

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: McCarthy Stone and Churchill Living response to the West Berkshire Local Plan Main Modifications consultation
Date: 28 January 2025 13:58:27
Attachments: [REDACTED]

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On behalf of my clients McCarthy Stone and Churchill Living, please find attached a representation on the West Berkshire Local Plan Main Modifications consultation.

With kind regards
Natasha

Natasha Styles
Senior Planning Associate

The Planning Bureau Limited

[REDACTED]

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Development and Housing
West Berkshire District Council
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Via email:



24th January 2025

Dear Sir / Madam

McCARTHY STONE AND CHURCHILL LIVING RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED MAIN MODIFICATIONS OF THE WEST BERKSIRE LOCAL PLAN REVIEW 2022-2039

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the consultation on the proposed main modifications of the West Berkshire Local Plan Review. McCarthy Stone (MS) and Churchill Living (CL) are independent housebuilders specialising in specialist housing for older people. Together, they are responsible for delivering approximately 90% of England's specialist owner-occupied retirement housing. Both operators are therefore well placed to provide comment on the policy barriers that may have the potential to restrict supply within the sector. This response relates specifically to MM27, MM29, MM86 and MM87.

Main Modification 27 (MM27)

We note that Main modification MM27 states that:

*All dwellings should be delivered as accessible and adaptable dwellings in accordance with Building Regulations M4(2). Around 10% of the new market housing ~~and a maximum of 5 units of the affordable sector~~ should also meet the wheelchair accessible standard M4(3) wheelchair user dwellings. **unless evidence clearly demonstrates that this would make the scheme unviable.** The Council will also support proposals for affordable wheelchair adaptable and accessible homes where evidenced by need. Affordable wheelchair adaptable and accessible homes will be negotiated on a site by site basis. The Council will take account of site-specific factors, evidence of site suitability and/or whether it would render development unviable in determining whether these requirements should apply.*

IN26, AP33 states that the 'Council to propose a modification to policy SP18 to clarify the requirement for meeting the wheelchair accessible standard M4(3) in relation to the provision of affordable housing'.

Although the proposed additional wording does seeks to clarify the requirement for meeting the wheelchair accessible standards (M4(3) in relation to the provision of affordable housing in line with IN26, we feel that deleting the words 'unless evidence clearly demonstrates that this would make the scheme unviable' at the end of sentence 2 is contrary to para 16 point b and d of the NPPF. This does not provide flexibility with respect to being able to show lack of viability, and would make schemes difficult to deliver and make the policy approach ambiguous.

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M4 (2) and M4 (3) in particular have a cost implication and may serve to reduce the number of dwellings and further reduce the viability of a scheme and flexibility therefore needs to be provided. Although a cost has been included in the Whole Plan Viability Assessment Update (Dixon Searle, 2022) of £155.50 per sq m we would question whether this has underestimated the true cost and has also not taken account of the fact that additional floorspace is needed to meet M4 (3) standards. Flexibility regarding viability associated with the M4 (3) requirement therefore needs to remain and the sentence should not be deleted.

Recommendation:

Do not delete the wording 'unless evidence clearly demonstrates that this would make the scheme unviable' at the end of sentence 2, fourth paragraph policy SP1.

MM29

It is noted that changes MM29 have been made as a result of the Inspector's action point (AP55) that states '*Council to propose modification to policy DM19 and/or reasoned justification to ensure consistency with national policy and guidance² relating to specialist housing for older people, including sheltered housing (and if necessary to clarify the relationship between policy DM19 and other policies in the Plan relating to the provision of affordable housing).*'

MM29 Fourth paragraph

It is noted that MM29 under the fourth paragraph seeks to introduce the word 'may' require rather than 'will' require, with respect to seeking an affordable housing review mechanism on schemes not providing the required level of affordable housing.

In our response to the Local Plan and through our Matter 8 hearing statement we highlighted the following:

To burden extra care and sheltered housing development which has already been found to be more challenging in terms of viability through the own Viability Assessment Update, Dixon Searle, Autumn 2022 (VIA1a) ('Viability Assessment') at the plan making stage with a review mechanism is wholly inappropriate and inflexible. This effectively means that as currently written, all specialist housing to meet the needs of older people will have to go through the delay and uncertainty of a review mechanism even though it is proven through the Council's evidence that such schemes will find it more challenging to deliver policy compliant levels of affordable housing. This will impact on the number of sites coming forward for much needed older persons housing.

Housing for older people, being specialist in nature as defined by Paragraph: 010 Reference ID: 63-010-20190626 of the PPG on Housing for Older and Disabled people, is often delivered on small brownfield sites separate to housing allocations or other development sites of around 0.5 hectares. Schemes tend to be high-density flatted developments located near town centres and recently have been around 35 to 40 units for retirement/sheltered housing and 55 units for extra care accommodation though providers presently seek higher unit numbers to be able to further spread service charges in response to the cost of living crisis. They tend to be delivered as a single phase. Sheltered housing and extra care development differ from mainstream housing and there are a number of key variables that affect viability. These include unit size, unit numbers and GIA, non-saleable communal space, empty property costs, external build cost, sales values, build costs, marketing costs and sales periods.

Once planning permission for specialist housing for older people is granted given the small size and single phase of schemes the objective is to commence the build and complete all units within one single phase. The build period usually takes around 18 months. Older persons' housing, given its specialist nature and being built in one phase, then has a much longer sales period often up to 36 Months with 50% of the scheme often not being sold until year 2 of sales, despite being completed some years earlier. Given the completion of the whole scheme on the first flat occupation, empty property costs are then charged on properties that have not yet sold, this includes costs such as council tax and service charges.

Paragraph: 009 Reference ID: 10-009-20190509 of the government guidance on Viability states the following:

'Plans should set out circumstances where review mechanisms may be appropriate, as well as clear process and terms of engagement regarding how and when viability will be reassessed over the lifetime of the development to ensure policy compliance and optimal public benefits through economic cycles. Policy compliant means development which fully complies with up to date plan policies. A decision maker can give appropriate weight to emerging policies.'

Para 004 Reference ID: 23b-004-20190901 of the PPG on Planning Obligations identifies where policies on seeking planning obligations should be set out and states:

'Policies for planning obligations should be set out in plans and examined in public. Policy requirements should be clear so that they can be accurately accounted for in the price paid for land.'

And

'It is not appropriate for plan-makers to set out new formulaic approaches to planning obligations in supplementary planning documents or supporting evidence base documents, as these would not be subject to examination.'

In order to introduce such a review mechanism, there must be a clear and specific policy basis for any review mechanism being imposed in line with PPG Viability para 009 Reference ID: 10-009-20190509. A significant number of recent Planning Appeals and case law have reinforced this point. There must therefore be a reasonable justification for imposing such a review mechanism. A review mechanism and any detail that will form part of it and sits within a planning obligation therefore needs to be considered fully and assessed through the Local Plan process. This should include the consideration of variables such as trigger points, costs, land values, how surplus is split and other definitions.

The requirement for a review mechanism at para 4 is not supported by any justification, evidence, or process where specific inputs to be included within any review mechanism that could be considered in public examination. It is currently contrary to national policy.

The Plan should therefore **include an exemption from the review mechanism for single phased developments**. This would assist the delivery of much needed older persons housing and SME's who are generally acknowledged to be struggling with viability of developments. For a large or multi-phase development which will be delivered over a long period it makes sense to check whether the scheme's viability has changed with market movements. However, for a small single

phased site the Inspectorate have repeatedly noted that review mechanisms are unnecessary. For example, under Appeal decision reference APP/C4235/W/120/3256972 dated 1st April 2021, the Inspector noted in paragraph 17 that *'as the development would almost certainly be completed in a single phase with an estimated build time of 12-18 months, it is not the sort of large multi-phased scheme where stronger arguments for a review/clawback mechanism may otherwise exist'*.

Recommendation:

We therefore recommended that in order to ensure that the plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy para 4 of policy SP19 should be amended as follows:

*If a lower provision of affordable housing is sought in exceptional circumstances, a review mechanism will **may** be required, **for multi phased schemes**, to ensure that if viability improves during the lifetime of the development project, additional affordable housing, up to the levels specified in this policy, is provided.*

We also note that the inspector's report to the Examination into the East Riding of Yorkshire Local Plan update has recently been published. This includes the introduction of more text with regard to the review mechanism into the plan and has been introduced in order to ensure the approach to review mechanisms is justified and effective. Similar wording could be introduced to the West Berkshire Local Plan.

'A review of viability will be carried out on a case by case basis based on the potential timescale of the development. A review is likely to be justified for large schemes or those with multiple phases delivered over a long time'

MM29 Ninth paragraph

We believe that reference to C2 and C3 is not necessary as it could seek to create confusion as no definition is provided as to what form of older persons housing falls into which use class. We discussed this in our Matter 8 statement in our response to question Matter 8, 8,1 (g) which we append here but do not largely repeat but do note that:

Our representation (Rep id no PS565) to the Proposed Submission West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2022-2039 (CD1) ('Proposed Submission Plan') identified that the Council's own Viability Assessment Update, Dixon Searle, Autumn 2022 (VIA1a) ('Viability Assessment') recognised the lower viability of older person's housing and advocates that sheltered housing should also be subject to flexibility in a similar way that extra-care housing is addressed. The Viability Assessment concludes at para 3.2.28 that:

*'3.2.28 Overall, on this development type it may be appropriate for the Council to consider the likely frequency of such schemes and whether that justifies a particular approach. We offer these comments bearing in mind that outcomes seem likely to vary to some extent. For the Council's consideration, **we suggest that if there were a little more flexibility built into to the draft LPR policy wording (proposed SP19 scope as understood by DSP at the time of writing) - similar to that set to be provided for extra care housing schemes (which we often see developed on a broadly similar format) - then this may assist in respect of any potential viability issues. In our view this need not dilute too much the overall expectations / LPR approach and starting point'**.*

We would add that the LHNA provides some advice as to use class as this can be a grey area between extra care and sheltered housing and whilst extra care often falls into the C2 use class order it is also common for sheltered housing to fall into the standard C3 use class. However, the use class does not take away from the need of specialist housing for older people whether that be sheltered or extra care and the plan should be supportive of all forms of specialist housing for older people, especially given the great need. We believe that referencing C2 and C3 without providing a definition could make the policy ambiguous contrary para 16 of the NPPF. We would therefore recommend that the wording 'having regard to whether it falls within Class C2 or C3' is removed from the Main Modifications so that it reads '**Proposals will therefore be considered depending on the level of care and scale of communal facilities provided.....'**

In addition, based on the response within our Matter 8 hearing statement and comment above we consider that The Council have not considered their own viability evidence within the Viability Assessment Update (VIA1a) regarding the viability of sheltered housing correctly, specifically paragraph 3.2.28. Flexibility is not provided to this typology of housing and further main modifications are needed to the Proposed Submission Plan (CD1) to ensure consistency with national policy and enable much needed older persons housing to be delivered.

Recommendation:

We therefore propose that the main modification 29 ninth paragraph is only partly introduced with the wording 'having regard to whether it falls within Class C2 or Class C3' is removed from the main modification. This would therefore then read as follows:

In relation to specialist housing for older and disabled people it is recognised that the provision of affordable housing may be particularly difficult to achieve. Proposals will therefore be considered ~~having regard to whether it falls within Class C2 or Class C3~~ depending on the level of care and scale of communal facilities provided. In such circumstances the policy will be implemented on a case-by-case basis, and the individual viability assessment will be used to demonstrate an appropriate affordable housing contribution.'

Main Modification 86 – amendments to Policy DM19 Specialised housing

MM86 has again been made in response to the inspectors Action point AP55. For clarification AP55 states '*Council to propose modification to policy DM19 and/or reasoned justification to ensure consistency with national policy and guidance² relating to specialist housing for older people, including sheltered housing (and if necessary to clarify the relationship between policy DM19 and other policies in the Plan relating to the provision of affordable housing)*'.

The second part MM86 seeks to add the wording '*Affordable housing contribution will be required in accordance with the requirements of Policy SP19: Affordable Housing depending upon whether the accommodation falls within Use Class C2 (Residential Institutions) or C3 (dwelling house) of the Use Classes Order*'. However, based on our comments to MM29 ninth paragraph we do not feel that reference to C2 and C3 should be made as no definition is provided. Instead, MM86 should read '*Affordable housing contributions will be required in accordance with the requirements of Policy SP19*'.

Main Modification 87 – amendments to Policy DM19 Specialised housing supporting text

We largely support the main modification as it clarifies the definition of housing for older people., however, to be consistent with terminology within the PPG and with our comments above, we would recommend that the word 'Specialist' is added to the beginning of new sentence 1 and that the

wording following 'merits' is deleted as the wording could potentially cause ambiguity contrary to para 16 point d of the NPPF.

Recommendation:

The new paragraph would therefore read as follows;

Specialist Housing for older people covers a wide range of needs, from sheltered housing (where residents live mainly independent lives whilst sharing some communal facilities) through to extra care housing and care homes, where a level of personal health care is typically provided. Proposals for specialist housing will be considered on their own merits. ~~having regard to whether the proposal falls within Class C2 or Class C3 of the of the Use Classes Order. This will depend upon factors such as the level of personal care offered; the type of accommodation and level of communal space and facilities. Preapplication advice should be sought if clarification is needed as to whether a development is likely to constitute a specialist care housing provision.'~~

Thank you for the opportunity for comment.

Yours faithfully

N. Styles

Natasha Styles
Senior Planning Associate

The Planning Bureau Limited

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West Berkshire Local Plan 2022-2039

Examination in Public

Hearing Statement

The Planning Bureau on behalf of

McCarthy & Stone Retirement Lifestyles Ltd.

March 2024

M8. Requirements of housing developers

8.1 Affordable housing (policy SP19)

Q8.1. Are the requirements relating to affordable housing in policy SP19 justified and consistent with national policy, and will they be effective in ensuring that the overall need for new homes is met whilst maximising the delivery of additional affordable homes. In particular:

(a) Does the viability evidence indicate that the requirements for 20%, 30% and 40% in different types of residential development are achievable?

Please see our response to question 8 (g) 'The approach to affordable housing provision in extra care housing schemes' with regard to the approach that should also be taken to the provision of sheltered housing.

(b) Is the requirement for affordable housing provision on sites of between five and nine dwellings justified having regard to NPPF 64 and the Council's response to PQ39?

For Council.

(c) The approach to site specific viability assessments and review mechanisms having regard to PPG ID:10-07 to 10-09.

Please see our response to question 8 (g) 'The approach to affordable housing provision in extra care housing schemes' with regard to the approach that should also be taken to the provision of sheltered housing.

It is noted that **para 4** of policy SP19 states: *'If a lower provision of affordable housing is sought in exceptional circumstances, a review mechanism will be required to ensure that if viability improves during the lifetime of the development project, additional affordable housing, up to the levels specified in this policy, is provided'*.

To burden extra care and sheltered housing development which has already been found to be more challenging in terms of viability through the own Viability Assessment Update, Dixon Searle, Autumn 2022 (VIA1a) ('Viability Assessment') at the plan making stage with a review mechanism is wholly inappropriate and inflexible. This effectively means that as currently written, all specialist housing to meet the needs of older people will have to go through the delay and uncertainty of a review mechanism even though it is proven through the Council's evidence that such schemes will find it more challenging to deliver policy compliant levels of affordable housing. This will impact on the number of sites coming forward for much needed older persons housing.

Housing for older people, being specialist in nature as defined by Paragraph: 010 Reference ID: 63-010-20190626 of the PPG on Housing for Older and Disabled people, is often delivered on small brownfield sites separate to housing allocations or other development sites of around 0.5 hectares. Schemes tend to be high-density flatted developments located near town centres and recently have been around 35 to 40 units for retirement/sheltered housing and 55 units for extra care accommodation though providers presently seek higher unit numbers to be able to further spread service charges in response to the cost of living crisis. They tend to be delivered as a single phase. Sheltered housing and extra care development differ from mainstream housing and there are a number of key variables that affect viability. These include unit size, unit numbers and GIA, non-saleable communal space, empty property costs, external build cost, sales values, build costs, marketing costs and sales periods.

Once planning permission for specialist housing for older people is granted given the small size and single phase of schemes the objective is to commence the build and complete all units within one

single phase. The build period usually takes around 18 months. Older person's housing, given its specialist nature and being built in one phase, then has a much longer sales period often up to 36 Months with 50% of the scheme often not being sold until year 2 of sales, despite being completed some years earlier. Given the completion of the whole scheme on the first flat occupation, empty property costs are then charged on properties that have not yet sold, this includes costs such as council tax and service charges.

Paragraph: 009 Reference ID: 10-009-20190509 of the government guidance on Viability states the following:

'Plans should set out circumstances where review mechanisms may be appropriate, as well as clear process and terms of engagement regarding how and when viability will be reassessed over the lifetime of the development to ensure policy compliance and optimal public benefits through economic cycles. Policy compliant means development which fully complies with up to date plan policies. A decision maker can give appropriate weight to emerging policies.'

Para 004 Reference ID: 23b-004-20190901 of the PPG on Planning Obligations identifies where policies on seeking planning obligations should be set out and states:

'Policies for planning obligations should be set out in plans and examined in public. Policy requirements should be clear so that they can be accurately accounted for in the price paid for land.'

And

'It is not appropriate for plan-makers to set out new formulaic approaches to planning obligations in supplementary planning documents or supporting evidence base documents, as these would not be subject to examination.'

In order to introduce such a review mechanism, there must be a clear and specific policy basis for any review mechanism being imposed in line with PPG Viability para 009 Reference ID: 10-009-20190509. A significant number of recent Planning Appeals and case law have reinforced this point. There must therefore be a reasonable justification for imposing such a review mechanism. A review mechanism and any detail that will form part of it and sits within a planning obligation therefore needs to be considered fully and assessed through the Local Plan process. This should include the consideration of variables such as trigger points, costs, land values, how surplus is split and other definitions.

The requirement for a review mechanism at para 4 is not supported by any justification, evidence, or process where specific inputs to be included within any review mechanism that could be considered in public examination. It is currently contrary to national policy.

The Plan should therefore include an exemption from the review mechanism for single phased developments. This would assist the delivery of much needed older persons housing and SME's who are generally acknowledged to be struggling with viability of developments. For a large or multi-phase development which will be delivered over a long period it makes sense to check whether the scheme's viability has changed with market movements. However, for a small single phased site the Inspectorate have repeatedly noted that review mechanisms are unnecessary. For example, under Appeal decision reference APP/C4235/W/120/3256972 dated 1st April 2021, the Inspector noted in paragraph 17 that *'as the development would almost certainly be completed in a single phase with an estimated build time of 12-18 months, it is not the sort of large multi-phased scheme where stronger arguments for a review/clawback mechanism may otherwise exist'*.

In order to ensure that the plan is sound justified, effective and consistent with national policy para 4 of policy SP19 should be amended as follows:

If a lower provision of affordable housing is sought in exceptional circumstances, a review mechanism will be required, **for multi phased schemes**, to ensure that if viability improves during the lifetime of the development project, additional affordable housing, up to the levels specified in this policy, is provided

(d) The approach to on- and off-site provision, having regard to NPPF 63.

For Council.

(e) The requirements relating to tenure split and First Homes having regard to NPPF 65 and PPG ID:70-013-20210524.

For Council.

(f) The requirement for 20% affordable private rent units in 100% build to rent schemes having regard to PPG ID:60.

For Council.

(g) The approach to affordable housing provision in extra care housing schemes (Are the requirements relating to affordable housing in policy SP19 justified and consistent with national policy, and will they be effective in ensuring that the overall need for new homes is met whilst maximising the delivery of additional affordable homes. In particular:)

Whilst the approach to extra-care housing is consistent with the plans evidence, we also consider that the same flexible approach should be applied to sheltered housing to ensure the plan is realistic, deliverable, justified and consistent with national policy.

Our representation (Rep id no PS565) to the Proposed Submission West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2022-2039 (CD1) ('Proposed Submission Plan') identified that the Council's own Viability Assessment Update, Dixon Searle, Autumn 2022 (VIA1a) ('Viability Assessment') recognised the lower viability of older person's housing and advocates that sheltered housing should also be subject to flexibility in a similar way that extra-care housing is addressed. The Viability Assessment concludes at para 3.2.28 that:

'3.2.28 Overall, on this development type it may be appropriate for the Council to consider the likely frequency of such schemes and whether that justifies a particular approach. We offer these comments bearing in mind that outcomes seem likely to vary to some extent. For the Council's consideration, we suggest that if there were a little more flexibility built into to the draft LPR policy wording (proposed SP19 scope as understood by DSP at the time of writing) - similar to that set to be provided for extra care housing schemes (which we often see developed on a broadly similar format) - then this may assist in respect of any potential viability issues. In our view this need not dilute too much the overall expectations / LPR approach and starting point.'

The Council in their response to all representations (See Consultation Statement for the Submission West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2022-2039, Consultation Statement Appendix 2 (CD4c) page 127) at the regulation 19 stage of consultation have simply responded generically with the following comment:

'All comments have been noted. The representations do not raise any issues which would prevent the Council from proceeding in accordance with the Proposed Submission version of the LPR. The Inspector may wish to make some modifications during the course of the Examination'

The Council have not fully considered representations submitted and considered if there should be any modifications put forward. As a result there is not sufficient flexibility provided by policy SP19 towards sheltered housing. The Council have not considered their own viability evidence within the Viability Assessment Update (VIA1a) regarding the viability of sheltered housing correctly, specifically paragraph 3.2.28. Flexibility is not provided to this typology of housing and main modifications are needed to the Proposed Submission Plan (CD1) to ensure consistency with national policy.

The PPG on viability (NAT2), Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 10-001-20190509 confirms that *'policy requirements should be informed by evidence of infrastructure and affordable housing need, and a proportionate assessment of viability that **takes into account all relevant policies, and local and national standards**, including the cost implications of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and section 106. Policy requirements should be clear so that they can be accurately accounted for in the price paid for land. To provide this certainty, affordable housing requirements should be expressed as a single figure rather than a range. **Different requirements may be set for different types or location of site or types of development.**'*

The PPG on Viability (NAT2) then confirms at Paragraph: 002 Reference ID: 10-002-20190509 that *'The role for viability assessment is **primarily at the plan making stage**. Viability assessment should not compromise sustainable development but should be used to ensure that policies are realistic, and that the total cumulative cost of all relevant policies will not undermine deliverability of the plan.....Policy requirements, particularly for affordable housing, should be set at a level that takes account of affordable housing and infrastructure needs and allows for the planned types of sites and development to be deliverable, **without the need for further viability assessment at the decision making stage.**'*

The Council have correctly tested sheltered / retirement housing at this plan making stage, but despite retirement /sheltered housing being found to be more marginal in terms of viability, the Council have taken the view that for such schemes developers would need to prove that sheltered housing is an exceptional circumstance in order to show that off-site contributions may be appropriate. It is likely that such schemes would also be subject to a review mechanism (see our response to 8c).

This view as well as ignoring the Council's own evidence will lead to further viability discussion at the decision-making stage as to whether or not it is appropriate for a viability assessment to be submitted and long, protracted, and probably adversarial, negotiations with council officers and commissioned consultants and resulting difficulties with decision makers expecting policy compliancy.

The Council recognise that they need to be flexible in the application of this policy due to viability concerns but the base assumption for decision makers is that sheltered housing can meet the policy requirement and is viable. This is clearly not the case for sheltered housing, as shown in the Council's own evidence, that sits in a similar viability position as extra-care housing and as such it should be addressed in the same way within Policy SP19.

We welcome that the Council have assessed the retirement / sheltered housing typology through the Viability Assessment (VIA1a) however it shows that sheltered is more marginal in terms of viability. The Council have then ignored the outcomes of the testing in the Viability Assessment (VIA1a). This

will result in protracted discussion and cost at the application stage and prevent the delivery of much needed housing for older people.

This is contrary to national policy guidance and given the advice in the PPG on viability Paragraph: 002 Reference ID: 10-002-20190509 the Council have not taken appropriate account of the Viability Assessment (VIA1a).

In order to ensure the Plan is consistent with national policy, justified and effective the following amendments should be made to Policy SP19:

Amend Policy SP19 para 10 as follows:

*In relation to extra care **and sheltered housing**, it is recognised that provision of affordable housing may be particularly difficult to achieve. In such circumstances, the policy will be implemented on a case-by-case basis, and the individual viability assessment will be used to demonstrate an appropriate affordable housing contribution’.*

Other modifications Net zero

It is also noted that policy SP19 para 11 asks that ‘Affordable homes will be built to net zero carbon standards to help meet objectives on sustainability and climate change. The affordable units will be appropriately integrated within the development’.

Whilst Council’s commitment to meeting both its and the UK Government’s target of net zero carbon emissions is commendable, it appears that the Council is going to achieve this through having mandatory carbon and climate standards from adoption of the plan that may go beyond government targets. However, it is our view that any requirement should be ‘stepped’ in line with Government targets and the proposed changes to the building regulations.

This approach is confirmed within the Ministerial Statement (statement no : Statement UIN HCWS123 available from [Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#)) released on 13th December 2023. The ministerial statement confirms that with respect to the net zero goal....

‘The improvement in standards already in force, alongside the ones which are due in 2025, demonstrates the Government’s commitment to ensuring new properties have a much lower impact on the environment in the future. In this context, the Government does not expect plan-makers to set local energy efficiency standards for buildings that go beyond current or planned buildings regulations. The proliferation of multiple, local standards by local authority area can add further costs to building new homes by adding complexity and undermining economies of scale. Any planning policies that propose local energy efficiency standards for buildings that go beyond current or planned buildings regulation should be rejected at examination if they do not have a well-reasoned and robustly costed rationale’ and ‘To be sound, local plans must be consistent with national policy – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework and other statements of national planning policy, including this one’.

Therefore Para 11 of the policy should therefore be deleted.

~~**Affordable homes will be built to net zero carbon standards to help meet objectives on sustainability and climate change. The affordable units will be appropriately integrated within the development**~~