



Planning Policy
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Manor Square
Solihull
B91 3YA

Date: 11 March 2019

Our Ref: M15/0715-253

By email only:
psp@solihull.gov.uk

Dear Sir / Madam

RE: SOLIHULL LOCAL PLAN REVIEW – DRAFT LOCAL PLAN SUPPLEMENTARY CONSULTATION

We represent **Rentplus UK Ltd**, an innovative company providing **affordable rent to buy housing** for hard-working people aspiring to home ownership with an accessible route to achieve their dream through the rent - save - own model, renting at an affordable rent and a gifted 10% deposit upon purchase.

Rent to buy offers a unique, affordable route to home ownership for households who do not otherwise expect to own, due in large part to the difficulties in saving for a deposit, or overcoming barriers such as existing debt which may also exclude them from the private rented sector. The Rentplus model provides such households with access to affordable rented housing, with rent set at the lower of 80% market rate (affordable rent) or LHA (including any service charge). The rental period provides families with security of tenure, management and maintenance by a local Housing Association, and support with saving for a deposit. Rentplus also provides a gifted 10% deposit at the point of sale to assist with purchase.

It is the many households for whom the ability to save for a deposit is the main roadblock to home ownership who would benefit from access to affordable rent to buy - diversifying the local housing offer helps these households access housing that meets their needs, without recourse to public subsidy. This helps to reduce numbers on the local housing waiting list whilst also helping those already in affordable housing but who can afford to move on through rent to buy, freeing up those homes for others in need.

The delivery of rent to buy housing is not at the expense of other affordable tenures; as many of those accessing rent to buy come from existing social or affordable rented homes, these are also freed up for other households in need, while rent to buy can be delivered as part of a wider affordable housing tenure mix to deliver genuinely mixed and balanced communities. This will be an important part of Solihull's growth.

The Rentplus development schemes delivered across England to date are now reaching the first five year mark at which the first quarter of households are expected to purchase. Rentplus, together with its partner Housing Associations, works closely with householders to plan for purchase, and at present at least 90% of those who are expected to purchase at year 5 are 'on track' to do so. The way in which individual schemes are targeted according to local priorities, with each scheme delivered with a bespoke local lettings policy agreed between the partner housing association and local authority, allowing (for example) priority to be given to local people already in social or affordable rented housing, particular bands on the housing register, or key workers.

The case studies shown on the Rentplus website (<https://rentplus-uk.com/about/case-studies>) highlight examples where 50% of residents have come from social rented housing, or living with family. The ability to tailor priorities locally gives considerable flexibility to the local authority and housing associations in targeting households in particular need, and this is always determined alongside clear affordability checks to ensure households can afford to purchase at years 5, 10, 15 or 20.

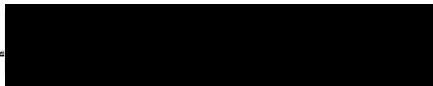
We note the Council's questions regarding the potential to seek affordable housing by reference not to the number of units, but to the square meterage or habitable rooms/floorspace. These approaches are not generally supported due to the inherent difficulties in designing for the policy, which causes developers to calculate the appropriate level of delivery by reference to optimal market floorspace instead of baseline numbers. This also causes difficulties in decision making and monitoring of delivery, and therefore in setting appropriate responses to underdelivery of affordable housing.

The Council is well aware of the difficulties in designing development to balance the competing needs of the three strands of sustainability – and in ensuring scheme viability and deliverability. Whilst design should not be a 'numbers game', requiring the balance of market and affordable housing to be calculated by reference to such detailed calculations as floorspace will inevitably result in a reduction in the quality of placemaking, at a time when this needs to be improved to deliver social and economic well-being.

We recommend that the Council look to diversify the market and affordable housing 'offer' by setting policies that detail general house type, size and mix expectations with sufficient flexibility to respond to needs over the Plan's lifetime. This should include the full range of affordable housing tenures to maximise the number of affordable homes that can be delivered across Solihull over the Plan period, and to ensure a diversity of needs are met, including for those who cannot afford to buy without a period of affordable rent.

We would like to be notified of further consultations on the Local Plan, when it is submitted for examination, and all stages thereafter; please notify **Tetlow King Planning** as agents of **Rentplus** by email only to consultation@tetlow-king.co.uk.

Yours faithfully

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Meghan Rossiter.

MEGHAN ROSSITER BSc (Hons.) MSc MRTPI
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
For and On Behalf Of
TETLOW KING PLANNING

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