

Spaces for Living



LOWFIELD ROAD
BOLTON-ON-DEARNE
'PHASE 2'

JULY 2013

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1.0 Introduction

Gleeson Homes & Regeneration are submitting a planning application to Barnsley MBC to build 64 affordable family homes on a currently unused brownfield site. The site is located in Bolton upon Dearne, a popular residential area, and directly adjacent the southern boundary of our existing 'Phase 1' development.

Pre-application advice has highlighted the requirement to consider the minimum space standards recommended by the South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide (SYRDG), with the inference that houses within the proposals would need to meet these minimum standards.

The SYRDG was produced in 2011 and, whilst it has not been adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document, it is used as a good practice guide by Barnsley MBC, and informs their SPD 'Designing New Housing Development'.

The aim of the guide is to give direction to house builders and professionals throughout the design and planning process for residential development in South Yorkshire. Its opening paragraph states an intention to provide a clear and consistent approach *'that will result in higher quality neighbourhoods and efficiency savings for developers'*.

2.0 Policy Context

In Barnsley the relevant supporting policy for the South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide is the Core Strategy, adopted Sept '11, and in particular policy CSP29. This policy is supplemented by the SPD 'Designing New Housing Development', adopted March '12, which in turn references the SYRDG.

The core principles of the South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide derive from the Building for Life standards which were superseded last year by Building for Life 12 (BfL12). BfL12 makes scant reference to the size of dwellings. In Section 4 it simply advises the avoidance of *'creating too many larger or too many smaller homes from being grouped together'* and recommends the provision of starter homes and homes for downsizing households. Section 12 of BfL12 recommends the incorporation of adequate external amenity space and storage for bins and recycling, as well as vehicles and cycles.

Building for Life 12 is based on the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and reflects the Government's commitment to deliver more housing and better housing. In the NPPF, Paragraph 50 deals with increasing housing choice and opportunities for home ownership and the creation of sustainable communities. To achieve this, the framework suggests that local planning authorities should; *'identify the size, type, tenure and range of housing that is required in particular locations, reflecting local demand'*. The NPPF does not refer to minimum space standards or size of housing in any further detail.

The space standards contained in the South Yorkshire Design Guide derive from comprehensive research carried out for CABI and the Greater London Authority and a comparative assessment of space standards as adopted by a range of local

authorities including Basingstoke, Croydon, Haringey, Lambeth, Mid-Sussex, Richmond, Southwark and Watford.

So, clearly, in the establishment of its internal space standards, the SYRDG has reflected the standards set by Authorities in the South of England, rather than reflecting local demand as advised by the NPPF.

3.0 Gleeson's Ethos

Gleeson focusses solely in building low cost homes for people on low incomes in areas of industrial decline and social and economic deprivation. The company builds a range of affordable homes for sale to people who would otherwise be unable to afford a new home, thereby helping them onto the property ladder. Gleeson funds all of its own projects, allowing regeneration to take place without reliance on Government investment.

The company's success is borne out of a thorough understanding of its customers' needs and balancing aspiration with affordability. Gleeson's management team has specialist knowledge of all aspects of regeneration and a combined experience of over 150 years of building and selling low cost homes.

4.0 Scheme Proposals - Internal Space Standards

In the South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide, Section B3.2 of the Design Guidelines affirms that *'all new dwellings should be fit for purpose in terms of internal layout, dimensions and space standards'*.

To help the four South Yorkshire local authorities assess whether a dwelling is 'fit for purpose' the guide includes a table of minimum internal space standards (Table 4A.1) for overall floor areas and individual rooms in different sizes of dwellings.

The proposed scheme at Bolton-upon-Deane comprises 16no. two bedroom homes, 43no. three bedroom homes and 5no. four bedroom homes. All of the four bedroom homes, and half of the two bedroom properties are larger than the suggested standards in the SYRDG, with the other half of 2 beds (201 types) falling marginally under. The three bedroom homes are smaller; but are popular, well designed and fit for purpose.

The 201 house type is an entry level semi-detached home, resourcefully designed to help couples or young families on the property ladder. At 60.48sqm, the type falls less than 2sqm below the minimum size suggested in the guide.

The 301 house type is an entry level semi-detached home, resourcefully designed to help families onto the property ladder. The 302 house type is a wide frontage version of the 301 but presents a more efficient layout with reduced circulation areas. The majority of the room sizes exceed the minimum space standards.

The 303 house types provide further choice of a 3 bed family starter home with an entrance porch and internal hallway to maximise efficiency of the layout and create a spacious landing on the first floor. The living spaces are generous and the bedrooms are workable. The 304 house type is a detached version of the 303 type.

At 75sqm, the 309 house type is only 2sqm below the minimum space standards for a three bed property. It is a more aspirational family home with an internal garage and a sizeable garden. All of the bedrooms are more substantial than the minimum sizes set by the SYRDG. The 310 house type is a detached version of the 309 type.

All of the house type plans are appended to this document and incorporate furniture layouts in each room to demonstrate that the proposed homes are functional and fit for purpose. Key items of furniture are included such as; beds, bedside cabinets, wardrobes, drawers, tables, chairs, sofas and coffee tables, each showing a 'use zone'.

5.0 Scheme Proposals - Layout & Amenity

Section 2.0 of this document refers to the Building for Life 12 standards and their endorsement of interspersing different house sizes across developments and providing sufficient external amenity space and storage. The proposed scheme at Bolton-upon-Deane follows both these principles closely by incorporating a variety of house types set within generous plots.

The South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide is quite specific in its recommendation of minimum rear garden sizes. Section 4A of the guide advises that rear gardens to two bedroom houses should be a minimum of 50 square metres and houses with at least three bedrooms should have a back garden of 60 square metres as a minimum.

Within the application scheme, rear gardens to the two bedroom homes range in size from 53 square metres to 163 square metres. The three bedroom properties have rear gardens which vary from 47 square metres to 342 square metres, with the vast majority of these gardens measuring over 60 square metres. 4 bed rear gardens range from 75 square metres to 193 square metres.

All of the rear gardens exceed the minimum space standards set by the SYRDG, with the exception of just 4 plots which minimally fall below the threshold. They have sufficient space to store household and garden waste and also to enable the future provision of an extension or a conservatory, a garage and a shed or greenhouse. In addition, the proposed homes have generous front gardens with private driveways for two vehicles.

6.0 Recent Gleeson Developments in South Yorkshire

Since the South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide was published, Gleeson has had the following applications approved in the region:

- 145 plots at Barnbrough Lane, Goldthorpe, Barnsley;
- 60 plots off Lowfield Road, Bolton On Dearne, Barnsley;
- 31 plots off Moorland Avenue, Dodworth, Barnsley;
- 381 plots at former Croda chemical works, Rotherham, and;
- 18 plots St Aiden's Drive, Norfolk Park, Sheffield.

All of the above schemes incorporate the same house types proposed at Bolton-upon-Dearne, so would not have met the minimum space standards set by the SYRDG. St. Aiden's Drive has now been completed and the other sites are currently under construction. All of the developments have been extremely popular with customers, in particular St. Aiden's Drive and Moorland Walk which were sold out in 9 months and 12 months, respectively.

7.0 Affordability and Viability

Gleeson's homes are priced so that they can be afforded by 90% of local couples in full time employment. To establish sales prices, the Government's ASHE (Annual Survey of Hours & Earnings) figures are used to determine the lowest wages within the Local Authority. A modest multiple is then applied to the bottom twenty percentile to calculate the level of mortgage which can be afforded by 90% of people living in the local area. In the Yorkshire region, 75% of customers who have purchased a home from Gleeson since January 2012 have been first time buyers.

It is a fundamental requirement of the business model that Gleeson designs homes that its customers want to live in. The company's survival depends on it. Within the National Planning Policy Framework, the importance of ensuring viability and deliverability is acknowledged in paragraph 173, which states that:

'Pursuing sustainable development requires careful attention to viability and costs in plan-making and decision taking. Plans should be deliverable. Therefore, the sites and the scale of development identified in the plan should not be subject to such a scale of obligations and policy burdens that their ability to be developed viably is threatened. To ensure viability, the costs of any requirements likely to be applied to development, such as requirements for affordable housing, standards, infrastructure contributions or other requirements should, when taking account of the normal cost of development and mitigation, provide competitive returns to a willing land owner and willing developer to enable the development to be deliverable.'

It should therefore be recognised that Gleeson could not deliver a viable scheme without absolute certainty that its homes are large enough and fit for purpose. The Company's sound business plan and thorough understanding of its customers ensures that its developments are viable and deliverable, and the application scheme at Bolton-upon-Dearne is no exception.

The application scheme uses standard house types as they are practical, commercial and the designs are known to be attractive to customers.

Increasing the size of the standard house types will increase the cost of housing and the land intake, thereby reducing the number of people that can afford a new home and adversely affecting the viability of developments.

8.0 Efficient Homes

Affordability is not just about the purchase price of a dwelling and Gleeson prides itself on building energy efficient homes with low maintenance and running costs. The larger the house, the more it costs to heat and to run, so Gleeson's house types are resourcefully designed to minimise circulation areas and to maximise what would normally be considered as 'dead space' such as under stairs and staircase bulkheads.

Gleeson has recently undertaken a utility bill survey whereby customers who have been living in their homes for more than one year were asked to provide a copy of their electricity and gas bills. The survey demonstrates that it costs an average of just £6.50 per week to heat a 2 bed house and £6.50 per week to power it. Running costs are an important consideration for customers when purchasing a home. It is therefore vital that household bills are kept to a minimum by building dwellings which are efficient and, through a reduction in their carbon footprint; sustainably responsible.

9.0 Conclusion

Section 1.5 of the South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide sets out five outcomes for places created by new housing development; including efficiency, flexibility and adaptability. It recognises that these features help to ensure sustainable development.

The substantial external amenity space proposed at Bolton-upon-Deane offers the opportunity of future expansion of the home by its occupants; thereby creating a flexible and adaptable new neighbourhood. The proposed house types are appropriately spacious but efficiently designed so that they are affordable to buy, easy to maintain and inexpensive to run.

Paragraph 59 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that:

'Local planning authorities should consider using design codes where they could help deliver high quality outcomes. However, design policies should avoid unnecessary prescription or detail and should concentrate on guiding the overall scale, density, massing, height, landscape, layout, materials and access of new development in relation to neighbouring buildings and the local area more generally.'

The application scheme at Lowfield Road will enhance the surrounding neighbourhood physically, aesthetically and economically, so it is Gleeson's view that prescribing minimum space standards is unwarranted. Furthermore the development will be sustainable, attractive and deliverable and in accordance with the NPPF 'should go ahead, without delay'.