

Neighbourhood Planning Regulations: Response to Consultation by Highbury group on Housing Delivery

Introduction

The Highbury Group is an independent group of specialists from public, private and independent sectors from housing, planning and related professions which prepares proposals for Government and other agencies on responses to the recession aimed at maintaining the output of housing including affordable housing (see footnote for membership and objectives).

1. Designation of Neighbourhood Areas

There is a difficulty in that in relation to unparished urban areas, where the process is initiated by a neighbourhood group, there are likely to be disputes between groups as to area boundaries. To simplify the process and avoid disputes, the local authority should consider whether to designate neighbourhood boundaries based on wards or groupings of wards. This would also avoid neighbourhood plans being developed for very small areas, and would increase the democratic structure of the process as the use of ward boundaries is the basis of representation on councils. It is recognised that there may be cases where it is appropriate for a neighbourhood planning boundary to cross administrative boundaries.

2. Recognition and operation of Neighbourhood Forums,

To increase the democratic accountability of a Forum, constitutions, membership criteria, officers and meetings of Neighbourhood Forums should be published a) through a statutory notice published by the council, a notice in a local newspaper and through the Forum's own website. There should be a requirement of a minimum of 4 public meetings a year. Forum officers should be subject to an annual election. Forum members should be required to make a formal declaration of interests, including any interests of relatives or partners.

3. Preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan.

The regulations should include a statement of the minimum content for a neighbourhood plan. This should follow the guidance given in PPS12 on local spatial planning for the minimum content of a Local Plan. This should include proposals relation to housing, employment, leisure and community facilities. A neighbourhood plan should be required to have a sound information base including an assessment of the current and projected future needs of an area, an impact assessment of the proposals on a) the neighbourhood and b) neighbouring areas, c) the delivery of policies and targets set out in any adopted Local plan or area plan. This impact must consider negative as well as positive impacts, including a statement of any

opportunity costs arising from proposals as well as of benefits. A minimum requirement should be set in the regulations for the Neighbourhood Forum to undertake consultations on a draft Plan before the plan is submitted for independent assessment.

4. Conformity with the Local Plan

The Regulations must state the policy areas on which the Neighbourhood Plan must conform with the Local Plan. This should include the strategic matters specified in PPS12 and in para 23 of the draft National Planning Policy Framework.

Where a site has been allocated for housing or another land use within an adopted core strategy, site allocations DPD or Area DPD, the Neighbourhood Plan may propose variations but any such variation is subject to the approval of the local planning authority. Where a neighbourhood plan is proposing deletion of a site which contributes to the delivery of a specific target in an adopted plan, this should only be considered where a neighbourhood plan puts forward an alternative site which will deliver as a minimum the output that would have been delivered by the site to be withdrawn.

5. Independent Examination

Arrangements for the appointment of the assessor should be transparent and the assessor should have relevant experience and have no conflict of interest. The Assessor should be required to hold a public examination with hearings based on written submissions and the right of any person making a written submission to be heard. The assessor should have the power to amend a plan or to request a Neighbourhood Forum to resubmit the Plan. Any amendments to a Plan should be in conformity with both the NPPF and with any adopted Core Strategy, or other DPD adopted by the local planning authority.

6. Disputes with the Local Planning Authority

There should be provisions for a Neighbourhood Forum or Parish Council to appeal to the Secretary of State in the case of any dispute between a Forum and the Local Planning Authority in respect of a) Recognition and Operation of a Forum; b) Preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan; c) Arrangements for Assessment of Plan; d) Extent to which Neighbourhood Plan is in general conformity; e) Arrangements for Referendum; f) Incorporation of a Neighbourhood Plan into the Local Plan.

7. Business involvement in neighbourhood plans.

There needs to be clarification as to the respective roles of businesses and residents in

business led neighbourhood plans.

Footnote

The Highbury Group is an independent group of specialists from public, private and independent sectors from housing, planning and related professions which prepares proposals for Government and other agencies on responses to the current 'credit crunch' aimed at maintaining the output of housing including affordable housing.

The group was established in 2008 as the Highbury Group on housing and the credit crunch and originally met at London Metropolitan University in Highbury Grove, Islington, London (thus the name). The group's name was changed in September 2010 and it now meets at the University of Westminster, 35 Marylebone Road, London NW1. It comprises the following core members: Duncan Bowie - University of Westminster (convener); Stephen Ashworth – SRN Denton ; Julia Atkins - London Metropolitan University; Bob Colenutt - Northampton Institute for Urban Affairs ; Kathleen Dunmore - Three Dragons ; Michael Edwards - Bartlett School of Planning, UCL; Deborah Garvie - SHELTER ; Stephen Hill - C20 Futureplanners ; Roy Hind - Bedfordshire Pilgrims HA ; Angela Housham - consultant ; Andy von Bradsky - PRP ; Seema Manchanda - L B Wandsworth; Kelvin McDonald - consultant ; Tony Manzi -University of Westminster; James Stevens - HomeBuilders Federation ; Peter Studdert – Planning consultant ; Janet Sutherland - JTP Cities; Paul Watt - Birkbeck College ; Nicholas Falk- URBED; Catriona Riddell – Planning Officers Society; Alison Bailey – consultant; Richard Donnell – Hometrack; Pete Redman – Housing Futures; Richard Simmons

The views and recommendations of the Highbury Group as set out in this and other papers are ones reached collectively through debate and reflect the balance of member views. They do not necessarily represent those of individual members or of their employer organisations. .

The key purpose of the group is to promote policies and delivery mechanisms, which

- * increase the overall supply of housing in line with need
- * ensure that the supply of both existing and new housing in all tenures is of good quality and more affordable by households on middle and lower incomes.
- * support the most effective use of both existing stock and new supply
- * ensure that housing is properly supported by accessible infrastructure, facilities and employment opportunities

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