

Bolton Metro

Environment Department

Planning Control Policy Notes

In December 1995 Bolton Council adopted its Unitary Development Plan (UDP) as the sole statutory land use plan for the whole Borough. This plan has since been reviewed. The latest plan is the Second Deposit UDP which was published in January 2001 and subject to Public Inquiry between November 2001 and December 2002. On adoption this plan will replace the 1995 UDP as the statutory plan for the Borough.

The Council has a number of Planning Control Policy Notes, of which this is one, providing detailed policy advice to supplement UDP policies and help those who wish to understand the Council's detailed planning requirements and advice. These notes will have been subject to public consultation before being finalised.

The interpretation of this advice will relate to the circumstances and particulars of a planning application which will be determined on its own merits.

In the context of changing local, regional and national planning policies it may be necessary for the Council to revise its Planning Control Policy Notes to take these changes into account.

Prospective applicants requiring clarification of the Note's contents should contact the Council's Planning Control Section.

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Introduction.

- 1.0 Where people live has a major effect on their life. If where they live is well planned, well designed and well managed, their quality of life is likely to be a great deal better.
- 1.1 The purpose of this guidance is to highlight the matters that developers need to take into consideration in applying for planning permission for new housing development in Bolton.
- 1.2 Bolton's Unitary Development Plan (December 1995) promotes the regeneration of the Borough and contains key enabling policies that seek to achieve sustainable development and regeneration objectives. Policies TH3, TH5 and TH6 provide the basis for this and are applicable to all forms of development. As a major source of development activity housing has an important role to play in achieving national and regional aims for urban renaissance and the creation of sustainable communities. There is therefore a clear link between policies TH3, TH5 and TH6, and the advice contained in this guidance.
- 1.3 Since the preparation of the adopted Unitary Development Plan the context for planning for housing has evolved through the publication of documents such as the Report of the Urban Task Force (June 1999), the Urban White Paper (November 2000), Planning Policy Guidance Note 3: Housing (March 2000) and Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (March 2003). The emphasis is on making effective use of previously developed urban land, and creating sustainable residential environments and communities in order to move towards an urban renaissance and achieve regeneration objectives. These issues have been taken forward in the review of the adopted UDP.

NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL POLICY

Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 – Housing (March 2000).

- 2.0 Planning Policy Guidance Note 3: Housing (PPG3) sets out a new approach to planning for housing. Priority is given to the development of urban brownfield sites before greenfield land. The Government is committed to maximising the re-use of previously developed land and empty properties and the conversion of non-residential buildings for housing, in order both to promote regeneration and minimise the amount of greenfield land being taken for development.
- 2.1 PPG3 requires new development of the highest quality. It looks for the best use to be made of the land we have available and for new development to be built in a sustainable way, sensitive to the needs of people and the impact it has on the environment.
- 2.2 New housing and residential environments should be well designed and should make a significant contribution to promoting urban renaissance and improving the quality of life¹.
- 2.3 Local planning authorities should develop a shared vision with their local communities of the types of residential environments they wish to see in their area and articulate this through their development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance².
- 2.4 New housing development of whatever scale should not be viewed in isolation. Considerations of design and layout must be informed by the wider context, having regard not just to any immediate neighbouring buildings, but the townscape and landscape of the wider locality. The local pattern of streets and spaces, building traditions, materials and ecology should all help to determine the character and identity of a development, recognising that new building technologies are capable of delivering acceptable built forms and may be more efficient³.

Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (March 2003) (RPG13)

- 2.5 The North West Metropolitan Area (NWMA) is to be the focus for new development and urban renaissance resources with priority being given to Liverpool and Manchester city centres and the inner city areas surrounding them. Priority is also given to development and

¹ PPG3 para 1.

² PPG3 para 55.

³ PPG3 para 56.

- complementary regeneration in the centres and inner areas of Bolton⁴.
- 2.6 The approach towards housing is one that emphasises better quality in both the housing stock and residential environments. Key aims are to maximise the use of brownfield land for new housing to achieve significantly lower levels of vacant dwellings, and to regenerate areas suffering from low demand and market failure. In providing for new dwellings, the emphasis is on 'plan, monitor and manage' rather than 'predict and provide'⁵.
- 2.7 In the past, the tendency in the North West has been to trade environmental degradation for economic prosperity, leading to numerous, critical environmental problems which detract from the Region's image and longer term prospects. Economic prosperity must be nurtured, but the Region must also protect and enhance its environmental assets. Conserving and enhancing the natural and built environment, bringing areas of dereliction back into productive use, minimising the environmental impact of future development and securing sustainable growth and more social inclusion are all key to achieving more prosperity and a much better quality of life in the North West⁶.
- 2.8 The North West contains many prosperous and very attractive 'green and leafy' neighbourhoods and areas of high-quality housing, with a very high quality of supporting facilities and leisure opportunities. Even so, there are extensive areas, especially within the older urbanised areas, which need considerable improvement and some remodelling (physically, economically and socially) in order that the bulk of residents of the North West may enjoy a better, indeed good, quality of life⁷.
- 2.9 The achievement of sustainable development in the North West involves addressing many challenges. Looming large among them is the challenge of delivering a marked improvement in the overall quality of life in some of the Region's less attractive urban areas. An urban renaissance is required. The sustainable regeneration of the Region's urban areas, in line with the Spatial Development Framework, and the creation of desirable environments in which to live, invest, work, relax and enjoy a good quality of life is a clear priority for the Region⁸.
- 2.10 To ensure a better quality of life in the region it will be necessary to embrace the notion of sustainable development. One of the key

⁴ RPG13 summary p4.

⁵ RPG13 summary p5.

⁶ RPG13 para 2.1.

⁷ RPG13 para 5.1.

⁸ RPG13 para 5.2.

elements in delivering sustainable development is promoting economy in the use of land and adopting a sequential approach to meeting development needs to ensure that priority is given to re-using existing buildings worthy of retention and suitable previously developed land. **Policy DP1** advocates a sequential approach to development which requires the re-use or conversion of empty buildings as a priority, followed by the use of other previously developed land, and then previously undeveloped land at the end of the sequence.

- 2.11 **Policy SD1** includes Bolton as an area where priority will be given to development which enhances the overall quality of life in areas where there are concentrations of social, economic and environmental problems. The development, regeneration and environmental enhancement of these urban areas must respond to and sustain people's rising aspirations for a better quality of life.
- 2.12 **Policy UR4** contains a direction that local authorities in Greater Manchester (excluding Manchester and Salford) should achieve on average at least 80% of new dwellings on previously developed land.
- 2.13 **Policy UR6** stresses the importance of reducing vacancy levels in the existing housing stock. "Most of the existing stock will continue to meet the Region's housing needs over the next twenty years, but failure to maintain and make the most effective use of these dwellings would increase the number of empty properties, lead to pressures for further land release and pose potential urban regeneration problems for the future".
- 2.14 **Policy UR7** reinforces the sequential approach by stressing the importance of reducing housing vacancies, maximising the re-use of vacant and under used land and buildings, and making allowances for conversions to residential use. The policy also sets out a housing requirement for Bolton of 450 dwellings per annum to the year 2016.

Local Planning Policy.

- 3.0 Bolton's Unitary Development Plan (December 1995) seeks to promote urban regeneration and sustainable development.

- 3.1 **Policy TH3** states that:

Development will be concentrated in the existing urban areas or where there is an allocation in the Plan, but will not normally be permitted on important areas of open space within urban areas.

- 3.2 **Policy TH5** states that:

The Council will encourage and promote development that contributes to urban regeneration.

3.3 **Policy TH6** states that:

The Council will seek to ensure that development is sustainable and that natural resources are conserved and protected.

3.4 **Policy CE4** supports regeneration and renewal through the reclamation of derelict land by the public and private sectors, including the redevelopment of cleared sites.

3.5 **Policy H2** is based on the principles of urban concentration and regeneration. It aims for the efficient use of resources and infrastructure, and promotes the re-use of derelict or neglected land.

H2. The Council will have regard to all of the following in determining applications for housing development on sites which are not identified in this plan:

- (a) the overall requirement for housing;**
- (b) giving priority to developing sites in the urban area; and**
- (c) the availability of infrastructure.**

3.6 The following policies are contained in Bolton's Second Deposit Unitary Development Plan and reflect the policies contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 – Housing and Regional Planning Guidance for the North West. It is acknowledged that these policies have not yet been adopted following completion of the development plan process, and may be subject to change. They are, however, being used for development control purposes and are of relevance in the determination of proposals for housing development.

3.7 **Policies H1 and H2** set out the level of housing provision for the Borough reflecting the requirement in Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (RPG). The Council will monitor and manage the housing supply to maintain a completion rate in line with RPG.

3.8 **Policy H3** sets out a criteria based approach to the determination of planning applications for housing where the emphasis is on sustainable development, urban regeneration, accessibility and social inclusion.

H3. The Council will permit housing development within the urban area provided that the following criteria are met:

- (i) the site is accessible by public transport, cycling and walking, and is well located in relation to places of work and services;
- (ii) the development would help to provide a wider choice and better mix of housing types, sizes and tenures;
- (iii) the existing and potential infrastructure has the capacity to absorb the development; and
- (iv) if the proposed site has not been developed previously it can be clearly demonstrated that previously developed sites elsewhere in the Borough are so physically and environmentally constrained that they cannot be developed for housing.

3.9 **Policy H4** deals with the provision of affordable housing.

3.10 **Policy H5** deals with the density of new development.

3.11 **Policy H6** relates specifically to proposals for gypsy and travelling showpeople sites.

3.12 The policies referred to above are particularly relevant in determining applications for housing development. However, proposals will be determined with reference to the adopted Unitary Development Plan and the Second Deposit Plans in their entirety and therefore a range of policies will be applicable to any proposal.

THE DETERMINATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS.

- 4.0 This section sets out some of the key factors to be taken into account when considering planning applications for housing development. These relate to a number of development plan policies. Throughout the text questions are posed which are intended to guide applicants and officers as to the aspects of development that should be fully considered in formulating a proposal, and the information that may be required as part of an application. In all cases the Council will require the submission of a comprehensive supporting statement which takes account of all the matters referred to below.

Accessibility.

- 4.1 The Government places particular emphasis on the importance of integrating decisions on planning and transport in order to reduce the need to travel by car. The location and accessibility of development sites to jobs, shops and services by modes other than the car, and the potential for improving such accessibility is a key factor in determining the sustainability of a proposal. Applicants will need to demonstrate that they have fully taken into account the needs of pedestrians and cyclists. Where possible developers should provide linkages between existing and proposed pedestrian routes and public transport facilities. These routes should be as safe and convenient as possible to help encourage walking and the use of public transport as opposed to the car.
- 4.2 **Q.** Has adequate analysis been carried out of the site's relationship to public transport and local facilities and has the potential for improved access provision been fully investigated?
- 4.3 **Q.** Has a movement network been prepared and has this informed the design of the development, for example, in terms of density, car parking provision and pedestrian routes and entrances? (a movement network should identify how people will move through an area, and how the layout can best be arranged to link to local facilities, maximise choice with priority given to pedestrians as well as creating safe and attractive routes and spaces) (see Appendix 1).
- 4.4 **Q.** Does the development accommodate important pedestrian desire lines through the site?
- 4.5 **Q.** Is the development based on a high quality network of streets and spaces catering for all residents and visitors, or does it give primacy to the movement of vehicles? (a good development will integrate buildings and spaces within the wider context and not just be a response to the rigid geometry of road design) (see Appendix 1).

- 4.6 **Q.** Will the development be well connected to existing routes? (see Appendix 1).
- 4.7 **Q.** Has the layout of development been designed to slow traffic by utilising the design of buildings and spaces? (see Appendix 1)

Creating mixed communities.

- 4.8 The Government believes that it is important to help create mixed and inclusive communities, which offer a choice of housing and lifestyle. A good mix of housing types and sizes is important in creating a basis for a balanced community. Much recent housing has provided a limited range of tenure choices, often focusing on a narrow market segment or particular housing need.
- 4.9 Policy H1/3 of the adopted plan and Second Deposit Plan policy H4 provide the basis for negotiation on the provision of affordable housing as defined in Circular 6/98. The Council will seek to enter into legal agreements with developers to provide affordable housing on site, or secure a commuted sum to provide affordable housing elsewhere. Applicants should contact the Council at an early stage to establish local housing needs and demands, and how they can best be met.
- 4.10 **Q.** Does the development provide an appropriate range of housing opportunities in terms of dwelling types, sizes, affordability and accessibility?
- 4.11 **Q.** Is the affordable housing successfully integrated into the scheme?

Physical and social infrastructure.

- 4.12 The capacity of infrastructure to absorb further development is an important consideration in determining applications.
- 4.13 The applicant will need to demonstrate how any impacts of the proposed development on, for example, the road network, highway capacity, sewerage and drainage capacity will be overcome. Development should be separately sewered with surface water passing to soakaway or watercourse with permission of the Environment Agency. The availability of social infrastructure such as schools will also be considered.
- 4.14 In order to fully assess and appraise the impacts a development is likely to have, the Council will formally consult with a range of internal departments and external organisations. The Council may also, at its discretion, seek specialist expertise and advice from external

organisations and individuals on a case-by-case basis. In some cases commuted sums (secured by legal agreement) may be required to fund improvements to, or enhancement of, local infrastructure where this is required in relation to the development proposed.

- 4.15 **Q.** What impact is the development likely to have on physical and social infrastructure and how are potential deficiencies and problems to be overcome?

The Sequential Approach to the Development of Land.

- 4.16 Both PPG3 and Regional Planning Guidance for the North West advocate a sequential approach to the development of land for housing. RPG13 policy DP1 requires the re-use or conversion of empty buildings as a priority, followed by the use of other previously developed land, and then previously undeveloped land at the end of the sequence.
- 4.17 There are a number of different types of land which fall under the definition of 'previously developed', which can provide opportunities for housing development. A number of these opportunities are listed below:
- Sub-division of existing housing
 - Flats over shops
 - Empty homes
 - Conversion of commercial buildings
 - Previously developed vacant and derelict land and buildings (non-housing)
 - Redevelopment of car parks
- 4.18 The need to achieve urban regeneration and the application of the principles of sustainable development suggest that it is appropriate to seek to focus on the re-use and conversion of existing buildings and the redevelopment of derelict sites as a priority.
- 4.19 If sustainable development and regeneration objectives are to be realised it is important that in those parts of the Borough where there are significant numbers of empty properties and vacant previously developed land this land is used effectively in contributing to new housing provision.
- 4.20 The Council has looked critically at the sequence for development set out in RPG13 and considers it appropriate, in applying policies DP1, SD1, and UR6 at the local level, to further define the sequence in order to promote urban renaissance and seek to bring forward those sites in most pressing need of regeneration. The effective use of existing buildings and infrastructure within urban areas and the re-use or

conversion of empty buildings is the highest priority. The next source of land in the sequence is then other previously developed land of which there are many types. The Council will be selective in seeking to resist the development of sites that do not require, or contribute to, regeneration in order to promote the redevelopment of sites that do.

4.21 In some parts of the Borough older housing areas suffer from the symptoms of social and economic decline, and exhibit signs of housing market failure. This is often evidenced by long term vacant stock, disrepair and dereliction caused by lack of investment, and anti-social behaviour. A report published in February 2001 by the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies⁹ modelled 'areas at risk' from changing demand (including parts of Bolton) and identified a number of significant factors at the neighbourhood level. These are:

- a predominance of one tenure;
- monolithic provision (e.g. thousands of two or three bed houses in one locality);
- concentrations of a particular dwelling type (e.g. back of pavement terraces)
- economic inactivity and unemployment;
- concentrations of elderly people dependent on benefits;
- age and obsolescence particularly of the terraced stock where issues of crime, vandalism and lack of defensible space prevail;
- derelict land and buildings, and generally poor physical environment.

Areas displaying such characteristics will be the focus for the development of sustainable communities and comprehensive regeneration activity, and may present significant opportunities for new housing development. In these areas a programme involving the selective demolition of existing housing may be an appropriate approach. In locations where there is no such need for regeneration the Council will seek to resist the demolition of non-derelict dwellings. However, proposals for the one-to-one replacement of existing dwellings will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

4.22 Criterion (iv) of Second Deposit policy H3 places the emphasis for new housing development on the re-use of buildings and other previously developed land. Where a greenfield site is proposed, applicants are required to demonstrate that there is a lack of brownfield opportunities available. The Council will have regard to its annual Housing Land Availability Study in assessing the need to release greenfield sites for development. Whilst there is a general presumption against greenfield development, permission may be granted in exceptional circumstances

⁹ Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (Feb 2001) 'Changing Housing Markets and Urban Regeneration in the M62 Corridor'.

where previously developed sites perform so poorly in relation to the criteria set out in paragraph 31 of PPG3 as to preclude their use for housing.

- 4.23 The Council's resistance to greenfield development is reinforced by RPG policy UR4, which requires Bolton to achieve on average at least 80% recycling of land for housing.

Design, character and landscape.

- 4.24 Many of the places which we now think of as being pleasantly distinctive grew naturally in response to local circumstances. Where such distinctiveness is ignored, new development may reflect only the standard practices of the building industry, or the latest fashions among design professionals. Development that responds sensitively to the site and its setting, by contrast, is likely to create a place that is valued and pleasing to the eye. Applicants should refer particularly to adopted UDP policy CE1/2, Second Deposit Plan policies D2 and D3, and 'By Design' in this regard¹⁰.
- 4.25 The landscape characteristics, building traditions, materials and spatial organisation of an area contribute to its sense of identity and special character. The existing layout of an area reflects its history, functions and connections with adjoining areas. These can contribute to the interest and richness of new development, and to its potential to accommodate further changes in the future.
- 4.26 Local building forms, landscape features and details contribute to the distinctive qualities of a place. These can be successfully interpreted in new development without necessarily restricting the scope of the designer. Standard solutions are rarely acceptable, as they are unlikely to create a distinctive identity or make good use of a particular site.

Responding to local character.

- 4.27 Development should reinforce or enhance the positive aspects of a locality. In areas lacking particular form or character there may be considerable scope and opportunity for design innovation (see Appendix 1).
- 4.28 Local building forms sometimes include distinct housing types, boundary treatments, building lines, roof slopes, window types and gardens. The response to such forms should be at the appropriate scale (see Appendix 1).

¹⁰ Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment. (2000) By Design – urban design on the planning system: towards better practice. Thomas Telford Publishing.

- 4.29 The character of townscape depends on the spatial organisation of buildings, its shape (linear, formal or informal), the grain of buildings and spaces, and building types and styles. The grouping of buildings and spaces contribute to a harmonious whole, through relating to the scale of their neighbours and creating a continuous urban form. The richness and sense of quality seen in the best environments is the consequence of careful consideration of the detailed design of the buildings and the spaces and interfaces between them (see Appendix 1).
- 4.30 The rhythm of buildings and spaces is often important in creating the character of an area. The replacement of small plots with large buildings straddling several plots needs great care if it is not to disrupt character. This is especially important in older, more established residential areas. Larger developments are more easily incorporated in newer areas where the contrast in size is less marked. In low density residential areas the subdivision of sites which results in the loss of landscape character can be especially harmful to the distinctive characteristics of that area and the development response should be designed to avoid significant loss of landscape character and openness (see Appendix 1).
- 4.31 **Q.** How does the development respond to its context in terms of the spatial arrangement of buildings and spaces, building forms, setbacks, use of materials and established urban grain?
- 4.32 **Q.** Have the intrinsic landscape characteristics of the site been identified in a landscape appraisal for the scheme and important features retained and enhanced in the layout of the development?
- 4.33 **Q.** Does the proposal maintain important views of prominent buildings or landscape features?

Density and space.

- 4.34 Second Deposit Plan policy H5 requires that developments should be laid out at a minimum net site density of 30 dwellings per hectare, with higher densities applied on sites around existing centres and close to public transport nodes. This reflects the advice contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 – Housing, paragraphs 57 and 58.
- 4.35 In some cases it may not be appropriate to require that the minimum density is applied in order to achieve other planning objectives that need to be given priority. The retention of protected trees, for example, may reduce the developable area of a site and thus reduce the density of development that can be achieved. In conservation areas the need to preserve the special characteristics of the area will often require specific design solutions.

- 4.36 The lack of distinctiveness and quality which characterises so many modern housing schemes can often be attributed to the design of layout forms and the application of standard housing types in a manner which fails to consider the relationships between internal and external spaces.
- 4.37 New housing schemes should respond to their context. In areas with distinctive character the design solution should be sensitive to this character enhancing the environment rather than detracting from it.
- 4.38 **Q.** How does the density and layout of the scheme relate to the locality of the site?
- 4.39 **Q.** Is the density of the scheme, and the consequent development forms, justified in relation to its context and planning objectives relevant to the site?

DETAILED ASPECTS OF LAYOUT AND DESIGN.

5.0 This guidance has set out the broad principles and factors to be considered in the determination of proposals for housing development. Other matters of detail will be considered with reference to Unitary Development Plan policies and other material considerations. In addition to this guidance the Council has a number of adopted Planning Control Policy Notes which provide supplementary guidance on detailed aspects of developments. Applicants should refer to the following notes where applicable:

- Car and Cycle Parking Standards
- Space Around Dwellings
- Trees: Protection and Planting in New Developments
- The Provision for Children's Play Within New Residential Developments
- Planning Out Crime
- Conversion of Dwellings into Self-contained Flats and Bedsits
- Nature Conservation
- Conservation Areas
- Listed Buildings
- Highways Considerations
- Public Art

As new Government guidance emerges, or in response to changing local circumstances it may be necessary to revise this guidance, and other supplementary guidance, in order to take these changes into account.