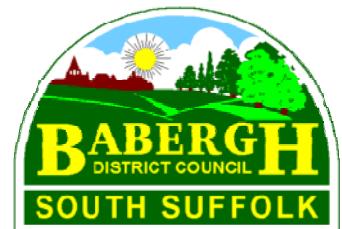


Core Strategy Issues and Options

**Housing Section
March 2009**



5. Housing

5.1. A good level of policy and guidance is provided to frame Babergh's approach to housing issues for the district, including national planning policy / guidance (PPS3 and related papers) and the regional Plan. The current adopted Local Plan also deals with a lot of detailed housing matters and it is considered that not all of this will need addressing or changing in the Core Strategy.

Key evidence base research studies for these themes are:

- Housing Needs Survey 2008
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment (and associated viability study) 2008/9
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2009
- Infrastructure Capacity Study 2008/9

Turning to local perspectives on this matter, the Sustainable Community Strategies and other local consultation have the following implications for and links to the district's key housing issues.



Suffolk LSP	Western Suffolk LSP	Babergh East LSP	BDC Strategic Plan
<p>A prosperous and vibrant economy Affordable, quality housing for all</p> <p>The Greenest County Reduce Suffolk's carbon footprint and adapt to the changing climate</p> <p>Safe, healthy and inclusive communities</p> <p>A sense of belonging within communities that are valued, engaged and supported Cohesive Communities</p>	<p>Develop and maintain a safe, strong and sustainable community</p> <p>Create and support healthier communities</p> <p>Make Western Suffolk a safer place and build a stronger community</p> <p>Protect our natural environment and local biodiversity and ensure sustainable development</p>	<p>Maintaining the quality of the environment</p> <p>Affordable housing</p> <p>Provision and retention of employment sites to encourage economic development (including tourism)</p>	<p>A greener and cleaner Babergh The right balance between protecting the natural environment and supporting development opportunities for the area and its people A smaller carbon footprint for the area</p> <p>Quality homes that local people can afford There are enough good quality homes which meet high environmental and sustainability standards to meet the needs of the people of Babergh. There are enough affordable homes to meet the needs of the people of Babergh. New housing developments are supported by adequate infrastructure improvements Fewer people are homeless</p> <p>Vibrant places and strong communities</p>

			<p>Reduce impact of rural isolation, particularly limited access to affordable housing, transport and jobs</p> <p>Active villages and communities</p> <p>Individuals have a sense of belonging within cohesive communities where everyone is valued</p>
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Housing Development Density

- 5.2. This is considered to be a detailed matter requiring address within subsequent (development plan) documents.

House Types and Sizes

- 5.3. This is an important matter in relation to ensuring that the right kind of housing is provided to meet the needs of Babergh's communities. This applies equally to open market housing and affordable housing. The established principle is that all new developments should provide an appropriate mix of dwelling types and sizes and thereby meet the needs of the local community. Babergh's evidence does not suggest any reason to depart from this established position and sets out the types and sizes of housing that are required. Current housing markets are not fully balanced and particular dwelling types and sizes are under-represented. Across all 3 tenure types (market, intermediate affordable and social rented affordable) Babergh's evidence shows that the greatest requirements are for small and medium sized dwellings.
- 5.4. It would seem appropriate to include a policy requirement within the Core Strategy dealing with the above matter. This would require housing provision in all but the very smallest developments to meet identified needs in terms of dwelling type and size. The alternative is to either not include a policy or 'delegate' the matter to a subsequent development plan document (DPD).

Question H1: Do you agree that the Core Strategy should address this matter through a specific policy or not and if so, do you consider that the above approach is reasonable?

Please give your reasons

Affordable Housing Provision

- 5.5. This has been a key issue for Babergh and can be expected to remain as such for the Plan period, even under the currently difficult economic conditions. Incomes in relation to house prices continue to mean that affordability remains a problem, regardless of how far the overall volume of housing supply determines this or not. For the purposes of this document, the definition of affordable housing will be that set out in national planning policy (PPS3, November 2006)- see glossary.

- 5.6. The Council has an enviable track record in affordable housing delivery and has used a variety of effective approaches towards this end. These include policies to require affordable housing alongside open market housing and a rural affordable housing exceptions site policy. We are required to set out an overall target for affordable housing provision for the Plan period.
- 5.7. Babergh has just concluded its last affordable housing delivery programme covering the 5-year period from 2004/5 to 2008/9. This was successful in bringing forward 700 new affordable homes in the delivery pipeline (defined as either completed, under construction or with planning permission). The Council has developed a similar new programme for the next 5-year period from 2009 – 2014, with a target of 500 new homes (this being set lower to recognize the constraints of current prevailing conditions).
- 5.8. Given the above, a target could be set for the Plan period of 2011 – 2027 (16 years) with regard to the 2 programmes above and their respective targets of 500 or 700 new dwellings per 5-year period. This will need careful planning, monitoring and review in the light of experience and changing conditions but a guide target figure would be a useful measure to set, with appropriate delivery strategies and measures for implementation. Please note that whilst it is necessary to aim to deliver as much extra affordable housing as possible, it is also important that a realistic and achievable target is set. This explains why the target for the Council's earlier programme was set at 700 new homes and the current programme's target has been set at 500 new homes.

Question H2: Do you consider that Babergh should set a Plan period affordable housing provision target based upon the above approaches or other approaches:

Option 1: A target of less than 500 new affordable homes per 5-year period

Option 2: A target of 500 new affordable homes per 5-year period

Option 3: A target of 600 new affordable homes per 5-year period

Option 4: A target of 700 new affordable homes per 5-year period

Option 5: A target of more than 700 new affordable homes per 5-year period

Please give reasons / evidence for your answer

Affordable Housing Tenures

- 5.9. Babergh's current evidence suggests that the overall split of new affordable housing should be 75% for 'social rented' housing and 25% for other, 'intermediate' tenure types of affordable housing

Question H3: Do you agree with the above proportions?

Would you propose a different split and if so, why?

Affordable Housing Requirements: Site Development Thresholds and Percentages

5.10. Babergh's existing policies require:

Up to 35% Affordable Housing provision in urban areas (developments / sites of 15 units or 0.5 ha. upwards) and

Up to 35% Affordable Housing provision in rural areas (applied to developments / sites of 3 units upwards, regardless of site area)

5.11. The available evidence does not recommend change for the current Local Plan rural Affordable Housing provision site policy. However, the latest evidence indicates that the Affordable Housing provision policy for urban areas requires revision. This is because evidence shows that too many developments occur below the 15 unit threshold, thereby providing no affordable housing at all. This impacts on the new supply of affordable housing and works against the creation of mixed, balanced communities. The evidence therefore recommends lowering the size of site at which provision should be made and increasing the percentage required to 40%.

Question H4: Do you consider that Babergh should increase the amount of affordable housing required under its urban Affordable Housing provision policy to 40%? Alternatively, should the Council choose to:

Option 1: reduce the percentage required to below 35%?

Option 2: leave it at 35%?

Option 3: or increase it above 40%?

Please give reasons / evidence for your answer

5.12. A related question to resolve is that of setting the size / scale of urban developments and sites where a requirement for affordable housing would arise. There is a national indicative minimum site size threshold of 15 dwellings. However, Babergh's circumstances suggest that consideration should be given to a different approach. Also, there is scope to set out differing percentage requirements and thresholds for differing scales of development proposals in different types of locations.

Question H5: Do you think that Babergh should set different minimum site size thresholds at which affordable housing provision will be required from the national indicative (and current Local Plan) site size?

If so, would you support Option 1, Option 2 or an alternative option?

Option 1: A possible approach could be to require a lower percentage of provision on smaller developments falling below the current 15 unit level. In this way, there could be a lower percentage requirement for developments from 10 to 14 units and a further, lower percentage requirement for developments from 5 to 9 units.

Option 2: An alternative would be to keep a standard percentage requirement (at 40%, given the latest evidence) and to lower the thresholds at which provision would be required.

Rural Affordable Housing Provision

- 5.13. Traditionally, this has been largely brought forward through use of a rural exceptions affordable housing policy, although more recently also through the Local Plan policy that requires affordable housing alongside market housing in rural developments. The indications are that the latter appears to have been sufficiently well refined and applied. However, national and regional planning policy and consultations, together with local community priorities, indicate that Babergh's approach to rural affordable housing provision may benefit from revision. This is primarily because affordable housing needs still arise in smaller villages, as do opportunities to meet that need and there remains a pressing need to increase the overall supply of affordable housing.
- 5.14. It is not possible or appropriate to revise some parameters of the existing rural exception sites policy, including that exceptions sites can only be developed for smaller villages; that the housing should be only affordable housing; and the need for the housing to be provided in perpetuity. However, there could be room for revising and relaxing the policy to allow for relatively small groups of affordable housing in smaller villages that have no built up area boundary (BUAB). The scale of development, as now, would be determined primarily by the scale of locally identified affordable housing need. There is usually considerable difficulty in finding and securing sites for rural exceptions sites, particularly in terms of availability, due to a 'hope value' (for open market housing) factor among landowners holding land adjoining village boundaries. This problem may be partly overcome by revising the current rigid requirement for rural exceptions sites to be located adjoining village boundaries. Development for affordable housing in the countryside would still need to be controlled, however. This could be done through a requirement for a sequential approach to site selection and for sites to still be well related to existing villages and acceptable in relation to site location, design, layout, landscaping, etc.

Question H6: Do you agree that the use of rural exceptions affordable housing developments in groups is appropriate for smaller villages (without a BUAB)?

Please give reasons for your answer

Question H7: Do you agree that the current rigid requirement for rural exceptions sites to be located immediately adjacent to village boundaries should be relaxed, as suggested above, with suitable safeguards retained, to ensure effective control over development?

Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeoples' Accommodation

- 5.15. These groups have their own specific accommodation requirements and the Government requires the Council to address these. Babergh currently has no authorized sites for these groups. A recent study covering Babergh (and several

other Suffolk districts) in 2007 suggested that there are virtually no accommodation requirements of these kinds within Babergh. The level of need suggested for Babergh by this work has already been met by the grant of planning permission for a single residential caravan in 2008. However, nationally and regionally there are identified shortages of authorized sites.

- 5.16. In response a single issue review of the Regional Plan is being produced specifically to address this issue. The strategy for this hinges on a substantial regional redistribution of accommodation sites for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. If approved, the Plan revision would mean that every district in the region contributes towards these accommodation needs (with a minimum of 15 pitches per district). Although this Plan is not yet approved, it seems likely that this will result in a requirement for Babergh to accommodate a site (or sites) sufficient to provide for 15 pitches by 2011 (each pitch being adequate to accommodate a calculated 1.7 caravans on average).
- 5.17. Thus, Babergh seems likely to require 15 pitches by the time this Core Strategy is adopted. Given this anticipated requirement by 2011, the initial 15 pitch requirement for the scale of Babergh does not represent an issue that this Core Strategy needs to address by site allocation. A combination of the adopted regional plan policy (H3); together with its emerging replacement policies (H4 and H4A); the government circulars ODPM 01/2006 and 04/2007; and the existing Local Plan Policy HS42, provide the most expedient basis to provide for the short term pitch requirements. The 'plan, monitor, manage' approach will be used to confirm whether this initial provision has been delivered by 2011 and the appropriate action taken at that time, if any change in approach proves necessary.
- 5.18. In addition, the emerging Regional Plan revision seems likely to result in a further requirement for a total of 20 'Transit' pitches (non permanent residential sites) for the whole of Suffolk by 2011. There is no prescription as to where this should be situated but locational guidance to provide for a site in each of the south and north of the county. This requirement will be best dealt with by joint working and initiatives by the Suffolk district councils and Suffolk County Council. It appears unlikely at present that these Transit sites will be allocated but more likely identified and / or promoted by the local authorities. However, research will be necessary first to establish the scale of these sites and where they should be situated.
- 5.19. This requirement does not make a specific response in this Core Strategy imperative, although the results of the above mentioned research may shed new light on the matter. Currently available evidence (as of late 2008) suggests virtually no requirement for Babergh (1 pitch). It is therefore considered feasible that this level of provision could be approached jointly with other districts and provided as part of a larger site, possibly within an appropriate adjoining district.
- 5.20. The third element of provision likely to be required is that of 9 plots of land by 2011 for Travelling Showpeople, again to be planned and provided on a county-wide basis. The emerging policy provides loose locational guidance in that this specific form of provision is anticipated for Suffolk Coastal district 'and elsewhere'. The same joint working approach as that above for transit sites would be the appropriate means of delivery. Beyond 2011 an annual compound increase of 1.5% in plot numbers would be planned for and delivered in the same way.

Evidence on this matter (from the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, late 2008) identified no families of Travelling Showpeople currently residing in Babergh. Accordingly, it did not identify any requirement arising over the ensuing 5 years. This type of requirement does not therefore necessitate a specific response in this Core Strategy.

- 5.21. Returning to Gypsy and Traveller accommodation, beyond 2021 an annual 3% compound increase in residential pitch provision is likely to apply. Babergh is likely to need to provide for the same proportion (1.2%) of extra new regional pitches (1,038) from 2011 to 2021. This would mean a further 13 pitches to provide for during the first 10 years of this Core Strategy period. Therefore, this is the key issue for this Core Strategy to address in relation to this subject.
- 5.22. In terms of locational factors for new site provision, key considerations will include the locations where accommodation needs arise and the preferences of the various Gypsy and Traveller communities themselves. Provision could be in rural, semi-rural, urban or urban edge locations but sustainability considerations are very important, including access to facilities and services. The emerging new regional policy favours the use of major development opportunities in principle (those that include a substantial residential element, whether solely residential or mixed use schemes). Reasons given why this approach appears likely to be favoured in regional policy include that it is in line with the important objectives of social inclusion; the establishment of mixed and balanced communities; and the aim of 'mainstreaming' Gypsy and Travellers site provision, particularly in relation to the vital need to ensure affordability.
- 5.23. The options identified for the approach towards providing the further 13 pitches (from 2011 to 2021) for Babergh are as follows:
- Option 1: Plan for provision through expansion of existing sites
 - Option 2: Plan for provision through an entirely new site or sites (to be allocated)
 - Option 3: Plan for provision through a combination of the 2 approaches above (including site allocation, if required)
 - Option 4: Plan for provision through rural exceptions site policy (allowing for proposals to come forward, as exceptions to normal policies of restraint, in the same way as settled accommodation affordable housing schemes already do)
 - Option 5: Plan for provision primarily through requirements for planned Gypsy and Travellers sites wherever major developments come forward

Question H8: Which option do you favour most and which do you favour least? It would assist if you ranked the options in order of preference, with 1 indicating your greatest preference

Please give your reasons

Question H9: Are you aware of any potential sites in the district that you consider would be suitable for Gypsies and Travellers accommodation and would satisfy prevailing planning policy (in any kind of location)?

Please give clear details of the address and, ideally, the site's ownership as well

Question H10: Subject to the findings of dedicated research, do you consider that Babergh district would be an appropriate location to accommodate Transit provision for Gypsies and Travellers, to provide a part of Suffolk's overall network of Transit site provision (20 pitches likely to be required overall) from 2006-11 and beyond that date, if an increase post 2011 is needed?

Would this specific form of provision be better accommodated elsewhere in the county and if so, do you have any views or evidence as to where and why?