

PLANNING COMMITTEE

23 APRIL 2013

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING

A.5 - BUILDING FOR LIFE-12

(Report prepared by Richard Matthams)

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT
To seek the Planning Committee's approval to support the use of CABE and the Design Council's 'Building for Life-12' standards in the way set out in this report as a useful means of rigorously assessing design quality in significant developments as they are reported to the Planning Committee.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
The report proposes that the newly refreshed ' <i>Building For Life-12</i> ' (<i>BFL-12</i>) standards produced by CABE and The Design Council will be used as part of officers' evaluation of residential design quality and reported to Planning Committee.
RECOMMENDATION
That Tendring District Council's Planning Committee supports the use of CABE and The Design Council's 'Building for Life-12' standards to assess residential schemes.

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

DELIVERING PRIORITIES
This practical tool will be important in helping to continue the drive to secure high quality design proposals for residential developments in the District.
RESOURCES AND RISK
Resources N/A.
Risks There is no apparent financial risk of cost to the council as the BFL-12 process does not normally involve the need for any fee payment. Should the suggestion of informal mediation be taken up this should be assumed to be at the applicant's cost. At a wider level there may be people who argue that a determination to deliver high quality design will discourage development by imposing extra costs. This is a complex debate and many would argue that good design is as much about

skill and care in design and not material extra cost. There is also evidence that investment in quality places drives higher returns in the short and longer term.

LEGAL

Building for Life-12 may be used in the determination of planning.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below. Crime and Disorder / Equality and Diversity / Health Inequalities /Area or Ward affected / Consultation/Public Engagement.

Equality and Diversity

The assessment design criterion includes the need to specifically assess the impact on access and issues that relate to the needs of different groups in society e.g. people with limited mobility, parents with young children elderly people etc.

Area or Ward affected.

All wards.

Consultation/Public Engagement

N/A.

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

In 2010 The Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment (CABE) working with their new partners, The Design Council, began a review of the 2008 Building for Life Standards, now re-launched as Building For Life-12 (BFL-12) in September 2012.

BFL-12 is the industry standard, endorsed by the Government, for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods and reflects CABE's and The Design Council's vision of what new housing developments should be: attractive, functional and sustainable places. It is based on the new National Planning Policy Framework and the Localism Act and reflects the Government's commitment to build more homes, better homes and involve local communities in planning.

CABE and The Design Council see BFL-12 as a useful tool for stimulating a conversation between local communities, local authorities and developers about creating great places to live. They encourage the use of BFL-12 as a collaborative dialogue, with the 12 questions used at the start of and throughout the development and consultation process. They hope that rather than 'assessor' and 'applicant' there will be a move towards a constructive design team approach, involving the local community, developer and local authority. CABE & The Design Council say the emphasis should be very much on everyone who has an interest in new homes and neighbourhoods working together to use the BFL-12 questions to help build more homes and better homes that result in the creation of better places to live.

BFL-12 Content

The new BFL-12 standards include 12 design assessment criteria which are used to assess the elements that determine the quality of housing developments. The new questions are set out in appendix 1 of this report but are structured on the following 3 chapters:

1. Integrating (the development) into the neighbourhood
2. Creating A Place
3. Street & Home

It is intended that BFL12 will be used by the Council to help structure discussions with the developer throughout the development process but most importantly at the earliest *informal pre-application* stages. Developers will need to include any BFL-12 assessments they make in their Design and Access Statements. Subsequently officers will assess schemes on each point and record this in committee reports.

In terms of involving the community there are various steps that can be taken. For example, the 12 questions can be used at developers' public exhibitions; and in presentations to Members; at design workshops. However there should be a note of caution in doing this as some training and experience would be required to carry out effective BFL-12 scores.

This Committee could request that CABE provide an introduction and training for Members.

It is expected that all residential schemes of over 10 dwellings will need to be subjected to an assessment by Council Officers. This will include mixed use schemes with a residential element. BFL-12 can also be used at master-plan and outline planning application stages to inform design discussions although not all questions may be relevant.

Under the new BFL-12 standards, based on a traffic light system, as a guide a minimum acceptable target of 8 out of 12 greens should be the threshold provided no red scores are recorded. This must include at least one green in each of the three chapters. A scheme recording a 'red' score under any of the 12 criteria will indicate significant design problems raising serious questions whether the scheme is acceptable in design terms. Also where any amber scores are recorded a full justification should be provided by the applicants to demonstrate why a green rating is not possible.

Implications for an unacceptable BFL-12 score

CABE recognises that at times there may not always be agreement on how a particular development performs against Building for Life. If the Council considers that a scheme merits refusal on design grounds (using BFL-12) or a developer considers that their scheme is not being appropriately scored, the use of a Building for Life expert is encouraged. It is expected that experts will be drawn from CABE's Built Environment Expert Network. These experts should offer an expert opinion on a paid-for basis on a particular BFL-12 scheme or assessment for planning authorities and developers, and potentially in situations where a scheme is subject to planning appeal. The experts will focus on trying to find solutions to design issues to help support the government's commitment to building more and better homes. It is not clear at this stage who should be responsible for paying for these individuals' involvement but I would expect it to be the applicant.

CONCLUSION

Work continues to seek to drive the high quality design agenda that members' often identify as a high priority and is encapsulated in the draft Local Plan. The new Building for Life standards are an important tool in achieving these aspirations and member support is requested for using the toolkit in the way outlined in this report.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Building For Life-12 (BFL-12)

BFL-12 comprises of 12 questions, with four questions in each chapter:

- Integrating into the neighbourhood
- Creating a place
- Street and home

Based on a simple 'traffic light' system (red, amber and green) we recommend that new developments aim to:

- Secure as many 'greens' as possible,
- Minimise the number of 'ambers' and;
- Avoid 'reds'.

The more 'greens' the better a development will be. A red light gives warning that an aspect of a development needs to be reconsidered.

A development proposal might not achieve 12 greens for a variety of reasons. Where a proposal is identified as having one or more 'ambers', which would point to the need to rethink whether these elements can be improved, local circumstances may justify why the scheme cannot meet the higher standard expected of a green.

Integrating into the neighbourhood

1. Connections

Does the scheme integrate into its surroundings by reinforcing existing connections and creating new ones;

whilst also respecting existing buildings and land uses along the boundaries of the development site?

2. Facilities and services

Does the development provide (or is it close to) community facilities, such as shops, schools, workplaces, parks, play areas, pubs or cafes?

3. Public transport

Does the scheme have good access to public transport to help reduce car dependency?

4. Meeting local housing requirements

Does the development have a mix of housing types and tenures that suit local requirements?

Creating a place

5. Character

Does the scheme create a place with a locally inspired or otherwise distinctive character?

6. Working with the site and its context

Does the scheme take advantage of existing topography, landscape features (including water courses), wildlife habitats, existing buildings, site orientation and microclimates?

7. Creating well defined streets and spaces

Are buildings designed and positioned with landscaping to define and enhance streets and spaces and are buildings designed to turn street corners well?

8. Easy to find your way around

Is the scheme designed to make it easy to find your way around?

Street & Home

9. Streets for all

Are streets designed in a way that encourage low vehicle speeds and allow them to function as social spaces?

10. Car parking

Is resident and visitor parking sufficient and well integrated so that it does not dominate the street?

11. Public and private spaces

Will public and private spaces be clearly defined and designed to be attractive, well managed and safe?

12. External storage and amenity space

Is there adequate external storage space for bins and recycling as well as vehicles and cycles?