

Liverpool City Council STRATEGIC HOUSING LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENT APPENDIX 5



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Stage 3(b) Density Assumptions

August 2009

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1 POLICY GUIDANCE

- 1.1 Paragraph 46 of PPS3 states that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) should develop housing density policies having regard to:
- the spatial vision and strategy for housing development in their area, including the level of housing demand and need and the availability of suitable land in the area;
 - the current and future level and capacity of infrastructure, services and facilities such as public and private amenity space, in particular green and open space;
 - the desirability of using land efficiently and reducing, and adapting to, the impacts of climate change;
 - the current and future levels of accessibility, particularly public transport accessibility;
 - the characteristics of the area, including the current and proposed mix of uses; and
 - the desirability of achieving high quality, well-designed housing.
- 1.2 Para 47 of PPS3 states that while LPAs may wish to set out a range of densities across the plan area, 30 dwellings per hectare (dph) net should be taken as a national indicative minimum to guide policy development and decision-making, until local density policies are in place. Densities below this minimum will need to be justified according to such factors as those listed above.
- 1.3 In the 'Proposed Changes to the Draft RSS' report (March 2008), the Secretary of State recommended that the RSS for the North West should include a policy on housing density, specifying a minimum of 30 dph net and encouraging higher densities in urban areas and locations with good public transport accessibility. However, these proposals were not incorporated, and the final version of the RSS (September 2008) contains no specific figures or recommendations regarding density of development in the region. The only reference to housing densities in the approved RSS is provided at the end of paragraph 7.19, which states that it is *'...important to build housing at appropriate densities taking account of local circumstances.'*
- 1.4 In the absence of specific guidance in the approved RSS, in Section 2 of this note we consider the densities on schemes in Liverpool which have been granted planning permission in recent years, in order to establish appropriate proxy densities for housing and flats across the city.

2 ANALYSIS OF DENSITY TRENDS, AND ASSUMPTIONS FOR THE SHLAA

Analysis of Density Trends

- 2.1 In order to identify proxy densities for application in the SHLAA, the Council analysed densities on sites with planning permission for housing at April 2008. The main findings from the Council's analysis are summarised below, along with our associated observations.

Housing Schemes

- 2.2 The average density for housing schemes according to the Council's analysis¹ is 29 dph, which appears to be a little low. On closer inspection of the Council's data, however, it transpires that the site area for some of the sites includes various non-residential uses. Excluding the non-residential uses from the site area would therefore result in a higher net density².
- 2.3 Schemes in the inner areas are a little more dense - of up to around 45 dph - presumably because they are dominated to a greater degree by lower value houses. Nevertheless, in order not to over-complicate the SHLAA process, the Council favoured the use of a single density assumption across both inner and outer areas. The Council therefore concluded that a proxy density of 35 dph for schemes consisting entirely of houses should be used in the SHLAA.
- 2.4 At present and for the foreseeable future, the housebuilding industry is reverting to traditional family housing schemes, a tried and tested product which housebuilders know will sell. Apartments and three storey town houses are very much out of favour and are not likely to be included on schemes in the next 3-5 years. The only exception to this rule may be town houses on sites commanding views of open water/open space. Even then, these town houses will only represent a small proportion of the overall dwellings on a site. The general consensus is that those who have had a 3-storey town house will be unlikely to have one again. Most housebuilders are therefore working to approximately 14.5 dpa or 36 dph and are turning their backs on non-standard products. Accordingly, it was agreed that a proxy density of 36 dph net for housing schemes would be appropriate in the Liverpool SHLAA.

Flatted Schemes

City Centre

- 2.5 The average density of all planning permission schemes in the City Centre at April 2008 (including schemes on sites below 0.4ha) was 167 dpa. The Council therefore concluded that a proxy density for flatted schemes in City Centre Locations of 165 dpa could be used for the SHLAA. In our assessment this is reasonable.

Other locations

- 2.6 The density of flatted schemes clearly varies significantly, depending on the number of storeys which, in turn, is dependent partly on location - waterfront and City Centre fringe sites tend to have higher densities than other locations. Schemes granted permission in recent years will be dominated by 1 and 2 bed flats. On the basis that future policy will likely promote bigger flats in general (the Council will certainly be

¹ The Council's analysis of housing schemes included only sites located outside of the City Centre and with an area of 0.4 ha or greater.

² The site area figures which the Council used for its analysis were taken directly from the planning applications. Because of time constraints the Council did not calculate which parts of the permission sites might be used for non-residential uses.

looking for fewer 1 bed flats), densities of flatted schemes can be expected to be lower than those experienced recently.

- 2.7 On the above basis the Council considered that a reasonable average proxy density for flatted schemes outside of the City Centre is 100 dph. We agree.

Mixed schemes (houses and flats)

- 2.8 Having excluded a very dense scheme at Minto Street, the average density for approved mixed schemes is 65 dpa. However, as with flatted schemes, current permissions will be overly dominated by 1 and 2 bed flats, which is not consistent with likely future policy aspirations. Furthermore, given that flatted components which are very high (in physical terms), or very high density, would not be practical on a mixed site, the average density of a mixed scheme would probably be closer to that for the average housing scheme than for the average flatted scheme. Accordingly, the Council concluded that 60 dph might be a reasonable assumption for mixed housing/flatted schemes.
- 2.9 Although apartments are hugely over-supplied in Liverpool, on some sites small numbers of apartments will be useful, acting as a barrier to other adjoining neighbouring uses. On mixed housing/flatted schemes, developers/housebuilders are now reluctant to provide more than 20 per cent of total units as apartments. This equates to 21.5 dpa, or 53 dph; this is based on the flatted components being no more than 3-storey dwellings in height, which remains economically viable. Buildings with a greater number of storeys incur higher build costs, due to fire regulations, lift requirements, extra parking etc and are less viable.
- 2.10 Accordingly, we have used a proxy density of 53 dph net for mixed housing/flatted schemes in the SHLAA.

Assumptions for the SHLAA

- 2.11 In carrying out its initial survey, the Council identified the most appropriate housing type for the majority of study sites - either houses, flats or a mix of both. The distribution of these reflects an aspiration (as set out in the Community Strategy) to move away from high density apartment development and a preference for traditional two-storey housing development at medium densities in most areas of the city, with apartment schemes largely restricted to City Centre areas. We have reviewed these housing types, and in most cases agree with the Council's assessments.
- 2.12 The work undertaken by the Council has therefore given us a useful steer in arriving at appropriate development density assumptions. Where houses have been identified as the most appropriate development type, we have assumed an average development density of 36 dph; this level strikes a balance between providing attractive and marketable housing and maintaining appropriate urban densities. In practice, the vast majority of sites are likely to fall into this band.
- 2.13 Where flats have been identified as the most appropriate housing type, we have assumed a development density of 165 dph in the City Centre and 100 dph elsewhere.
- 2.14 Where a mix of houses and flats has been identified as most appropriate, we have assumed a development density of 53 dph. This is lower than the point midway between expected yields for houses and flats, for the reasons given above.
- 2.15 Where no appropriate housing type has been identified, we have taken a default position of assuming houses (at a density of 36 dph) throughout most of the City and flats (at a density of 165 dph) in the City Centre. This represents a cautious approach and is consistent with the City Council's aspiration to encourage the development of family homes across the City.
- 2.16 Our sites database, which will be provided to the Council upon completion of the study, allows other densities to be applied in order to model possible alternative outcomes.

For the purposes of our analysis, we have applied the densities specified in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1 Density Rates for the Liverpool SHLAA

Site Location Characteristics	Density (dph net)
Identified as appropriate for flats and located in Liverpool City Centre	165
Identified as appropriate for flats and located outside of the City Centre	100
Identified as appropriate for a mix of houses and flats	53
Identified as appropriate for houses	36

- 2.17 It should be emphasised that in many cases we have specific information with regard to likely yield figures (for example, from masterplans and Call for Sites submissions). Where this is the case we have reviewed the number of dwellings proposed for the development and - provided they seem reasonable in the context of the site's situation and location - used these as the expected site yields, rather than applying the standard density rates described above.

