

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

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Report Originator	Head of Development Services	Fwd Plan Ref No:	
Wards Affected	All	30 September 2013	
Title	HOUSING STANDARDS REVIEW		

1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To inform Members of the Department for Communities and Local Government consultation paper on the Housing Standards Review, and agree a formal response.

2. **BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 In 2010 the Government announced the need for an industry led examination of housing standards, to find a way to simplify them. It was decided the best way was to consider standards by theme, the themes being energy; accessibility; security; and water. An industry led group was formed to rationalise and simplify them, its broad conclusion was that there was significant scope for rationalisation in each theme. The Group also called for as much material to be put into the national Building Regulations as possible, thereby making a clearer distinction between planning policies and technical regulations. The Group also urged the government to continue the review work, and for this to include the Code for Sustainable Homes.
- 2.2 The Review asks 64 questions in total, this can be viewed by accessing the following link:-
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/230250/1- Housing Standards Review - Consultation Document.pdf The purpose of this report is not to consider and respond to each subject matter and question in turn. The intention is to focus on two aspects of the Review of particular interest to Kettering Borough Council, and its aspirations for securing high standards in housing growth.
- 2.3 The issues discussed within this report relate to:
- i. The Housing Standard Workstream Process
 - ii. Space Standards

The Housing Standards Workstream Process

- 2.4 The approach being taken with the Housing Standards Review is that the technical or functional performance of a building should relate to Building

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Regulations, and the environment in which it is built is a matter for planning policy or guidance. This document has concentrated on the former, the functional performance of buildings. The clear message is that the Government is directing energy efficiency in buildings to be a central component in Building Regulations.

- 2.5 The document states that the Review is not proposing to stop the industry or other bodies (eg. local authorities) from bringing their own standards to the market, for developers to utilise on a voluntary basis. The consultation proposes a clear difference between standards which will be set out in a “nationally described standard set” or can be asked for subject to viability; and areas where voluntary, market led approaches are to be encouraged, but can not be mandatory through planning policy.
- 2.6 The Department for Communities and Local Government is proposing to implement the outcomes of the review in one of two ways:
- to develop a set of “nationally described standards”; or
 - through fully integrating the standards into Building Regulations

The recommendation of the Panel, an option favoured by the Government, is the integration of the standards into Building Regulations alone. However it recognises that although this can provide benefits in terms of clarity and certainty, disadvantages do also exist. One such disadvantage being that the single standard will, by its nature, be an average. The result of this is it could have an adverse impact on viability in some places, while not challenging standards in others. One way of resolving this would be to apply different standards to different areas.

- 2.7 The Code for Sustainable Homes is proposed to be wound down, with transitional arrangements created to ensure that contractual commitments made under the code are properly covered. The Housing Standards Review proposes that it will “deliver a mechanism, legislative or otherwise, to ensure that additional rules and standards are not added on (by authorities), beyond those left at the end of the Review”. The Government is clear that local planning authorities limit the use of discretionary standards to only those established in this Review. The inclusion of any new standards in local plans will be thoroughly tested through the examination process.
- 2.8 Part M of the Building Regulations has placed a requirement on developers to build to a meaningfully higher energy standard than that in place at the time the Core Spatial Strategy was adopted, in 2008. The standards required are now significantly more challenging than those previously in force.
- 2.9 **KBC Comment** – The North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy includes an adopted policy which sets a scale of codes against the Code for sustainable Homes aimed at securing the delivery of energy efficient homes, leading to code level 6 in 2016. Without this policy the Council is concerned that its ability to

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negotiate with developers in an effort to secure enhanced energy efficiency and sustainable construction will be severely diminished. As a Council, Kettering Borough is ambitious to reduce carbon emissions, and secure further improvements in sustainability, in its development. Without more challenging targets than those provided by Part M of Building Regulations, there is concern that the industry, and its development of further advancements in technology, will stall.

2.10 The Council recognises that for development to go ahead, and for homes to be provided at prices that buyers can afford, the viability of schemes is crucial. Development viability of schemes is used on a regular basis as a tool to seek to demonstrate poor viability of a scheme. However, as is evidenced in Kettering Borough, major new sites, committing to challenging Code for Sustainable Homes levels are being built out. It is questioned whether these standards would have been secured without an adopted policy in place.

2.11 Kettering Borough Council would urge the government to continue in encouraging energy efficient development, and continue to set targets for the development industry to meet.

Space Standards

2.12 National minimum internal space standards for private sector housing are not set by national policy. However, there has been an increase in the numbers of authorities who are including space standards in their local plans. One of the drivers to increasing the adoption of space standards is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This states at paragraph 50:

“To deliver a wide choice of high quality homes, widen opportunities for home ownership and create sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities, local planning authorities should:

- Identify the size, type, tenure and range of housing that is required in particular locations, reflecting local demand”.

2.13 The government declares it does not have a preferred approach on space standards at present. As such, the main purpose of this part of the consultation is to look at issues in principle, and to gather evidence to inform future considerations.

2.14 **KBC Comment** – Although it is recognised that there is a balance to be struck between the desire of residents to live in comfortable, spacious homes, and the reality of the costs of affording to buy or rent these homes, a home needs to be “fit for purpose”. Kettering Borough Council is concerned at the small size of some new homes being built within its area. The Council recognises that small, as well as larger homes are needed, to meet the requirements of a broad cross-section of the community. However, in some instances some homes, and room sizes don’t appear capable of performing the function suggested. By way of

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explanation, if a standard single bed can not fit in a room, it should not be described as a bedroom. The Council is concerned that some developers are driven more by profit margins than by the provision of “decent standards”. In addition, there are numerous examples of properties being provided with garages, and a standard sized car does not fit within it.

- 2.15 Kettering Borough Council considers that space standards are an important mechanism for influencing the development of an area. The setting of standards may also act to reduce local opposition to residential development, once residents recognise that homes being provided will meet local need, and be of a reasonable quality.

Question 13 – *Would you support government working with industry to promote space labelling of new homes?*

- 2.16 Space labelling is a process whereby the overall internal floor area (and potential individual room sizes) of new homes are presented in a consistent and visible manner at point of sale to potential home buyers. Space labelling could be adopted as an alternative to national space standards on private sales housing.

- 2.17 **KBC Comment** – The Council believe that an understanding of housing size would significantly improve the ability of potential buyers/ occupiers to realise the quality of the product, and whether it is of the size suitable for them, and their family. It is also of the view that providing this information could also put pressure on developers, as home buyers become more aware, and products become more comparable. There is no clear reason why space labelling could not be incorporated alongside the introduction of space standards.

3. CONSULTATION AND CUSTOMER IMPACT

- 3.1 Kettering Borough Council is a consultee in the formulation of the Housing Standards Review.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Housing Standards Review, when published, will become government policy. It will have a significant influence on the Council’s own policy making, and decision taking when considering development.

5. USE OF RESOURCES

- 5.1 None directly related to this report.

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6. **RECOMMENDATION**

That Members agree the comments contained within this report, as the Council's response to the Housing Standards Review.

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