



25th January 2021

RBWM Housing Strategy - Consultation

This strategy is either incorrectly titled or incomplete. It is divided into three areas of attention. In **Deliver New Homes** it is focussed on social / affordable housing with little reference to the total residential market. In **Health and Wellbeing** it fails to acknowledge the social, behavioural and health problems associated with living in high rise flats - which feature so largely in the regeneration of the town centre. It is only in analysing the issues relating to the housing needs and challenges of the **Vulnerable** in our society that *strategic* issues are identified.

Of course, it is late in the day to come up with a Housing Strategy, when in the town centre nearly 4,000 flats have been completed, are under construction, are in the planning stage or have been identified as potential sites for residential development. 85% of new dwellings completed in the year to 2019 were flats - the vast majority 1 or 2 bedroom. The **Housing Strategy** makes numerous commitments which elicit the following observations:

- **Commitment 1** only refers to the mixture of tenures associated with affordable housing or social housing.

The document fails to address the key issue of housing mix by type / size of dwelling - flats, maisonettes, terraced, town houses, semis and detached.

The SHMA clearly indicates the requirement by size and type, with the affordable element separated out - flats representing 35% of total dwellings. We are currently delivering 85%.

Overprovision of flats will result in individuals or couples being unable to move onto a family home with adequate bedrooms and outside space because they do not exist.

The strategy is more concerned about social mobility, variety of tenure and moving up the housing ladder - rather than providing for a family.

Mobility in the housing market requires upsizing and downsizing facilitated by a good mix of housing stock. With current mix of dwelling types young families will have to leave Maidenhead - not because of "affordability" but because family homes do not exist.

- **Commitments 4 and 5** both refer to infrastructure, which clearly has been neglected so far, and where a substandard infrastructure delivery plan is in the Borough Local Plan.
- **Commitment 8** regarding gypsies and travellers is laudable.
- **Commitment 9** overstates the relatively small scale impact of the RBWM Property Company in terms of the total housing stock
- To maximise the **Community Infrastructure Levy** is an implausible objective when 4,000 town centre properties are to be built at nil rate CIL.

The pressure on CIL outside of the centre will be onerous in attempting to recover the loss incurred by the application of a nil rate in the town centre.

- The **empty property strategy** is to be supported and is a positive initiative to get unused dwellings on stream.
- The **key worker policy** is also to be lauded, but is of little significance until the supply of such housing improves.
- **Commitment 11** is completely at odds with what is happening. Health and well being are jeopardised by the continued over provision of flats, and the provision of gardens and open spaces is being neglected.

The need for gardens or other amenity space is highlighted by the rigours of lockdown - especially for families.

Historically, social deprivation, poor health and mental issues have been associated with high rise flat dwelling.

- **Commitments 16 to 22** concentrate positively on the needs of the vulnerable - but they are a strategy for homelessness not a Housing Strategy.
- The section entitled **Maidenhead Regeneration** is a complete understatement of what is happening.

Only two schemes are referred to - the Golf Course and Deerswood Meadow. Both are Cala Homes projects and both feature affordable housing. This demonstrates the focus of this strategy on "affordable" in all its manifestations.

It is a positive that the size of dwellings is to be maintained at the Nationally Described Space Standard and that ever smaller living spaces are not approved of in this document.

- There is already a "policy" if not a "strategy" for **affordable homes**. 712 new homes per year is the construction / planning target for the Borough and 30% should be affordable, say 210 dwellings.

The document suggests that the Strategic Housing Market Analysis indicates the need for 434 affordable homes per year which is more than 60% of the 712 target.

To be realistic the SHMA figure should be ignored - but the focus should be on delivering the 30% policy. Regretfully, the RBWM have completely failed in delivering affordable homes (in spite of nil CIL in the town centre.) This document states that 70, 58 and 77 affordable homes per annum have been "successfully" delivered in the last three years.

Regretfully, as a Housing Strategy this is not a comprehensive document. Its focus quite rightly, is on the un-affordability of much of our housing stock and the unavailability of housing for the homeless. But Housing Strategy is a misnomer.

There is a sequence from wish list, objective, strategy, policy to delivery. There is already a policy for affordable homes but for years it has failed to be delivered.

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