



MID DEVON LOCAL PLAN REVIEW 2013 – 2033

Proposed Submission (incorporating proposed modifications) Examination

Inspector: Paul Griffiths BSc (Hons) BArch IHBC

Main Hearings - Hearing 4: Tuesday 19th February 2019

Matters and Issues

Development Management Policies

Statement of Mid Devon District Council

ISSUE 11 Is Draft Policy DM12 (Housing Standards) justified?

11) Is Draft Policy DM12 (Housing Standards) justified?

11.1 Yes, Policy DM12 (Housing Standards) is justified and based on proportionate evidence. National Policy sets out that planning should always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings. The aim of the policy is to deliver high quality buildings and spaces that meet the needs of users, taking account of an aging population whilst ensuring compatibility with surrounding development and uses. There are no strategic alternatives identified within the Sustainability Appraisal [SD04] as the Council's development management policies have been developed to reflect the NPPF position locally, or are written to reflect the Local Plan Review's supporting evidence base [SD04a].

11.2 In line with PPG (paragraph 002), the policy seeks to implement two optional technical standards:

- Level 2 of Building Regulations Part M 'access to and use of dwellings'; and
- Nationally Described Space Standards

Accessible and adaptable dwellings

11.3 Planning Practice Guidance sets out that based on housing needs assessments and other available datasets it is for local planning authorities to set out how they intend to approach

demonstrating the need for requirement M4(2) accessible and adaptable dwellings. Furthermore, there is a wide range of published official statistics and factors which local planning authorities can consider and take into account, including:

- The likely future need for housing for older and disabled people (including wheelchair user dwellings)
- Size, location, type and quality of dwellings needed to meet specifically evidenced needs (for example retirement homes, sheltered homes or care homes);
- The accessibility and adaptability of existing stock;
- How needs vary across different housing tenures and
- The overall impact on viability

The likely future need for housing for older and disabled people

- 11.4 The Mid Devon Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) [HOU03] outlines that the proportion of people aged over 60 is likely to increase significantly over the next 20 years. The District's aging population will give rise to the need for proposals for elderly person's accommodation including sheltered accommodation, care homes and nursing homes. Indeed, the projected growth of the 65+ population in Mid Devon between 2013 and 2033 is expected to increase by +54.3%. This equates to approximately 9,366 more people aged 65+ by 2033. Mid Devon is projected to have the highest increase in older people in the Exeter Housing Market Area, with a 54.3% increase in the population aged 65+ between 2012-33 (the average across Exeter HMA authorities being +44.4%) and an 81.8% increase in people aged 75+ over the plan period.
- 11.5 In general terms, care and support needs increase with age. However, more people are staying in their properties longer with support and care being supplied by external agents in their home. The latest census (March 2011) indicated that approximately 7% (5,792) of Mid Devon's population (77,750) were limited a lot in their day to day activities and 10% (7,708) were limited a little in their day to day activities due to a long term health problem or disability. Furthermore, data from the AMR (2018) highlights that approximately 20.3% of households in Mid Devon include a member with a disability and only 9.7% of the housing stock is comprised of adapted households.
- 11.6 Given that future demographic changes will inevitably result in greater demands for housing suitable for older people and those with disabilities, there is a clear need for the inclusion of Building Regulation M4 (2) within the Local Plan Review.

Size, location, type and quality of dwellings needed to meet specifically evidenced needs

- 11.7 The SHMA indicates that the increase in older households (80+) will have implications for housing with support, extra care housing, long term suitability of accommodation, equity release schemes, adaptations, and other age related care requirements. Prior to the SHMA, the Local Housing Needs and Demand Study 2011¹ noted that the main type of

¹ <https://www.middevon.gov.uk/media/103707/housing-needs-assessment-2011.pdf>

accommodation occupied by older people in Mid Devon are detached houses, (29.4%) followed by bungalows (29.1%). A survey was conducted of existing households aged 60+ who were planning a move within the district in the next 3 years. They were asked a series of questions about their future housing requirements. The results highlighted that approximately 35.9% of people would prefer to move to a bungalow and would prefer two bedrooms. In addition, 15.9% of respondents would prefer supported housing including sheltered.

- 11.8 The Shelter Report 'A Better Fit? – Creating Housing Choices for an Aging Population'² (April 2012) stated that 68% of older homeowners live in a home that has at least two spare bedrooms. When older people downsize to smaller accommodation, there is a market chain effect and larger properties become available to other households. Indeed this is also the case for Mid Devon which when comparing occupancy ratings of 2+ or more against the national average of 34.2%, Mid Devon exhibits a significantly higher incidence of properties with +2 or more occupancy ratings (43.6%³). Building more homes that are suitable for older people could help stimulate the market by increasing their propensity to downsize therefore holding to address overall housing requirements in Mid Devon.

Accessibility and adaptability of existing housing stock

- 11.9 The provision of accessible and adaptable homes can play a significant role in encouraging older households to downsize from larger under occupied accommodation thus helping to free these properties to meet wider housing requirements for larger households. As set out above, under occupation of the existing housing stock is a significant issue in Mid Devon. Planning policy must therefore work towards finding a wider range of housing options for older people, especially in the private sector. Rapidly changing demographic profiles will increase the proportion of under-occupation especially in those households with no mortgage, usually older people. The situation will worsen over the next decade as the proportion of older owner-occupiers in the HMA increases significantly.
- 11.10 The percentage of adapted housing in Mid Devon is 9.7% accordingly to the Mid Devon AMR (2017) [MID05]. Where older people and those with disabilities are living in unsuitable housing, it is likely that they may be forced to make expensive adaptations to their homes. The provision of homes in accordance with Level 2 of Building Regulations Part M would help address these issues by enabling future households to make necessary adaptations and adjustments without needing to move home. The Leonard Cheshire Disability Report 'No Place Like Home'⁴ outlines how disabled friendly homes are by design, far cheaper and easier to adapt than any other homes. It is therefore important for planning policy to proactively respond to Mid Devon's changing demographic.

² https://england.shelter.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/427730/Policy_report_A_better_fit.pdf

³ HOU03 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (Page 44)

⁴ <https://www.leonardcheshire.org/sites/default/files/no-place-like-home-leonard-cheshire-disability.pdf.pagespeed.ce.2HcEbj3zI5.pdf>

How needs vary across different housing tenures

- 11.11 The current unit supply of specialist housing in Mid Devon is as follows: affordable 557, market 156 [HOU03]. Despite the majority of older person's households being in the owner-occupier sector, the majority of specialist housing is in the affordable sector (61%) with only 39% being available in the market sector. As a result it is clear that there is a need for providing a wider range of housing options for older people, especially within the private sector. Indeed, when comparing this data with the other authorities in the Exeter HMA, Mid Devon has the lowest unit supply of specialist housing per 1,000 population aged 75+.

The overall impact on viability

- 11.12 According to the Mid Devon Viability Assessment Addendum 'Public Open Space, Accessible Dwellings and Self Build Housing' (2014) [HOU05] with regards to Part M (2), the impact on viability is marginal and Dixon Searle LLP are of the opinion that the sensitivity of the results to an approximate £240 per dwelling change in cost is not one that can be easily differentiated. On that basis, it is unlikely that an additional £240 per dwelling (compared to the costs of complying with the Council's previous requirement to achieve Lifetime Homes standard of 20% on new dwellings) would lead to a viable scheme becoming unviable. Moreover, the Council's Viability Update 2018 [HOU07] identifies a general improvement in viability relative to the 2016 and 2014 studies.

Conclusions on policy requirement for accessible and adaptable dwellings

- 11.13 In accordance with Planning Practice Guidance, based on the housing needs assessment and other available datasets, it is for local planning authorities to set out how they intend to approach demonstrating the need for M4 (2) (accessible and adaptable dwellings) of the Building Regulations. By referring to the evidence above, there is a clear, demonstrable need for the inclusion of this optional access requirement which would ensure that there are appropriate and accessible dwellings for the future population needs for Mid Devon.
- 11.14 There is significant evidence of an aging population in Mid Devon which is likely to continue to grow up to 2033 and subsequently, demands for suitable housing will also continue to grow. The evidence suggests that without implementation of M4(2) there is a risk that new homes will fail to meet identified future housing needs particularly when considering the low levels of accessibility found within the existing housing stock.
- 11.15 The inclusion of an optional access requirement within the Local Plan Review will help facilitate the provision of adaptable homes for and older people and those with disabilities. This will help ensure that households do not need to move home in order to address mobility issues that may arise in the future. Given that under-occupation of the existing housing stock is a key issue affecting future housing stock, the provision of accessible and adaptable dwellings is also likely to facilitate downsizing and therefore free up larger under-occupied dwellings for larger households.

- 11.16 Overall, the policy requirement for 30% of dwellings to be built to Level 2 of Building Regulations Part M ‘access to and use of dwellings’ is a reasonable and justified basis for the provision of specialist dwellings.

Internal Space Standards

- 11.17 Where a local planning authority wishes to require an internal space standard in their Local Plan, it should do so only by reference to the Nationally Described space Standard (NDSS). Local planning authorities should provide justification through consideration of the following areas:

- Need – evidence should be provided on the size and type of dwellings currently being built in the area, to ensure the impacts of adopting space standards can be properly assessed, for example, to consider any potential impact on meeting demand for starter homes.
- Viability – the impact of adopting the space standard should be considered as part of a plan’s viability assessment, with account taken of the impact of potentially larger dwellings on land supply. Local planning authorities will also need to consider impacts on affordability where a space standard is to be adopted.
- Timing – there may need to be a reasonable transition period following adoption of a new policy on space standards to enable developers to factor the cost of space standards into future land acquisitions.

Need

- 11.18 Analysis of existing dwellings being built in Mid Devon indicates that the application of NDSS through Policy DM12 would have little impact. Based on a sample of LPR sites that have come forward in advance of the adoption of the Local Plan Review, the majority of new dwellings within major developments across Mid Devon already comply with NDSS. For example, at Hunter’s Hill, Culmstock⁵ (Policy CL2), 84.62% of the approved dwellings were compliant with the standards. Although, the 15.38% that did not comply were two bedroom dwellings. At Wellparks, Crediton⁶ (Policy CRE1), 92.43% of dwellings were compliant, with 7.57% failing to comply, which were comprised of 3 bedroom house types. In addition, a reserved matters application for 248 dwellings at Uplowman Road, Tiverton⁷ (forming part of the Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension – Policies TIV1-TIV5) was granted planning permission in August 2018. Within this scheme, 81% of the approved dwellings met the Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS) leaving 48 of the 243 dwellings that did not. 17

⁵ <https://planning.middevon.gov.uk/online-applications/caseDetails.do?caseType=Application&keyVal=OGDFSBS07T00>

⁶ <https://planning.middevon.gov.uk/online-applications/caseDetails.do?caseType=Application&keyVal=OHX4ENKS02T00>

⁷ <https://democracy.middevon.gov.uk/documents/g933/Public%20reports%20pack%2008th-Aug-2018%2014.15%20Planning%20Committee.pdf?T=10>

of those 48 miss the NDSS by only 0.6sqm however the remaining 31 units have a greater under provision of internal space, all of which are 2 or 3 bedroom homes. In contrast to the above sites however, land at Cummings Nursery⁸ (Policy CU16) was granted planning permission for 100 dwellings in 2016 and is now mostly complete. Across this development, approximately 59.18% of dwellings failed to comply with NDSS with 55.18% of these being either 2 or 3 bedroom houses.

- 11.19 Therefore, there is a clear need for the Local Plan Review to require compliance with NDSS through Policy DM12 on the basis that it would not significantly impact development coming forward but it would ensure that adequate internal space is provided, particularly within smaller house types (predominately two bedroom dwellings), where failure to comply with the standards is more commonplace. More generally, it is considered that the Council's proposed application of NDSS is consistent with the core principles of the NPPF that planning should seek to secure high-quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings.

Viability

- 11.20 On the basis of viability, the Council's viability evidence prepared in 2016 [HOU05] (reviewed in 2018 [HOU07]) confirmed that 'if previously recommended affordable housing policies and CIL rates are maintained, alongside the inclusion of optional elements of national strategy (e.g. nationally described space standards) viability is certainly no worse and would not, in our opinion, jeopardise development coming forward across the district'.

Timing

- 11.21 The Mid Devon Local Plan Review [SD01] was submitted to the Secretary of State in March 2017 and included the provision of Nationally Described Space Standards. Developers have therefore been aware for some time that the Council intends to introduce the standard for new dwellings. As such no transitional arrangements are considered necessary.
- 11.22 The Council therefore anticipates that the policy would be applied to all planning applications submitted after the policy is adopted, in the same way that any other new policies would apply.

⁸ <https://planning.middevon.gov.uk/online-applications/caseDetails.do?caseType=Application&keyVal=NPS6DZKS02T00>