

**Examination of the Spelthorne Core Strategy
and Policies DPD**

Topic Paper on Matter 5

**Housing Size, Type and Density
(Policies HO4 and HO5)**

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Housing size, type and density

Key Issue: Do Policies HO4 and HO5 accord with national and regional policy, are they appropriate to the Borough and are they soundly-based and fully justified?

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This topic paper begins by briefly referring to national and regional planning policy. It goes on to identify the evidence base on which the policies are based. The paper then responds to the questions put by the Inspector.

2. Background

- 2.1 PPS 3 'Housing' requires (para 9) that a wide choice of housing is provided to ensure everyone has the opportunity of a decent home. Local Authorities are required to plan for a mix of housing on the basis of the different types of households that are likely to require housing over the plan period (para 21). This should take account of household types (para 22). Authorities are required to make effective use of land (para 40) by using it efficiently (para 45) and densities should reflect this. A minimum national density of 30 dph is set. Careful attention to design is required where the chosen local strategy involves intensification of the existing urban fabric (para 49). The density of existing development should not dictate that of new housing by stifling change or requiring replication of existing style or form (para 50).
- 2.2 The draft South East Plan requires in its Policy H5 a regional average density of 40 dph over the plan period. This has been set to encourage high densities so as to make good use of available land. The Panel's report on the plan supports the 40 dph regional target (paras 8.37 and 8.38 page 122) as representing "the right degree of challenge at least in the short-term".

3. Intentions of the Plan

- 3.1 Policy HO4 has been drafted in the context of a significant proportion of the existing housing stock in Spelthorne being 3 bedroom and larger, but the growth in household numbers arising from small households. The additional housing requirement of 3,320 dwellings amount only to around an 8% increase in overall stock and therefore present only a limited flexibility to bring about significant change in the overall composition of the stock. In assessing the need for smaller dwellings, account has been taken of the impact of extensions to residential property in increasing the average size of the stock.
- 3.2 Evidence on the requirement for smaller dwellings is provided in 'Housing Market Assessment – Jan 2007' paras 5.16 to 5.26. Evidence on household sizes is provided in 'Spelthorne Population Projections – April 2007' Appendix 2 shows a growth in number of one person households from 2006 to 2026 from 12,472 to 16,625. The Housing Needs Survey by D. Couttie provides further evidence of the type of housing needed in the future. Table 9.2 (page 66) shows existing household needs overall require 12% one bed and 49% as two bed. Table 9-6 shows concealed households need some 25% one bed and over 50% two bed. The existing stock of one and two bed dwellings is

respectively only 11.4% and 25.2% (Housing Market Assessment Table 2 page 9).

- 3.3 The purpose of HO5 is to reflect the guidance in the South East Plan to make more efficient use of land and the position in Spelthorne where available land is limited and efficiency is of particular importance. The Policy sets out general guidance for particular types of area, emphasises the need for good design and compliance with Policy EN1 and recognises that higher densities can be acceptable. Para 6.28 recognises that higher densities still can be achieved where smaller dwellings are involved.

4. Response to Inspector's Questions

(i) What is the justification for the 80% figure in Policy HO4? Is it unreasonably onerous, and is it consistent with PPS 3? Is it too inflexible?

- 4.1 PPS 3 requires authorities to plan for a mix of housing on the basis of the different households likely to require housing over the plan period. The composition of the new build element must have regard to the existing dwelling mix, how that will change over the plan period and also changes in the composition of households. The evidence referred to above, and in the supporting documents (particularly Table 3 in the Housing Market Assessment), shows that even with an 80% one and two bed dwelling requirement, once extensions to existing dwellings have been accounted for (including for 2 bedroomed properties), the net gain of those dwellings amounts to around 31 units at an average new build of 151 (or around 43 at a new build average of 166). This could amount to 860 dwellings over 20 years although some 400 would need to be extra-care units resulting in a net gain of ordinary one and two bed dwellings of just some 460 of the total new build of 3,320 overall. In the context of the projected growth of around 4,150 in one person households and the evidence from the housing needs assessment, the net contributions that can be achieved from an 80% requirement is very modest and even at this level potentially fail to provide the mix of housing required and PPS 3 encourages authorities to provide.
- 4.2 Statistically there is a limit on how far the requirement can focus only as one and two bedroom dwellings due to the slightly greater demand for family housing to meet the social needs (and comes from the remaining 20%) and the need to set a sensible threshold of four dwellings to avoid inappropriate requirements on very small developments.
- 4.3 The policy allows scope for some variation in the case of social housing, in that the 20% for 3 bedroomed or larger dwellings could be primarily social housing units if required. On the above basis the requirement is not considered onerous. In fact there is a strong market for even more smaller dwellings reflecting the need identified. Securing an appropriate dwelling mix overall in the Borough is consistent with PPS 3. In the circumstances, given the qualifications regarding the need for some larger social units, it is not considered too inflexible.

(ii) Should the DPD make provision for housing for the elderly in addition to the 'extra care' units provided for?

- 4.4 The Council has based its approach to providing accommodation for the elderly on the document 'North Area Extra Care Strategy' (CD/SCC/206) prepared by Surrey County Council's Adult and Community Care Team and Supporting People Team, the PCT, the local NHS Trust and District Councils.
- 4.5 The work undertaken by the group has identified that the additional accommodation requirements need to be in the form of what is termed 'extra-care' provision. In simple terms this is independent accommodation like sheltered housing but with the 'care' provision similar to residential care homes. It has a wide range in terms of the circumstances it seeks to cover. It is a relatively new concept of care provision.
- 4.6 The group has not identified a need to develop other forms of elderly care accommodation although the plan gives positive support to all forms of housing. Policy SP2 in the second paragraph refers to housing of types to meet identified needs including vulnerable groups. Policy HO4 (6) refers to encouraging provision to meet the needs of older people including extra care. The form of wording intentionally does not limit provision to extra-care only.
- 4.7 Whilst extra-care is seen as the key form of additional provision supplementing existing sheltered housing, residential care homes and nursing homes, such other provision is positively supported where it is needed.

(iii) How in practice will the policy achieve delivery of the number of "extra care" units aimed at?

- 4.8 Policy HO4 seeks to deliver extra care units through encouragement and negotiation on individual suitable sites. In practice this involves the Council's Housing Strategy Officer who works within the Planning and Housing Strategy team, and also staff within the County Council Adults and Community Care Services team. The approach has so far delivered one completed scheme of 40 units at Beechwood Avenue, Sunbury, and two more currently proposed at the Benwell Centre site Sunbury (39 units), and part of the Stanwell New Start Scheme (40). This will have secured some 119 units within the first four years or so of the plan which, on a pro-rata basis, is slightly ahead of an 'even' rate of provision. Experience so far suggests the approach to delivery is effective.

(iv) Are the density levels proposed in Policy HO5 appropriate and justified by robust and credible evidence?

- 4.9 The density levels are intended to reflect the guidance in PPS 3 and the South East Plan which set out respectively site minimum and average minimum density levels of 30dph and 40dph respectively. This helps to ensure an efficient use of urban land. The specific ranges are those used in the draft PPS3. Whilst they are not repeated in the final version there is no evidence to show that they were not appropriate for application.
- 4.10 Within Policy HO5 they are qualified by reference also to the design policy EN1 and scope for higher densities where that policy can be complied with. The supporting text explains that the ranges may be acceptably exceeded where smaller units are involved. A minimum density of 35dph is specified to reflect the particular circumstances of housing need in Spelthorne and indeed

for much of the London Fringe sub-region where there is a particular need to ensure an efficient use of land due to the presumption of retaining the Green Belt.

- 4.11 Table 13 of the Annual Monitoring Report 2007 shows the Council's progress in achieving higher density and consequent efficient use of land. The average overall density of development completed in 2006-7 was 64 dph.

(v) Should there be an upper limit to housing density in Staines Town Centre? If not, why not?

- 4.12 Staines Town Centre is identified as a secondary regional centre in Policy TC2 of the draft South East Plan. It is the major town centre in Spelthorne and an important retail and employment centre. The scale of existing development and potential scale of new development in terms of site coverage and height means that higher density residential development will be appropriate. Residential development may be part of mixed use schemes in many instances. The appropriate density will be the product of the particular circumstances of sites and the applications of design policy EN1 in a town centre context.

- 4.13 The Policy HO5 identifies a minimum density but this is likely to be significantly exceeded in most cases in the town centre and setting a density ceiling which ignores site and design considerations would risk arbitrarily constraining the efficient use of land. For this reason a numerical upper limit is considered inappropriate.

(vi) What is the justification for Policy HO5's requirements that housing developments should not normally be below 35 dwellings per hectare?

- 4.14 PPS 3 requires an efficient use of land. Given the strategy of the plan to focus all new development within the urban area, it is particularly important to ensure that efficiency is achieved. The background document Population and Social characteristics of Spelthorne – Feb 2005 shows at Table 21 that Spelthorne has a higher proportion of semi-detached, terraced dwellings and flats in comparison to most of its immediate neighbours and in comparison to Surrey as a whole and in many respects more than the South East. The product of smaller dwellings and a more compact residential area overall means Spelthorne has a higher density on average. A higher minimum density than PPS 3 reflects local circumstances. The Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East (CD/REG/306) requires in its Policy H5 an overall regional target of 40 dwellings per hectare over the Plan period. This is different from setting a minimum figure but indicates the intention to increase densities generally.

(vii) Is Policy HO5 sufficiently flexible? Would it be more appropriate for density and scale to be considered on a site by site basis?

- 4.15 The policy sets a clear direction on density and the efficient use of land that is required. This is achieved through density figures which provide a numerical measure to guide developers.
- 4.16 The appropriate density and scale for a given site is of course a judgement derived from the assessment of the site and the Council's design policies.

However, without clear direction on density, there is a risk of sites not achieving their full potential and contribution to the Borough's housing requirements, and in turn the sub-regional and regional needs. It is essential a measure of density is given and this is reflected in the measures endorsed by the Panel in the South East Plan of a minimum average figure.