

North East Derbyshire District Council

Cabinet

2 July 2014

Building For Life 12

Report No: PRK/18/14/AWC of Councillor P R Kerry, Portfolio Holder with Responsibility for Economy, Finance and Regeneration (jointly with Cllr N Foster)

This report is public

Purpose of the Report

- To provide a progress report on NEDDC's Building For Life design policy and to recommend its continuation.

1 Report Details

- 1.1 In January 2011, a report was presented to Cabinet recommending the adoption of the Building for Life 20 (BfL) residential design standard, and for it to be used to appraise all major residential schemes (10 or more units).
- 1.2 Following adoption of BfL as policy, a total 8 NEDDC officers became fully accredited Building for Life assessors, bringing the number of accredited assessors working at the authority to 9 drawn from officers across three disciplines – Housing, Planning and Economic Development.
- 1.3 Since 2011, a total of 43 schemes have been appraised or reappraised. The adopted policy set a minimum score of 14 from a possible 20 criteria, with schemes scoring less being recommended for refusal.
- 1.4 During the first year of its implementation, schemes appraised using BfL20 achieved an average score of 5, which was disappointing. However, there was a positive trend during the second year and part of the third year, with the average score reaching 9, and, although this still fell short of the expected standard, it was an encouraging development.
- 1.5 It is important to note that the average scores stated in paragraph 1.4 were those achieved when the applications were first received and with limited dialogue between BfL appraisers and the applicants. A total of 14 applications which had achieved scores below the threshold of 14 were reappraised following discussions with the applicants and a revised layout submitted. These 14 reappraised schemes scored an average of 13.5, bringing them into line with the Council's aspirations.

- 1.6 The upward trend in scores achieved over the first two to three years, and the significant improvements in the quality of development proposals following discussions with applicants, have emerged for a number of reasons. Since NEDDC launched its Urban Design Academy (UDA) in March 2010, developers, architects and other development professionals have become more aware of the authority's commitment to improve the quality and standard of development across the district.
- 1.7 The UDA initiative was the start of a process that continued with the adoption of BfL20 as the authority's tool for appraising development proposals, which reinforced NEDDC's rising aspirations. This external awareness of the Council's design agenda was apparent from the increasing number of applications received where the applicant had carried out their own BfL assessment. This self-scoring often resulted in an inflated score compared to the one reached by an NEDDC officer, however it does demonstrate that the BfL questions were being considered, and at least partially addressed, by applicants. Finally, it is believed that the training and development of officers and Members as a result of the UDA initiative has increased the confidence of those whose role it is to challenge poor design, and, to be comfortable using the language and methods to negotiate improvements.
- 1.8 The use of BfL over a number of years has allowed a reassessment of its use as a design tool, and has resulted in a reduction of questions from 20 to 12, with the original developers of the Building for Life tool officially relaunching it as BfL12 in 2012. NEDDC officers continued to use BfL20 but monitored the roll-out and practitioners' views of BfL12. It is now considered an appropriate time to move from using BfL20 to BfL12.
- 1.9 Within BfL12 there are now three categories to consider (previously four) as follows:
- Integrating into the neighbourhood
 - Creating a place
 - Street and home

The assessment method is based on a traffic light system, as opposed to a score out of 20, with a number of the original 20 questions being removed, and some combined. BfL12 is also seen more as a collaborative approach and as a negotiation aid. An applicant with a proposal for a residential scheme with 10 or more units will be expected to:

- Secure as many 'Greens' as possible – the more greens, the better the development will be;
 - Minimise the number of 'Ambers' – one or more ambers indicate the need to rethink whether these elements can be improved. If not, it should be justified why the scheme cannot meet the higher standard expected of a green;
 - Avoid 'Reds' altogether – this is a warning that an aspect of the development is weak and needs to be reconsidered.
- 1.10 The move from using BfL20 to BfL12 will also complement the recently adopted Successful Places residential design guide, which is based on Building for Life principles.

- 1.11 If the recommendation to adopt BfL12 is accepted, it is proposed that Stefan Kruzowski one of the Building for Life 12 authors is invited to facilitate a workshop for Members and officers to explain the rationale for moving to BfL12 and how to use the revised appraisal tool. It is also proposed that NEDDC will host an event to publicise the authority's adoption of BfL12, and its ongoing ambition to improve the quality of housing developments in the district, and invite developers, house builders planning agents and other external contacts who are active in the development sector.
- 1.12 Finally, to promote the potential marketing and financial benefits of following the BfL12 design principles, the original developers of BfL have recently launched a new initiative aimed at housebuilders, called Built for Life. This permits developments that reach a required standard to display the 'Built for Life' kite mark on site and in their marketing literature, demonstrating to potential purchasers that the scheme has been independently appraised and has achieved a high standard of design and quality, and has a better chance of becoming a successful and functioning community. It is proposed that the Built for Life web-site is promoted to proposers of housing schemes in North East Derbyshire.

2 Conclusions and Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 It is concluded that NEDDC adopt BfL12 to replace BfL20. This will strengthen the authority's credibility and provide continuity when negotiating with developers, and will help ensure that the quality of schemes coming forward is maintained and further improved.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 That NEDDC adopt BfL12 as its design appraisal method to replace the currently adopted BfL20, and that it is applied to all residential developments proposing 10 or more units, which is in line with current policy.
- 3.2 That the Built for Life marketing initiative is publicised to housing developers active in the district where possible and appropriate.
- 3.3 That a launch event is held to publicise the authority's adoption of BfL12.

4 Decision Information

Is the decision a Key Decision? (A Key Decision is one which results in income or expenditure to the Council of £50,000 or more or which has a significant impact on two or more District wards)	No
District Wards Affected	N/A
Links to Corporate Plan priorities or Policy Framework	Improve the standard of housing

5 Document Information

Appendix No	Title
N/A	N/A
Background Papers (These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Cabinet (NEDDC) or Executive (BDC) you must provide copies of the background papers)	
N/A	
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