



CHOBHAM PARISH COUNCIL

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30th September 2020

Changes to the current planning system consultation
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government,
3rd Floor, South East Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

By email: TechnicalPlanningConsultation@communities.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam

Changes to the current planning system consultation

Chobham Parish Council has reviewed the above consultation and its representation is set out below. In addition to the responses to the prescribed questions which follow, the Council wishes to make the following additional points:

1. There appears to be little or no concern given to Green Belts, countryside, environmental issues, diversity of local areas, the implications of Covid-19, building quality and sustainability in these proposals.
2. Many of the sections of the document do not have corresponding questions, which gives the impression of discouraging feedback on these sections.
3. A question-led consultation without any opportunity or invitation for free comments is overly prescriptive. Respondents should not be restricted when making representation.
4. The Parish Council is against any policy reforms which remove the opportunity for local communities to have their say. This goes against the principles of Localism and undermines local democracy.
5. The proposals appear to disproportionately benefit developers, while weakening planning controls and overlooking the real needs of communities.

The standard method for assessing housing numbers in strategic plans

Q1: Do you agree that planning practice guidance should be amended to specify that the appropriate baseline for the standard method is whichever is the higher of the

level of 0.5% of housing stock in each local authority area OR the latest household projections averaged over a 10-year period?

No – the baseline should be determined by local demographic and not at national level, taking into account area constraints (e.g. Green Belt, Special Protection Areas, environmental concerns). Government policy should also increase Councils' powers to find ways to bring more existing empty homes into use.

Q2: In the stock element of the baseline, do you agree that 0.5% of existing stock for the standard method is appropriate? If not, please explain why.

No – 0.5% is an arbitrary baseline percentage and any increase should be determined by local demographic as above.

Q3: Do you agree that using the workplace-based median house price to median earnings ratio from the most recent year for which data is available to adjust the standard method's baseline is appropriate? If not, please explain why.

No comment.

Q4: Do you agree that incorporating an adjustment for the change of affordability over 10 years is a positive way to look at whether affordability has improved? If not, please explain why.

No comment.

Q5: Do you agree that affordability is given an appropriate weighting within the standard method? If not, please explain why.

"Affordability" may be a misnomer in areas (particularly in the saturated South East) where even discounted housing is not genuinely affordable.

Do you agree that authorities should be planning having regard to their revised standard method need figure, from the publication date of the revised guidance, with the exception of:

Q6: Authorities which are already at the second stage of the strategic plan consultation process (Regulation 19), which should be given 6 months to submit their plan to the Planning Inspectorate for examination?

Q7: Authorities close to publishing their second stage consultation (Regulation 19), which should be given 3 months from the publication date of the revised guidance to publish their Regulation 19 plan, and a further 6 months to submit their plan to the Planning Inspectorate?

If not, please explain why. Are there particular circumstances which need to be catered for?

There should be appropriate transition arrangements and flexibility for authorities at the later stages of Local Plans, but also any authority that can show it has completed significant work on its plan using the existing methodology. In order to avoid authorities chasing "moving targets" at the public's expense, the housing numbers should be made clear at an early stage.

Authorities should also be required to publish their revised need figures as soon as practically possible, regardless of the stage of consultation, together with a broad distribution breakdown of the additional dwellings across the administrative area. It should be noted that even local authorities classified as "urban" may include rural areas within their administrative boundary, and the particular needs and character of rural communities should not be overlooked by broad brushing.

Consideration should be given to avoiding the potential for large housing developments being permitted, remote from existing services and communities, in order to "meet the

numbers” if transition arrangements are too onerous on authorities with a large increase in need figures. There is particular concern around the lifting of the previous “cap”, which could see some authorities’ numbers increase exponentially.

Delivering first homes

Q8: The Government is proposing policy compliant planning applications will deliver a minimum of 25% of onsite affordable housing as First Homes, and a minimum of 25% of offsite contributions towards First Homes where appropriate. Which do you think is the most appropriate option for the remaining 75% of affordable housing secured through developer contributions? Please provide reasons and / or evidence for your views (if possible):

- i) Prioritising the replacement of affordable home ownership tenures, and delivering rental tenures in the ratio set out in the local plan policy.***
- ii) Negotiation between a local authority and developer.***
- iii) Other (please specify)***

25%+ of onsite affordable homes may not be required as “first homes” depending on local needs. Priorities should be clearly set and adhered to at local level with ad-hoc negotiations avoided to ensure fairness and transparency across the board.

Cash and land contributions should remain in the immediate local area of the development which gave rise to the contributions.

All affordable housing options should comply with tenure-blind design standards and be clearly set out at application stage.

The Council re-iterates that in Surrey even discounted market housing is unlikely to be within the reach of a large number of potential first-time purchasers so the scheme may not result in the desired consequences.

With regards to current exemptions from delivery of affordable home ownership products:

Q9: Should the existing exemptions from the requirement for affordable home ownership products (e.g. for build to rent) also apply to this First Homes requirement?

No comment.

Q10: Are any existing exemptions not required? If not, please set out which exemptions and why.

No comment.

Q11: Are any other exemptions needed? If so, please provide reasons and /or evidence for your views.

Exemptions may be considered at local level if they are solely to address a genuine local need, and not to nominally ensure viability of a project. The criteria for exemptions must be set out in policy and not by means of negotiation.

Q12: Do you agree with the proposed approach to transitional arrangements set out above?

No comment.

Q13: Do you agree with the proposed approach to different levels of discount?

Agreed, subject to greater clarity/guidance on when an increased discount would be appropriate to ensure fairness.

Q14: Do you agree with the approach of allowing a small proportion of market housing on First Homes exception sites, in order to ensure site viability?

It is felt that the inclusion of market housing may have the potential to lead to an erosion of settlement boundaries, create a merging of villages and settlements, and undermine the case for rural exception sites. It is felt to be particularly inappropriate in a rural and/or village setting. Nevertheless, if a small proportion of market housing is allowed, the basis for considering the viability of the site should be subject to independent scrutiny and the amount of market housing kept to the minimum required in order to deliver the site.

All market housing on First Homes exception sites should comply with tenure-blind design standards and be clearly identified at application stage for consultation purposes.

Q15: Do you agree with the removal of the site size thresholds set out in the National Planning Policy Framework?

No – it is felt that removing this control has the potential to give rise to larger scale development which may not respect the value and character of existing settings. The term “proportionate” in this context is vague and must be properly quantified at local level if the threshold is to be removed.

Q16: Do you agree that the First Homes exception sites policy should not apply in designated rural areas?

The needs of rural communities (designated or non-designated) must be considered separately and should not be undermined by other types of exception sites which may be more attractive to developers. The strengthening of policy for rural exception sites to ensure they are built only to meet proven local need (not cascaded to wider need) would be welcomed.

There are concerns about the proposed approach of introducing an exemption from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for First Homes. The levy is critical to funding the necessary infrastructure to support development, particularly where other types of funding for infrastructure may not be available.

Supporting small and medium-sized developers

Q17: Do you agree with the proposed approach to raise the small sites threshold for a time-limited period? (see question 18 for comments on level of threshold)

No – it is believed the raising of the small sites threshold would have a negative impact on the delivery of affordable housing.

Any raising of the small sites threshold should additionally not apply in the Green Belt and perhaps may be explored as a measure to encourage development in the most appropriate areas (e.g. urban regeneration, brownfield sites, unused homes).

Q18: What is the appropriate level of small sites threshold?

- iv) Up to 40 homes***
- v) Up to 50 homes***
- vi) Other (please specify)***

While the Council does not agree with the approach (as above), it would seek a low threshold if the policy is to be brought forward (40 homes or fewer).

Q19: Do you agree with the proposed approach to the site size threshold?

No – the approach appears to take no account of needs and constraints at a local level and would encourage sizeable housing developments with no means of funding the required infrastructure.

Q20: Do you agree with linking the time-limited period to economic recovery and raising the threshold for an initial period of 18 months?

Yes, despite the concerns above, an initial temporary approach would be preferable to a permanent one.

Q21: Do you agree with the proposed approach to minimising threshold effects?

Yes, the risk of developers bringing forward sites in phases to avoid contributions must be avoided and any “missing” contributions recouped. The potential for developers deliberately under-utilising land for market housing to fall below the threshold where affordable housing could have been provided should also be considered.

Q22: Do you agree with the Government’s proposed approach to setting thresholds in rural areas?

Yes – the needs of rural areas (designated or otherwise) must be considered separately. Appropriate distinctions should be made to ensure that the special character and quality of living in villages and countryside is not eroded or lost.

Q23: Are there any other ways in which the Government can support SME builders to deliver new homes during the economic recovery period?

No comment.

Extension of the Permission in Principle consent regime

The Council has no comments to make for this section due to the unlikelihood of it having any impact within Chobham parish.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Q35: In light of the proposals set out in this consultation, are there any direct or indirect impacts in terms of eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations on people who share characteristics protected under the Public Sector Equality Duty?

If so, please specify the proposal and explain the impact. If there is an impact – are there any actions which the department could take to mitigate that impact?

The potential for undermining the delivery of rural exception sites and other types of affordable housing may disproportionately impact some protected groups who are more likely to require access to social housing.

If Chobham Parish Council can provide any further information or clarification on any of the points in the above response please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully



Ms C L Cooper
Planning Administrator