

## HOUSING & REGENERATION SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

### REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S DRAFT UNITARY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

#### REPORT - MAY 2003

#### **SCRUTINY FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. On the basis of discussions, Members focussed on the achievability of the high density housing levels set out in the London Plan and a number of difficulties were raised with these. In particular, Members considered the difficulty of accommodating a significant increase in affordable family housing in a way which would also be compatible with other sustainability issues. Southwark already has an a-typically large percentage of affordable rented housing and should be aiming to increase the percentage of higher income residents – who make proportionately fewer demands on council services and require fewer public facilities because they can access commercially provided services (which, in turn, generate employment opportunities).
2. It should also be recognised that Government policy is to redirect subsidy for new housing to outer London and the East Thames corridor, and that it is necessary to be realistic about the amount of profit that developers can afford to devote to subsidising affordable housing of the high quality outlined in the UDP, especially if its presence reduces the sale prices they can otherwise achieve.

**Recommendation 1: Southwark should establish a target for the balance it wishes to achieve between affordable housing (including different tenure types) and market housing and should aim to bring the borough closer into line with other inner London averages. This target should inform the UDP.**

3. We also questioned two expert witnesses who provide RSL accommodation about the factors that influence successful provision of high density affordable housing, particularly housing for families. Our witnesses agreed that two ingredients are essential: quality of design and construction, and good management. The following specific factors were cited:
  - a) Housing above 4 or 5 floors tends to have much higher management / service costs and it is unlikely that rental streams will be sufficient to attract Registered Social Landlords;
  - b) Demands / needs for community facilities are high where there are families, particularly for families who cannot afford to pay for schooling, private health, leisure facilities. These facilities (e.g. play areas, community centres, youth clubs, schools) require space – and land is scarce if it is also to be used for high density housing and to generate capital via Section 106 and PPG3 for the needs of the borough;
  - c) Flexible space standards are crucial for sustainability and Lifetime Homes standards should be required;
  - d) Families do not choose to be housed at height.
4. We concluded that affordable *family* housing at higher densities can be achieved, but it is unlikely to be achieved in the Opportunity Areas where density requirements and land values are highest (most expensive).

**Recommendation 2: That high housing densities in Opportunity Areas be achieved by encouraging intensive development of private housing at market rates. Southwark should ensure developers provide a high quality of design, landscaping and streetscape, recycling facilities, library, etc, and should seek capital in lieu of social housing on site in order to finance affordable family housing elsewhere in the borough.**

5. The Sub-Committee discussed the factors that make dense affordable housing unpopular and unsustainable. Members sought to identify elements of best practice which should be encouraged when delivering high density housing, which included:

- Provision of reasonable and flexible space [lifetime homes standards, or a return to Parker Morris standards];
- Consideration of communal facilities [in support of courtyards, slanted roofs and designed-in communal spaces];
- Provision of private amenity space within dwellings;
- Housing above commercial units;
- Consideration of principles of good design to render dwellings more habitable, e.g. building around stairwells rather than long corridors, limiting the number of properties sharing the same walkway/access;
- Stairwells being open to view from outside-in and from within-out;
- Use of half basements;
- Higher floors stepped back to minimise appearance of height;
- Good sound-proofing
- Cost of maintenance to be taken into consideration, e.g. height of buildings, slanting roofs;
- Designing out crime;
- Defensible space;
- Private balconies;
- Roof gardens;
- Courtyards;
- Be more specific on types of communal facilities which need to be in the area – youth clubs, play areas.

**Recommendation 3: That planners expand on design principles which will be applicable to sustainable density affordable housing, to enshrine these principles in the UDP and Special Planning Guidances and to codify these into design guidelines so that planning committees can assess proposals against these.**

**Recommendation 4: In the Action Areas, to achieve higher densities, better use should be made of the air space above commercial premises for dwellings (e.g. along the Old Kent Road). Single storey shopping malls and business premises should no longer be favoured.**

6. The Chair of Planning and the Sub-Committee considered that Community Councils may, for political reasons, find it more difficult to approve more intensive developments and higher densities set out in the UDP.

**Recommendation 5: That planning decisions by Community Councils be monitored carefully to see how pressures from the community are balanced against the requirements of the UDP.**

**Recommendation 6:** Members acknowledge the importance of public consultation during the planning process and recommend that developers be required [or at least encouraged] in future to consult with both applicants and objectors in respect of proposed development applications.

**Recommendation 7:** Members noted the issues raised in the deputation made by Nunhead Action Group to Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2002. Members acknowledge the need for quality and transparency in the delivery of planning, and ask Planning Committee to consider these issues as part of the end of year planning review.

**Recommendation 8:** Members considered the principle of developments being secure by design and of the possibility of designing out crime. Members note the points made in the submission from the Community Support and Safety Scrutiny Sub-Committee on this matter.