

BASINGSTOKE AND DEANE DEVELOPERS FORUM
Monday 24 September 2018

KEY THEMES FROM WORKSHOPS

Session 1: Accelerating Housing Delivery

1. Shared agenda to accelerate delivery

- Need to develop an environment of mutual trust and a culture change which focuses on delivery. This requires more honesty from all parties including developers.
- Delivery is not just a planning issue. It is a corporate priority and needs full council support. This support needs to extend to encompass initiatives such as attracting new developers to the borough (through marketing) through to the approach to working with Registered Providers.
- This agenda to improve delivery needs to also extend to consultees who can be the cause of delays.
- Also need to ensure Councillors are working effectively and understand delivery agenda

2. Co-ordinated approach at the strategic level

Infrastructure

- Joined up thinking at a strategic level is required. A specific forum could be set up to plan for sites around Basingstoke town which includes infrastructure providers, statutory and other bodies. This would encourage buy-in from stakeholders at the strategic level.
- Obtaining planning permission is often not a key factor in delays but rather it is due to complexities in securing infrastructure delivery
- There were mixed views on how easy or difficult it can be to coordinate the delivery of services with statutory undertakers but agreement that large infrastructure requirements delay housing delivery and reduce quality.
Specific points included:
 - Water companies need to be involved at an the early stages
 - Parties should work together to provide superfast broadband as part of all new developments from the outset.
 - Delivery appears to be easier when both planning and infrastructure delivery are dealt with by the same unitary authority. Dealing with two-tier authorities can be more difficult. Communication between County Council and Borough Council could be improved
 - Delivery would be assisted by developers being able to work with more security on bringing services and infrastructure forward especially between the grant of outline planning permission and the submission of reserved matters. There was a suggestion that this could be assisted by a separate reserved matters approval for services and infrastructure.
 - Delivery would be assisted by any public funding for infrastructure and services being released more quickly.

Addressing other strategic issues

- Conversations which informed the allocation of land through the Local Plan should have already determined the way forward and involved all relevant stakeholders. It shouldn't be necessary to revisit at planning application.
- A proactive approach to planning applications from stakeholders, officers and Councillors is needed, creating a 'hit team' (targeted delivery team) for relevant sites focused on overcoming any barriers and delivering them quickly.

3. Positive policy framework and joined up approach between Development Management and Planning Policy

- Development briefs are beneficial as they help to move sites forward with policy and officer support. Flexibility is needed within these development briefs.
- There was a suggestion that development briefs could be prepared for all sizes of development rather than just strategic sites.
- More involvement of policy team in the Development Management process would be beneficial as whilst development briefs help there needs to be more continuity of officers as earlier proactive work can be lost as new officers don't know the history of the site and relevant issues.
- Forward planning of adjacent sites to ensure planned delivery of community, health and education facilities and services is needed.

4. Pre-planning discussions

- Positive that council encourages consultation at an early stage and officers and councillors are generally pro-active.
- From the outset it is important to ensure clarity of process and set out clear expectations for seeking planning approval
- Any potential issues need to be addressed early in the process
- Effective early engagement required through two way communication between applicant, local planning authority and statutory consultees to ensure a pro-active approach is taken when developing proposals. Earlier feedback from statutory consultees would assist. This could include on-site meetings with the planning authority and/or councillors at pre-application stage.
- Early engagement and involvement of ward members at pre-planning stage to understand their views suggested. Linked to this, parish and ward councillors should have access to expertise and training to be able to assess development proposals in their areas and to facilitate and enable engagement and dialogue.
- Use of tailored exhibitions to promote positive messages – developers should properly engage the community and capture the positives of development. It is also helpful to feed these back to councillors.
- Planning performance agreements could be used at pre-application stage.

5. Ongoing engagement with key stakeholders

- Issues which were understood to be addressed at allocation stage or outline stage, in some cases, can cause problems at reserved matters stage when they are raised by consultees again.
- Some planning application consultees appear to be overly influential in slowing down the determination of an application.
- The relationship with the County Council can be a problem, particularly the education and highways departments.

- The Development Management case officers could take more of a managerial role in coordinating consultees and addressing problems raised by them. More joined up thinking is required and more of a focus is required on the objective of determining the application expeditiously.

6. Determination of planning applications

Faster determination of planning applications

- Housing allocations in the adopted Local Plan should be fast tracked through suitable processes and the pro-active approach from officers and councillors at Local Plan stage should continue through to DM process.
- The planning application process could be streamlined/fast-tracked in some circumstances for minor development or certain types of development.

Planning performance agreements

- Use of mutual planning performance agreements that include what is expected of developers throughout the process, including delivery could be put in place. These should be outside the S106 process.
- Planning performance agreements could be made binding.

Joined up approach within council

- There is a need for better communication between different council officers and departments within the council when determining planning applications.
- Officers may be positive at the planning policy stage but this support isn't carried through when an application is submitted. There needs to be better communication between planning policy and development management and more continuity of officers, councillors and stakeholders.

Involvement of Councillors

- Briefings to DC Committee councillors by developers, in advance of committee, would help. These briefings should be short, pick up key points and include the benefits of schemes, as evidenced through any consultations.
- More proactive engagement with Councillors throughout the planning process from both developers and officers is needed.

7. Availability of land

- Trying to reduce land values can lead to landowners hesitating to sell.
- It can be difficult to encourage landowners to accept lower land values if this would help delivery or quality given that any developer who did this would be out-bid by another developer.
- Developers recognise that local planning authorities can't control when a landowner decides to sell their site.
- Public sector land plays an important role in the overall supply. The Greater London Authority drive the release of public land for development which helps delivery.

8. Ensuring an effective mix of sites have been identified and are delivering at anticipated rate

- Whilst it is recognised that strategic sites provide for planned development there is a danger of oversaturating the market when they are relied upon.

- As strategic sites take longer to deliver it is important to have a broader range of sites of varying sizes in various locations which are supported by the council.
- There are opportunities for diversification in the town centre and to deliver homes in and around the smaller settlements alongside strategic sites.
- The Local Plan should be driving delivery of a diversity of supply through allocation of sites of different sizes and by supporting a wide variety of housing products.
- If strategic sites are going to deliver there needs to be a change to the traditional model of delivery as this model won't work on that scale.

9. Potential barriers to early commencement after planning permission is granted

Legal agreements

- Negotiations relating to legal agreements (S278, S106) can take too long and cause significant delays
- This could be mitigated by bringing forward negotiations relating to the legal agreements earlier in the process so that agreement has already been reached before the resolution to grant planning permission.

Discharge of conditions and design codes

- Development management process runs smoothly until the final hurdle when technical details are discussed which then leads to long delays and applicants unable to meet expectations. Open and early dialogue needed to address this at an earlier stage.
- Delays can occur post-permission with the discharge of conditions. There is a view that pre-commencement conditions and conditions involving highway matters, can be too demanding or unnecessary.
- Experience elsewhere indicates that Design Codes can slow down delivery – flexibility is needed.

Delivery vehicles and procurement

- Procurement can significantly delay sites coming forward. Council's should look for opportunities to assist to fast track this process and consider the different models available.
- Vehicles for delivery could be led by the Council

10. Potential barriers to continued on-site delivery

Property market

- Stable regular property market is needed as economic uncertainty impacts on delivery. A continuing market provides confidence.
- Importance of predicting the market to understand what is needed both locally and regionally.

Access to materials, skilled workforce and supply chain:

Materials

- There is a need to stimulate the economy locally and nationally to ensure the raw materials are available.
- Material shortages could be addressed and delivery accelerated by modular and on-site constructions. However, research and testing are still ongoing and there is still a

perception associated with modular homes relating to their longevity and concerns that it may be more challenging to get a mortgage. These products haven't been tested and choice and innovation doesn't exist yet. There can also be difficulties transporting the modules.

Labour force:

- Upskilling of the labour market is needed, it is also likely to be impacted by Brexit
- We should be using local colleges to ensure a local skilled labour force
- Encouraging school pupils to go to college to learn these building skills will be key.
- Labour shortages could be addressed through collaboration with the Army and re-training of servicemen returning to the U.K.

Examples of initiatives to address skills and materials shortages include:

- Berkeley Homes have constructed their own modular factory in Kent which helps with off-site construction.
- Taylor Wimpey have a strong apprentice scheme.
- The Home Builders Federation (HBF) are promoting the Home Building Skills Partnership.

11. Accelerating on-site delivery

Multiple outlets and diversity of housing offer/tenure

- Multiple outlets delivering multiple tenures will accelerate delivery as multi-channel delivery helps with market capacity issues
- Diversification of tenures (including public rented sector) and innovation in the housing offer needed
- Home buying assistance and schemes such as Help-to-Buy will continue to be important and the extra care market will be key.
- Facilitation by the Council or Homes England would be beneficial.
- Flexibility of planning policies relating to affordable housing and tenure are needed.

Pre-fabricated homes

- Modular and pre-fabricated homes will help to accelerate delivery and address skills and materials shortages (as set out above). Further testing to develop products and improve attractiveness through choice and innovation are ongoing.

Session 2: Ensuring Quality

1. Embed high quality agenda

- Quality needs to feature more highly in the planning process.
- High quality agenda should be central to everything the council does.
- This leads to an environment of confidence where high quality is expected as standard.
- Effective partnership working and open dialogue between partners is required to achieve this.

2. Clarity of expectations in relation to quality

- Clarity is needed in relation to what quality means and the expectations when it comes to quality. What does 'good' look like?
- Councillors should familiarise themselves with local developments so they can articulate their expectations in relation to design.

3. Holistic approach to design and quality

- A shift in emphasis is required to ensure that all aspects of place making, street-scene and public realm as a whole are addressed rather than there being a main focus on the design of individual houses.
- Taking a holistic approach ensures that a whole range of aspects are picked up including the environment, highways, technological change, lifestyle and home occupiers needs.
- Essential to consider the development as a whole informed by proper masterplanning that guides development.
- Use of design codes encouraged.
- More successful schemes have a clearer vision of how a good townscape could be built up by looking at the scheme as a whole and not being content with replicating house types or streets. There needs to be a move away from simple, standard house types to more bespoke designs for houses.

4. Use of policy tools to improve design

- More specific policies regarding local character would be beneficial
- Design and site guidance helps to achieve high quality. The use of supplementary planning documents, development briefs and design codes are beneficial to achieving quality.
- There does however need to be a level of flexibility in the application of policy requirements.

5. Monitoring of design and build quality

- Monitoring design and build quality is important through Building for Life assessments or other mechanisms.
- This monitoring should take place over the lifecycle of a scheme right through to occupation by talking to residents to ensure quality and to pick up any issues when properties are lived in.