

NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET – 21 SEPTEMBER 2010

Title of report	'WHAT MAKES AN IDEAL PLACE TO LIVE' SURVEY RESULTS
Key Decision	a) Financial No b) Community Yes
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Purpose of report	To inform Cabinet of the results of the 'What makes an ideal place to live' resident survey and consider approval of the recommendations offered.
Reason for Decision	To agree a response to the Council's 'What makes an ideal place to live survey' and support the place shaping aspirations of local residents
Strategic aims	The proposed initiative meets the following aims of the Council Delivery Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger, Safer and Healthier Communities • Prosperous and Sustainable Communities • Organisational Development
Implications:	
Financial/Staff	No staff implications. No financial implications.
Link to relevant CAT	Place shaping
Risk Management	A risk assessment has been undertaken.
Equalities Impact Assessment	Not applicable - Building for Life is Government supported national standard for well designed homes and neighbourhoods.
Human Rights	None.
Transformational Government	This will be considered as part of the Value for Money programme

Comments of Head of Paid Service	The report is satisfactory.
Comments of Section 151 Officer	The report is satisfactory.
Comments of Monitoring Officer	The report is satisfactory.
Consultees	Teams within Place Shaping Service. Waste Strategy Manager. Housing Futures Section
Background papers	<p>NWLDC (2010) Building for Life risk assessment</p> <p>NWLDC (2009) What makes an ideal place to live?</p> <p>NWLDC (2009) Helping you find your ideal place to live</p> <p>NWLDC (2 December 2008) Cabinet report: Urban Design Initiative Proposals</p> <p>CABE (2007) Delivering great places to live – 20 questions you need to answer.</p> <p>CABE (2007) Housing Audit: assessing the design quality of new housing in the East Midlands, West Midlands and South West.</p> <p>Department for Communities and Local Government (2007), Homes for the Future: more affordable, more sustainable.</p> <p>NWLDC (2008) 'North West Leicestershire Design initiative' Powerpoint presentation</p> <p>NWLDC (2008 and 2009) Annual Monitoring Report (reference: H6 Housing Quality data)</p> <p>NWLDC (2008) Urban Design Initiative Risk Assessment.</p> <p>NWLDC Saved Local Plan Policies</p> <p>Note: All of the above background items are held by the Council's Principal Urban Designer, with the exception of the Annual Monitoring Report (held with the Spatial Planning Team).</p>
Recommendations	<p>A) THAT CABINET REAFFIRMS ITS COMMITMENT TO THE BUILDING FOR LIFE STANDARD AS A DESIGN QUALITY INDICATOR FOR ALL NEW HOMES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS WITHIN THE DISTRICT (10 DWELLINGS OR MORE).</p> <p>B) THAT CABINET NOTE THE PROPOSAL TO PRODUCE A SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT ENTITLED 'ACHIEVING BUILDING FOR LIFE IN NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE FOR THE PURPOSES OF</p>

	<p style="text-align: center;">CONSULTATION</p> <p>C) THAT CABINET AGREE THAT THIS CONSULTATION SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT STATES THAT BUILDING FOR LIFE CRITERIA 1, 2, 4, 5, 12, 14, 16 AND 17 ARE MADE COMPULSORY CRITERIA.</p> <p>D) THAT CABINET AGREE THAT THIS THE CONSULTATION SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT STATES THAT BUILDING FOR LIFE CRITERIA 19 AND 20 ARE MADE STRONGLY ENCOURAGED CRITERIA.</p> <p>E) THE WORDING OF THE CONSULTATION DRAFT SPD IS DELEGATED TO THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT IN CONSULTATION WITH THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER</p>
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1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Cabinet approved the Council's first design initiative on 2 December 2008 and resolved to share the aspirations of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) in expecting residential led development of 'very good' and 'good' standard (as defined by the national Building for Life standard) to become the norm as opposed to the exception.
- 1.2 Sustainable urban design is an aim of the Council's 'Green Footprints Challenge' priority. The ourplace™ design initiative seeks to encourage and inspire people to create and expect places that contribute to our everyday lives and support our natural, built and social environment. There is a complementary relationship between ourplace™ and the Council's Green Footprints Challenge which seeks to encourage and promote more environmentally responsible lifestyles.
- 1.3 The Council is now well accustomed to using the Building for Life standard as a design quality indicator for residential led developments of 10 dwellings or more (although officers have opted to apply the standard to schemes of 8 units). The tool has been extremely effective in raising the profile and standard of design within residential-led developments and is becoming 'second nature' to planning officers and Planning Committee.
- 1.4 The Building for Life standard comprises of 20 questions. A minimum of 14 points is required to secure a good standard of design. A maximum of one point is available per criterion, with developers currently free to select any combination of criteria. By 'testing' the Building for Life criteria through the survey it has been possible to capture residents' place making aspirations and identify particular criteria that matter most to our residents.
- 1.5 Applicants are expected to submit a Building for Life assessment as part of the Design and Access Statement component of their planning application. Their assessments are evaluated by an Accredited Building for Life Assessor and a full assessment is provided to the relevant case officer.

2. WHAT MAKES AN IDEAL PLACE TO LIVE SURVEY

- 2.1 In January 2010, a survey was distributed to all residents and placed on the Council's website. The survey was designed to 'test' the Building for Life criteria and see which criteria (if any) mattered most to our residents.

- 2.2 397 residents responded to the survey. A full report of the survey results is provided as part of the appendices to this Cabinet report. Headline results are provided within this report.
- 2.3 Of the respondents, 60% were female, 38% were male, with the remaining 2% withholding their gender.
- 2.4 The survey attracted a good response rate across the age groups, with an encouraging response rate from the 35 and under age group which (based on the average age (38 years) of first time buyers¹) represent future first time buyers:

Age group	% response
Under 25	9%
26 – 35 years	12%
36 – 50 years	29%
51 – 65 years	37%
66 years and over	13%

YOUR IDEAL NEIGHBOURHOOD

- 2.3 Residents were asked what made an ideal neighbourhood, i.e. facilities they wanted within a short five or ten minute walk from home.
- 2.4 Responses attracting the highest positive responses rates (i.e. 50% or over)

84% of respondents wanted shops.
 82% of respondents wanted parks.
 82% of respondents wanted easy access to public transport.
 71% of respondents wanted easy access to a network of greenways that connect villages, towns, parks and countryside and offer them off-road routes to walk or cycle along.
 61% of respondents wanted restaurants, pubs and/or cafes.
 59% of respondents wanted schools/nurseries.
 58% of respondents wanted play and recreational facilities.
 54% of respondents wanted a small community building/centre.
 50% of respondents wanted places to work a short distance from home.

It is conceivable that the variations evident in the types of facilities people want within a short walk of their home relates to their current life cycle stage (e.g. parents of young children would clearly want schools, nurseries and play facilities, whilst this is likely to be less of a concern for childless adults or older 'empty nesters').

- 2.5 On the basis of the evidence collated, it is recommended that the following Building for Life criteria are made compulsory within North West Leicestershire:

BFL1

Does the development provide (or is it close to, i.e. within a five or ten minute walk) community facilities, such as schools, parks, play areas, shops, pubs or cafes?

¹ Source: The Independent (16 March 2010) 'No place like home: the generation who can't afford to buy' <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/house-and-home/property/no-place-like-home-the-generation-who-cant-afford-to-buy-1921781.html>, accessed 26.8.2010.

BFL4

Does the development have easy access to public transport?

BFL14

Does the scheme integrate with existing streets, paths and surrounding development?

Where the size of the site is such that public open space provision and/or National Forest planting are required on site, it is recommended that BFL16 is also compulsory.

BFL16

Is public space well designed and does it have suitable management arrangements in place?

YOUR IDEAL STREET

2.6 Residents were asked what made an ideal street.

2.7 Responses attracting the highest positive responses rates (i.e. 50% or over)

84% of respondents wanted a street where car parking is well integrated and avoids the need for streets full of cars, or large, isolated parking courtyards.

79% of respondents wanted streets where vehicle speeds are kept low and are safe for cyclists, pedestrians and children.

67% of respondents wanted a place that is well connected to the wider neighbourhood, for example by providing footpath links that offer the most direct route to the local shops.

2.8 On the basis of the evidence collated, it is recommended that the following Building for Life criteria is made compulsory within North West Leicestershire:

BFL12

Is car parking well integrated and situated so it supports the street scene?

As part of adopting this criterion as compulsory, it is recommended that parking standards are reviewed with Leicestershire County Council to achieve parking provision that better reflect car ownership levels.

BFL13

Are streets pedestrian, cycle and vehicle friendly?

BFL14

Does the scheme integrate with existing streets, paths and surrounding development?

YOUR IDEAL HOME

2.9 Residents were asked what made an ideal home.

2.10 Respondents were asked whether they preferred traditional styled homes that may use some local materials or new, modern styled homes that may use some local materials.

2.11 **68%** expressed a preference for traditional styled homes that may use some local materials.

29% expressed a preference for modern styled homes that may use some local materials.

3% expressed no preference.

2.12 Whilst there is no Building for Life criterion relating to architectural style (as Building for Life seeks to promote design quality as opposed to a particular design style, which is recognised in national planning policy as a reflection of personal taste), the results are insightful. It is therefore recommended that home builders are encouraged on larger developments (developments in excess of 150 units) to consider interpreting design codes more creatively.

2.13 Responses attracting the highest positive responses rates (i.e. 50% or over)

88% of respondents wanted buildings designed to higher standards and use new technology to reduce energy bills. For example, by creating homes that are well insulated or that generate all or some of their own energy needs.

77% of respondents wanted dedicated storage space for wheelie bins and recycling crates (and where they can be hidden out of sight when it is not collection day).

56% of respondents wanted a garage that is big enough for their car and their storage needs.

2.14 On the basis of the evidence collated, it is recommended that the following Building for Life criteria is made compulsory within North West Leicestershire:

BFL5

Does the development have any features that reduce its environmental impact?

BFL17

Do the buildings exhibit architectural quality?

Please note that this criterion requires buildings to be designed in a way that makes them 'fit for purpose', and therefore this is consistent with the need to provide well designed refuse and recycling space; and provide garages that can accommodate cars and provide space for storage. It is suggested that within the 'Achieving Building for Life in North West Leicestershire' Supplementary Planning Document, space standards are specified for both garages and storage space.

2.15 On the basis of the evidence collated, it is also recommended that the following Building for Life criteria is strongly encouraged:

BFL19

Has the scheme made use of advances in construction or technology that enhance its performance, quality or attractiveness?

BFL20

Do buildings or spaces outperform statutory minima, such as Building Regulations?

CONCLUSION

3.1 On the basis of the evidence collated it is suggested that in drafting the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) 'Achieving Building for Life in North West Leicestershire', the

'compulsory' and 'strongly encouraged' criteria will be communicated and explained to prospective developers. The SPD will be subject to external consultation in autumn 2010.

- 3.2 Of the eight compulsory criteria, it will be expected that a minimum of six of these must be met.
- 3.3 The survey sought to identify what residents feel makes an ideal place to live (in terms of the physical attributes of homes and neighbourhoods) and tested all of the Building for Life criteria, with the exception of criteria 2 and 3 that relate to local housing needs. Based upon evidence relating to the need for affordable housing and the revision to the existing Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document, it is therefore considered to also adopt Building for Life criterion 2 (Is there a tenure mix that reflects the needs of the local community?) as an additional compulsory criteria in the draft consultation of the Supplementary Planning Document entitled, 'Achieving Building for Life in North West Leicestershire. This would ensure that the Council's use of Building for Life cross references other Council priorities and activities.
- 3.4 The impact and effectiveness of the adoption of the compulsory and 'strongly encouraged' criteria will be monitored.

APPENDIX 1

BUILDING FOR LIFE CRITERIA

Environment and community

01. Does the development provide (or is it close to) community facilities, such as a school, parks, play areas, shops, pubs or cafes?
02. Is there an accommodation mix that reflects the needs and aspirations of the local community?
03. Is there a tenure mix that reflects the needs of the local community?
04. Does the development have easy access to public transport?
05. Does the development have any features that reduce its environmental impact?

Character

06. Is the design specific to the scheme?
07. Does the scheme exploit existing buildings, landscape or topography?
08. Does the scheme feel like a place with distinctive character?
09. Do the buildings and layout make it easy to find your way around?
10. Are streets defined by a well-structured building layout?

Streets, parking and pedestrianisation

11. Does the building layout take priority over the streets and car parking, so that the highways do not dominate?
12. Is the car parking well integrated and situated so it supports the street scene?
13. Are the streets pedestrian, cycle and vehicle friendly?
14. Does the scheme integrate with existing streets, paths and surrounding development?
15. Are public spaces and pedestrian routes overlooked and do they feel safe?

Design and construction

16. Is public space well designed and does it have suitable management arrangements in place?
17. Do the buildings exhibit architectural quality?
18. Do internal spaces and layout allow for adaptation, conversion or extension?
19. Has the scheme made use of advances in construction or technology that enhance its performance, quality and attractiveness?
20. Do buildings or spaces outperform statutory minima, such as building regulations?

APPENDIX 2: SYNERGY BETWEEN BUILDING FOR LIFE CRITERIA AND SURVEY QUESTIONS

Building for Life criteria	'What makes an ideal place to live?' survey questions
Environment and Community	
1	1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 2.
2	No questions were asked as this criterion relates to Local Housing Needs as opposed to design.
3	No questions were asked as this criterion relates to Local Housing Needs as opposed to design.
4	3
5	2, 6, 11, 18,
Character	
6	7, 9
7	7, 26
8	8
9	9
10	9, 15
Streets, Parking and Pedestrianisation	
11	12
12	12
13	13
14	4, 14
15	15
Design and Construction	
16	10, 11
17	10, 11
17	17, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28a, 28b, 28c, 28d
18	19, 20, 21, 24
19	18, 27
20	18

Survey questions asked that did not relate directly to the Building for Life criteria: 5, 16a, 16b