impact upon affordability issues and reduce customer choice. In terms of choice, for example, some developers will provide entry level two, three and four-bedroom properties which may not meet the optional nationally described space standards, but which would allow on lower incomes can afford a property which has their required number of bedrooms. Given the poor affordability of property in the area it is important that the Council can provide, in line with PPG, robust evidence that there is a need to introduce the optional space standards – that these standards are a must have rather than a nice to have policy.

The HBF is also not aware of any evidence that market dwellings in Colchester that do not meet the NDSS remaining unsold or that those living in these dwellings consider that their housing needs are not met. There is no evidence that the size of houses built are considered inappropriate by purchasers or dwellings that do not meet the NDSS are selling less well in comparison with other dwellings. The HBF in partnership with National House Building Council (NHBC) undertake an annual independently verified National New Homes Customer Satisfaction Survey<sup>1</sup>. The 2020 Survey demonstrates

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hbf.co.uk/documents/10871/S030a - HBF 2021 Brochure - V3.pdf>

that 91% of new home buyers would purchase a new build home again and 91% would recommend their housebuilder to a friend. The results also conclude that 94% of respondents were happy with the internal design of their new home, which does not suggest that significant numbers of new home buyers are looking for different layouts or house sizes to that currently built.

Given that there is little to suggest that development below space standards is an endemic concern within Colchester we would suggest that part (v) of DM12 is deleted from the plan. This would give the Council greater flexibility to maximise the number of sites that are developable as well as extending consumer choice to more households.

*Does CLP Section 2 make sufficient provision for inclusive design and accessible environments in accordance with paragraphs 57, 58, 61 and 69 of NPPF?*

No comment

*Do policies DM12, DM13 and DM15 provide a clear direction as to how a decision maker should react to a development proposal?*

No comment

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