

## Department for Communities (DfC) Comments

### Local Government and Housing Regulation Division Input

We acknowledge the statutory link between the spatial plan and the district's community plan. The Local Development Plan shares the vision of the Fermanagh and Omagh Community plan 2030 of a “welcoming, shared and inclusive Fermanagh and Omagh district, where people and places are healthy, safe, connected and prosperous, and where our outstanding natural, built and cultural heritage is cherished and sustainably managed”.

### Engaged Communities Group Input



Local Development  
Plan 2030 - ECG part

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### Housing Input

*The Department welcomes the Council’s approach to the provision of mixed tenure housing and would reinforce that the Draft Plan Strategy should take specific account of the overall direction of housing policy in terms of meeting need and demand, tackling homelessness, supporting people, affordable, shared and private rented housing.*

*It is disappointing that the Draft Plan Strategy provides no visible commitment to addressing homelessness or improving good relations and promoting/advancing the shared housing agenda in Fermanagh & Omagh District Council area. Local Government can provide a range of opportunities for achieving the vision of NI Executive’s Together: Building a United Community Strategy to deliver “a united community...where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together”, through the development process. Such opportunities can be successfully secured through the provision of housing (whether in settlements or the countryside), community facilities and open and recreational space, as well the development of town and settlement centres (not just through the Community Plan) however, there is no evidence of such thinking coming forward in the Council’s Draft Plan Strategy.*

*Specifically, the Department would draw your attention to Sections within the document which may need to be revised to improve factual accuracy and compliance with current statutory requirements:*

- *The Draft Plan Strategy references to the provision of "affordable housing need" as measured by the Housing needs Assessment (see Paras 3.4, 3.5 (a)(ii), 3.11, 3.12, 3.61). For clarity, it might be useful to note that the NIHE Housing Needs Assessment only covers social housing need and that affordable housing also includes the provision of intermediate housing.*
- *At Paragraph 3.14 the correct reference would be Travellers’ Accommodation Needs Assessment.*
- *Paragraphs 3.14 and 3.62 refer to the retention of social rented housing in perpetuity. Such caveats directly contradict requirements under the House Sales Scheme and would require legislative change to implement.*

- *Draft Policy HOU17 limits the provision of "affordable housing" to registered Housing Associations. The Department suggests that it would be prudent to future proof the Draft Plan Strategy by removing this limitation given that Department is planning a review of the definition of affordable housing, which could encompass a broader definition of intermediate housing. As such, the plan should allow flexibility in this regard.*

*We attach a position statement from the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations for Councils which might provide useful additional information.*



NIFHA Position  
Statement on IL...

## **Local Development Plan 2030: Draft Plan Strategy - Statutory Consultation.**

### **Part-input from Engaged Communities Group re SCORR-0926-2018**

#### Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment

We have given significant thought to the issue of how MAG can most appropriately give assistance to Councils in the LDP process.

We have provided responses to a number of Preferred Options Papers, which we trust has been of value to the Councils concerned. Reflecting on those responses, rather than simply issuing consultation responses and letting matters lie, we feel that MAG may be able to make a more positive contribution by engaging directly with planning staff. For example, after a few meetings to set parameters, Belfast City Council and Lisburn/Castlereagh Council have invited us to participate in a stakeholder group in order to take their POP to the next stage.

With that idea in mind, we would like to offer Fermanagh and Omagh District Council MAG's engagement on whichever aspects of your POP or LDP process you feel we could most usefully discuss. Once we have an idea of the areas you would find most valuable, we could schedule a workshop with your staff, with a small group of two or three MAG members with relevant expertise.

If you feel that this proposal would be of interest, please do contact us at ([magsecretariat@communities-ni.gov.uk](mailto:magsecretariat@communities-ni.gov.uk)) and we can set about making the necessary arrangements.

# Local Development Plan-Making NIFHA Position Statement

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## Introduction

This position statement has been prepared on behalf of the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) to assist the Local Councils in the preparation of their Local Development Plans (LDP) with the assistance of Turleys planning consultancy.

As you are aware, a key component of the emerging local development plans is the need to make provision for housing delivery across the plan period. The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) specifically sets out that the LDP should bring forward a strategy for housing and amongst others things must deliver balanced communities:

“Achieving balanced communities and strengthening community cohesions is one of the major themes underpinning the RDS. The provision of good quality housing offering a variety of house types, sizes and tenures to meet different needs, and development that provides opportunities for the community to share in local employment, shopping, leisure and social facilities is fundamental to the building of more balanced communities.”

In particular the SPPS sets out that the LDPs should:

“Identify settlements where the HNA has found there to be an affordability pressure.”

The SPPS sets out that:

“The HNA/HMA (Housing Market Assessment) undertaken by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), or the relevant housing authority will identify the range of specific housing needs, including social/affordable housing requirements.”

Affordable housing is currently defined as social or intermediate housing. As the key provider of social and intermediate housing in Northern Ireland housing associations should be a key stakeholder in the local development plan making process. Disappointingly the associations have been given limited opportunity to be involved in the process or to assist with evidence gathering and this position statement is prepared in response to the lack of engagement with the sector.

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## Member Survey

As the representative body for housing associations NIFHA has undertaken a survey of all its member associations to understand their members' thoughts on the future provision of affordable housing. Housing Associations are the key provider of affordable housing in Northern Ireland and as such should be considered as a key stakeholder in the local plan making process.

A survey of housing associations was undertaken between 31 October 2018 and 7 November 2018. The survey sought clarity of four key areas, as follows:

- What is your preference for the provision of social and intermediate housing?
- Should planning policy prescribe the mix of housing to be provided within future planning applications?
- Is it appropriate for local Councils to prescribe design requirements for residential development which exceed those currently set out in planning policy?; and

- Are there any aspects of residential development where you would wish to see more flexibility applied?

Out of the thirteen associations invited to take part in the survey, eight responded, equating to two thirds of the NIFHA membership.

The feedback provided has been used to inform the contents of this paper, however it does not prevent individual member associations from making further submissions to the LDP plan-making process.

The remainder of this report will consider the feedback revised from the member survey and summarise the key recommendations for your consideration in preparing housing policies for your Council's LDP.

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## Feedback from Member Associations

### Provision of social and intermediate housing

Collectively there is recognition that all housing developments should provide a mix of type, tenure and size to contribute towards sustainable communities and meet the objectives of the SPPS.

The majority of housing associations consider that Council should provide for affordable housing to be provided on site either via a threshold approach that applies to all sites or as a key site requirement where a clear evidence of need has been provided. The survey found that the key site requirement was the most supported approach.

It was recognised that a threshold approach would secure a more flexible approach to the provision of affordable housing, however:

- The threshold should not be overly onerous on the viability of developments; and
- The requirement for the quantum and type of affordable housing should be based on an evidential need at the time.

This would assist in ensuring the right type of affordable housing it provided for within the right locations and will create opportunities for the provision of affordable housing where land has previously been unavailable to housing associations.

Caution should however be taken in setting a threshold approach as it will need to be reflective of the different affordable products. For example social housing is not needed in all locations and therefore policies should avoid affordable housing policies which require both social and intermediate housing to be provided on each site. On the other hand site specific zonings for affordable housing will not be flexible to provide for changes in need, particularly social housing need, over time.

We would recommend that the type of affordable provisions should be provided based on the need in the location at that time. It is therefore important that the Council's evidence base for proposed affordable housing policies is founded in a robust evidence base and must consider:

- That social housing need is defined by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and housing needs assessments prepared by the NIHE only consider social housing need;
- The location of social housing need cannot be determined across a 15 year plan period as those in need of social housing can change their locational preference at any time; and
- Religious and political divisions in the provision of social housing and how the Council proposes to overcome these issues to ensure that housing is delivered.

Affordable housing is currently defined as social and intermediate housing that is provided by housing associations, however other products such as Co-Ownership and FairShare are available as intermediate housing products through some housing associations. There are numerous other affordable housing products that could become available and as such policies should be flexible enough to respond to other products that already exist or may come to the market in the future.

### **Should planning policy prescribe the mix of housing to be provided within future planning applications?**

It was clear that there was a preference for a more flexible approach to policies relating to the mix of housing to be provided on sites, particularly in relation to the provision of social housing where the mix is determined on the need calculate by the NIHE. Councils should therefore work closely with the NIHE in formulating housing mix policies to ensure that they would not prejudice the future delivery of social housing however further consideration should also be given to the wider housing need to ensure that sustainable communities are delivered.

It will be important that the Councils have a robust baseline understanding of the existing social housing provision within their area and the proposed future social housing need to understand what quantum of land is needed and likely future infrastructure requirements for the area. Any assessment of need should also factor in the quality of existing stock to determine whether replacement stock should be planned for within the plan period. However, recognising the locational issues facing social housing delivery and that housing need can change over a 15 year plan period, the council should ensure sufficient flexibility within the proposed policy wording.

Policy wording should be able to adapt should the Councils' annual monitoring of the delivery of social housing show that locational need and the type of housing required has changed.

In relation to intermediate housing provision it will be important to consider that whilst the HNA or a HMA may show a need for a range of type and size of properties, those who are seeking intermediate housing may wish to have access to a different type of housing and that this will be a more market driven approach. Housing need for intermediate products is better understood within the local markets for sale and the private rental market.

### **Is it appropriate for local Councils to prescribe design requirements for residential development which exceed those currently set out in planning policy?**

The overwhelming feedback from the associations was that Councils should not use the LDP as an opportunity to prescribe overly onerous design requirements for residential development. The preference is that existing policies within the SPPS and planning policy statements (PPS') should be

carried forward to ensure a consistent approach to policies across Northern Ireland. This will provide better clarity for both housing associations and private developers.

Housing associations currently work to design criteria set out in planning policy and standards required by the NIHE, which are often more onerous than planning policy.

In order to support additional design standards being introduced, such as lifetime homes and wheelchair accessible home requirements, local councils should undertake a robust assessment of the need for such homes and should engage directly with housing associations to understand the necessity for such standards. They should also clearly define what is meant by lifetime homes and wheelchair accessible homes and take account of the costs associated with such development when considering the deliverability of planning policies.

### **Aspects of residential development where more flexibility should be applied?**

Following on the theme of requirements for residential developments, feedback was sought on those areas where a more flexible approach to policy should be considered to assist in the delivery and operation of housing sites.

Across the associations a more flexible approach to the provision of car parking would be welcomed. This is based on the operation of existing schemes where car ownership levels within some social housing schemes results in car parking being under used in some schemes. Policies for the provision of car parking should also consider the locational characteristics of individual sites, recognising that some sites will be located within city/town centres or areas well served by public transport or other sustainable modes of transport.

Open space is also identified as an area where a more flexible approach could be applied. Open space requirements for residential development can sometimes provide anti-social behaviour issues within schemes, leading to maintenance issues. In preparing policies for the provision of open space, councils should assess the existing quantity of provision and should consider what is required to meet future need, however an assessment of quality should also be undertaken. Policy provision for offsite provision or the maintenance of existing provision should be considered as a reasonable alternative.

Policies relating to density levels on sites should only be applied on a site by site basis and should be well informed by site assessments to fully understand the constraints associated within the development and the locational opportunities of some sites.

Overall it is considered that the requirements applied to residential development will vary on a site by site basis and a suitable level of flexibility should be incorporated in to proposed policies to allow for this.

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## Recommendations

Based on the feedback received from NIFHA member associations the following recommendations are made to assist local councils' in the preparation of their LDP:

- Caution should be taken when applying an affordable housing requirement across all residential sites as not all locations will have a social housing need;
- When applying a threshold approach to affordable housing provision the council should consider carefully the existing mechanisms for the delivery of social housing;
- Key site requirements seeking social or intermediate housing should be based on detailed and up to date housing need;
- The Council should ensure that their evidence base has assessed the need for both social and intermediate housing, both of which are currently provided by housing associations;
- Policy proposals should be flexible to adopt to site specific characteristics and ensure deliverability of housing;
- Policy wording should be flexible to adapt to changes over time, particularly in relation to the delivery of different affordable housing products; and
- Policy requirements for the design of residential development should be based on a robust assessment of need.

Finally, Councils should pro-actively engage, early in the plan-making process, with the housing sector and in particular the housing associations and developers responsible for the delivery of housing in order to better understand the operational realities of delivering development and the unintended consequences flowing from proposed policies.

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## Overview of Housing Association Sector in NI

The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) is the representative body for Northern Ireland's 20 registered housing associations. Collectively our members provide more than 50,000 homes comprising general needs, specialist and supported accommodation, as well as shared ownership.

Housing associations are not-for-profit social businesses that increasingly borrow significant amounts of private finance to deliver public benefit in meeting housing need, supporting their tenants and investing in communities.

Assets worth over £3.8 billion with an annual turnover of £331 million.

Over 3200 employed directly by housing associations, contributing £76m in wages to the local economy.

Ben Collins  
Chief Executive

