

15.03.1040

Solihull Local Plan Team
Planning Policy
Council House
Manor Square
Solihull
B91 3QB



14.03.2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

Solihull Local Plan Review – Draft Local Plan Supplementary Consultation

This letter includes the formal comments from the National Custom & Self Build Association (NaCSBA) to Solihull Local Plan Review Consultation.

NaCSBA's mission is to substantially increase the number of people able to build or commission their own home and they believe that opportunities should arise for prospective self and custom-builders through the Local Plan process.

Custom & Self-Build

Current self-build policy in England has evolved over the last 4-5 years. Brandon Lewis MP, in his role as Minister of State for Housing and Planning made the following comments in a letter sent to all Local Planning Authorities in March 2015:

"We all need to do more to address the lack of suitable plots of land being made available, and we believe that local planning authorities have a vital role to play.."

The letter went on to say:

"National planning policy and guidance is clear that local planning authorities should identify and plan for local demand for custom and self build housing. Planning inspectors will want to see evidence that consideration of demand for custom and self build housing has been taken into account when they examine Local Plans. Failure to provide sufficient evidence may lead to plans being found unsound."

This communiqué from the Department of Communities and Local Government (now MHCLG) could not be any more explicit in its requirements for LPAs to plan for the needs of those that wish to build their own home. However, at the time, there were limited references within the NPPF and there was no adopted policy or legislation to support this.

The Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Bill, however, received Royal Assent on 26 March 2015. The Bill is now an Act of Parliament. This Bill seeks to establish a register of prospective custom builders who are seeking a suitable serviced plot of land and requires LPAs to keep an up to date register of people within the district that wish to build their own home. It is acknowledged that Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) have complied with the requirement to keep a register of individuals and associations who wish to acquire a suitable plot of land. It is not apparent whether SMBC have been able to offer plots to anyone on this register.

The above comments from the Planning Minister and the *Right to Build* legislation clearly demonstrate how the government intended LPAs to respond to the requirements set out in the NPPF when drawing up new Local Plans. LPAs should take a proactive position to providing land and should undertake rigorous and effective evidence gathering to measure custom and self-build need in their districts. And LPAs that do not do so can expect their Local Plans to be found unsound at examination.

The Housing and Planning Act 2016 conferred on LPAs the responsibility to:

“Give suitable development permission in respect of enough serviced plots of land to meet the demand of for self-build and custom house building in the authority’s area...”

The Act established that evidence of such demand would be provided by registers which LPAs are required to keep in accordance with the 2015 Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Act.

The Housing White Paper entitles ‘Fixing Our Broken Housing Market’ published in February 2017 stated that:

“the Government wants to support the growth of custom built homes. These enable people to choose the design and layout of their home, while a developer finds the site, secures planning permission and builds the property.”

The paper further went on to acknowledge that:

“The main barriers to custom built homes are access to land and finance.”

Finally, the paper demonstrated the importance with which the Government treats provision of self-build opportunities by councils by stating that:

“If we do not believe local authorities are taking sufficient action to promote opportunities for custom-building and self-building, we will consider taking further action including possible changes to legislation.”

Paragraph 61 of the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the requirement for Local Planning Authorities (LPA) to plan for a wide choice of high quality homes to support sustainable communities and provide greater opportunities for home ownership. It goes on to state (underlining is our emphasis):

“The size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policies (including, but not limited to, those who require affordable housing, families with children, older people, students, people with disabilities, service families, travellers, people who rent their homes and people wishing to commission or build their own homes).”

Furthermore, the NPPF makes clear how small and medium sized sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirement of an area. The identification and promotion of small and medium sites as per the NPPF paragraph 61 can be promoted in order to support the needs of custom and self-builders.

It is notable that the Draft Local Plan Supplementary Consultation does not make a single reference to custom or self-build or those wishing to build their own homes.

Green Belt

The Consultation document asks for views on the washed over green belt and whether villages washed over in the green belt should be removed from it.

NaCSBA consider there is a strong opportunity to use the green belt designation to promote the types of homes needed within the borough. For example, the green belt designation could remain but the emerging plan could contain a policy which states that on infill sites and within villages in the green belt starter homes, affordable homes and self/custom build homes will be supported.

This will prevent unrestricted urban sprawl as per the purpose of the green belt whilst allowing modest, small-scale developments of the type for which there is greatest need.

An appropriate example of such a policy can be found in the adopted Coventry City Local Plan in which **Policy H3 – Provision of New Housing**, which states that

“opportunities to provide self-build homes and starter homes will be considered acceptable as part of limited infill within existing ribbon developments within the Green Belt where it is demonstrated that they do not have an adverse impact upon the openness and integrity of the wider Green Belt.”

Such a policy would respect the fact that sites within villages washed over by the green belt do not significantly contribute to urban sprawl and as such can be appropriate, but provides a mechanism to ensure that the LPA retains significant control over what is built to ensure that the local community benefit from the development of such sites.

The relevant question within the consultation document is:

34 *Should the washed over Green Belt status of these settlements/areas be removed, and if so what should the new boundaries be? If not why do you think the washed over status of the settlement should remain?*

Washed over areas of the green belt should not be removed however a policy should be introduced which states that ‘Custom, self-build, starter and affordable homes will be considered acceptable as part of limited infill within existing ribbon developments within the Green Belt where it is demonstrated that they do not have an adverse impact upon the openness and integrity of the wider Green Belt’.

Recommendations

NaCSBA would like to make the following recommendations:

1. SMBC should publish the level of demand for self-build as demonstrated through the self-build register. This demand should be used to inform the emerging Local Plan Review to ensure that sufficient plots are provided over the life of the plan.
Ascertain a target for self-build provision for the borough.
2. In order to meet the needs of those that wish to build their own home and to deliver point 1, reference should be made to those wishing to build their own home and a policy

should be developed that makes clear that the provision of custom and self-build opportunities is strongly encouraged.

A policy promoting self-build must be included in the emerging plan in order to comply with the NPPF, the Housing & Planning Act and the Right to Build.

3. The council should retain washed over villages within the green belt but allow custom and self-build as well as starter homes and affordable homes to be built on infill sites and sites within washed over villages.

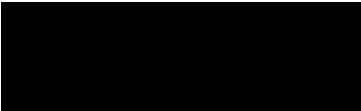
A policy should be introduced which states that 'Custom, self-build, starter and affordable homes will be considered acceptable as part of limited infill within existing ribbon developments within the Green Belt where it is demonstrated that they do not have an adverse impact upon the openness and integrity of the wider Green Belt'.

4. Paragraph 119 of the NPPF states that 'Local planning authorities, and other plan-making bodies, should take a proactive role in identifying and helping to bring forward land that may be suitable for meeting development needs'. As such it is apparent that the reviewed Solihull Local Plan should include small to medium sized sites allocated specifically for the purposes of Custom/self-build.

Allocate sites within the plan to meet the needs of those that wish to build their own home.

Please contact me if you require any additional information.

Kind regards,



Sally Tagg Technical Representative On behalf of NaCSBA

(Managing Director of Foxley Tagg Planning)

This representation has been prepared on behalf of NaCSBA and its supporters, who are listed overleaf and comprise business and in the custom- and self-build sector.

