

Matter 2: Overarching strategy: achieving net zero carbon developments

Issue

Does the DPD provide a reasonable approach to Warwick's declared climate emergency and does it identify an appropriate overarching strategy towards achieving net zero carbon development within Warwick District? Is the approach set out justified, effective and in accord with national policy?

Questions

1. Are the aims and objectives of the DPD, as submitted, soundly based and do they form an appropriate response to the climate emergency declared in Warwick District?

- 1.1 The report submitted by Barton Willmore, now Stantec (June 2022) (at **Appendix 1**) sets out the conclusions of a review of the proposed policies within Warwick District Council's (WDC) Draft Net Zero Carbon DPD and the assessments supporting the draft DPD as part of the evidence base. In regard to the aims and objectives of the draft DPD, these respond to WDC's commitments resulting from the Climate Emergency which was declared on 27th June 2019 and the role of the planning system in helping to achieve the ambitions of the Climate Emergency Action Programme (CEAP), through developing policies and setting standards aimed at reducing carbon emissions by improving net zero carbon building standards.

It is generally considered an appropriate response however there are areas for improvement as set out in the reps (Appendix 1) and in more detail below. Concerns and recommendations for amendment relate to providing greater justification for the proposed requirements and ensuring that viability testing is sound. There are areas where the proposals would exceed national policy for achieving net zero carbon, which is not required and would not be deliverable/viable in some cases.

2. Is the general approach of the DPD through *Policy NZC1 – Achieving Net Zero Carbon Development* a reasonable one?

- 2.1 The review of the proposed DPD policies has assessed how each of these policies compare to national building regulation standards, industry best practice, and similar policies and precedents in the Local Plans of other local authority areas.
- 2.2 Building Regulations Part L 2021 provides a 31% reduction in allowable carbon dioxide emissions compared to Part L 2013. New Building Regulations Part L are now in force. This is in line with accelerating the national Future Homes Standard set for 2025, which aims for new homes built to a 'zero carbon ready' standard in 2025 and is designed to achieve operational net zero carbon by 2030 without the need for retrofit works as the national grid is predicted to continue to decarbonise.
- 2.3 It should be noted however that policy NZC1 sets this as a minimum on-site performance measure, exceeding the timeline set for the Future Homes Standard (FHS) and going beyond the national policy approach. New dwellings built to this proposed net zero standard before 2025 will become carbon negative without retrofit work as the electricity grid continues to decarbonise. It is our opinion that this is excessive, and that the council should not be seeking to set a local target

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beyond net zero carbon. As set out in the reps at Appendix 1, it is considered that the built cost uplift from current standards to the specification required by NZC1 achieved by NZC3 has been underestimated.

- 2.4 It is considered that there are more reasonable alternatives for each draft DPD policy than the three options presented, and that these should also be explored. These options could for example comprise policies and standards set by other local planning authorities and the London Plan 2021, as identified in The Energy & Sustainability Policy Review (2022), which has been completed in support of the draft DPD to research how plan policy requirements have been structured and justified in other adopted plans, therefore forming a proxy evidence base for their applicability in Warwick. It is unclear why the other policy requirements in here have not been considered and appraised for sustainability effects in the SA, for example, as these may comprise equally good or better options than those currently presented.
- 2.5 Section 4 of the Reg 19 SA Report concludes that the main reason for progressing the draft DPD rather than the Do-Nothing or the National Approach to Improving Energy Efficiency scenarios is that the strategy set out in the draft DPD progresses WDC's climate change commitments. The other two scenarios do not progress WDC's commitments for becoming a net zero carbon organisation by 2025 and facilitating the total carbon emissions within Warwick District as close to zero as possible by 2030. Due to the limited options appraised, it seems that this conclusion has been foregone throughout the process. It is unknown whether the other possible alternatives mentioned above would successfully contribute to WDC's commitments and objectives.

3. Specifically, is the approach within the DPD to introduce local carbon reduction targets ahead of national Government-led targets (e.g. the Future Homes Standard in 2025) justified and set on a sound basis?

- 3.1 As set out in our response to question 2, policy NZC1 sets this as a minimum on-site performance measure, exceeding the timeline set for the Future Homes Standard (FHS) and going beyond the national policy approach. New dwellings built to this proposed net zero standard before 2025 will become carbon negative without retrofit work as the electricity grid continues to decarbonise. It is our opinion that this is excessive, and that the council should not be seeking to set a local target beyond net zero carbon. As set out in response to question 4, the FHS has been used as justification for policy NZC1, it does not however provide justification for exceeding the FHS requirements and timetable, and therefore does not remain within the national policy approach. It is our opinion that the Council should not be seeking to set a local net zero carbon standard above the FHS net zero ready approach, particularly given that the evidence provided suggests that the uplift in build cost to meet this standard may have been underestimated.
- 3.2 Considering fabric design and how a building is heated requires careful consideration as a building fabric needs to be suitable for a particular renewable technology. Therefore whilst there may be scope to apply renewable technologies to buildings to provide a net zero carbon product, this may be counterproductive and result in higher energy usage and running costs. Considerable time and technical work is spent to ensure a 'fit for purpose' structure and fabric designed achieving the 75-80% reduction without compromising the end user. An uplift on this in excess of the Government-led targets is therefore considered to be unfeasible.

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4. Does Policy NZC1, and the strategy set out within it, accord with national policy?

- 4.1 A comparison was undertaken (Appendix 1) between Policy NZC1 and Building Regulation standards and industry best practice including the London Plan.
- 4.2 Building Regulations Part L 2021 took effect on 15th June 2022 in England and provide a 31% reduction in allowable carbon dioxide emissions compared to Part L 2013. The proposed policy NZC1 is therefore a total 75% reduction in carbon emissions over the current Building Regulations standard. This is in line with accelerating the national Future Homes Standard set for 2025, which aims for new homes built to a 'zero carbon ready' standard in 2025 and is designed to achieve operational net zero carbon by 2030 without the need for retrofit works as the national grid is predicted to continue to decarbonise.
- 4.3 The London Plan 2021 is referenced as policy precedent for policy NZC1, however the GLA has released energy planning guidance to confirm that the London Plan net zero carbon target will be with a minimum 35% reduction in carbon emissions delivered by onsite measures for new residential developments, compared to the Part L 2021 baseline. This is 28% lower than the proposed policy NZC1.
- 4.4 The FHS has been used as justification for policy NZC1, it does not however provide justification for exceeding the FHS requirements and timetable, and therefore does not remain within the national policy approach. It is our opinion that the Council should not be seeking to set a local net zero carbon standard above the FHS net zero ready approach.
- 4.5 A local case study for Gallows Hill is referenced as a demonstration of feasibility of policy NZC1 with a 77-80% reduction in carbon emissions over Part L 2013. No details are provided however on how the building specification for this site would perform against Part L 2021 or against the proposed NZC1 energy hierarchy, which would be required to be considered a robust example of feasibility.

5. How does Policy NZC1 sit comfortably with the adopted Warwick Local Plan and its relevant policies?

- 5.1 Reducing emissions from buildings themselves is essential in achieving decarbonised lifestyles and meeting the Government's 2050 net zero commitment. However, buildings themselves are only once source of greenhouse gas emissions with transport in particular playing a large part. Land use planning, ensuring that active and sustainable travel methods are prioritised and facilitated has the potential to result in significant carbon reduction. Facilitating behavioural shift would likely remove the need to go above and beyond national policy and standard for buildings if the policy framework is supportive. Whilst we support buildings being net zero carbon ready and on the national trajectory to net zero, a flexible approach would allow innovation and other ways of reducing the climate change impact of living to come to fruition, rather than putting further pressure on delivering much needed housing through increased build costs. A flexible approach to carbon reduction through holistic sustainable design is key. This is in accordance with Objective B of the adopted Local Plan which aims for well designed development in the right place that address climate change. Strategic policy DS3 supports delivering a low carbon economy and sustainable lifestyles and Policy NZC1 is in line with this aim. It should be noted that the adopted Local Plan policies predate the Government's net zero commitment but there is no justification for NZC1 exceeding it in terms of more onerous requirements than the FSH net zero ready requirement.

6. Is everything covered within Policy NZC1 that needs to be?

- 6.1 Policy NZC1 focuses on carbon of the buildings themselves, as is the stated aim. As discussed above however, the linkages between other aspects of sustainability should not be underestimated and any policy context is considered to be more effective when a holistic approach is taken. Places that focus on enhancing biodiversity, providing quality green and blue infrastructure and landscaping providing natural cooling and shading, opportunities for active and low-zero travel all contribute to reducing emissions more so than focusing narrowly on the buildings themselves. Innovation will likely play an important role in reducing carbon emissions from developments and a flexible approach to considering whole life carbon of development including emissions from travel and other sources would likely provide more opportunities for deliverable development to come forward whilst still meeting the national decarbonisation objectives.
- 6.2 It would be helpful to include whether any technology or sustainable innovations had been implemented in the plan area since the Local Plan adoption and the previous consultations due to increasing awareness of the climate change agenda that were having a positive effect on the baseline carbon emissions and sustainability and may change the context. Such initiatives may include more prevalent landscaping and planting, incorporation of electric vehicle charging points, the use of ultra-low emission bus schemes, improved waste management, increased solar panels on recent developments. Consultation and engagement with existing developers could assist in highlighting examples of where such initiatives have been implemented and may also provide baseline data on energy efficiency and carbon reductions.

7. Is there a justification to include a target FEE (space heat demand) of 15-20 kWh/m²/yr within Policy NZC1, or similar, and would the inclusion or omission of such a target go to the soundness of the DPD?

- 7.1 As set out above, we would discourage any further restrictive wording within Policy NZ1. Room for innovation is important and narrowly worded policies restrict being able to take a holistic approach to more sustainable living and will likely make delivering much needed housing unviable in some circumstances.

8. Is sufficient clarity provided within the DPD in relation to the content and scope of energy statements and when they are required?

- 8.1 Policy NZC1 sets an energy hierarchy which must be implemented via the submission of an energy statement, the stages of the hierarchy are set out in policies NZC1, NZC2(A), NZC2(B), and NZC2(C).
- 8.2 The requirements are set out throughout, e.g. in Policy NZC2(A) all energy statements must also lay out the U-values and airtightness of the proposed building in comparison to the notional values in the Future Homes Standard. Policy NZC2(B) states the submitted energy statement should consider all available zero or low carbon energy sources and gives examples. This is therefore considered to be sufficiently clear.

9. Are there any requirements that should not be in Policy NZC1 with regard to soundness?

- 9.1 We suggest that in place of a planning condition requiring an as built SAP or SBEM calculation for each building, the condition should instead require an as built energy strategy which confirms the

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as built performance in line with policy NZC1. This would reduce the number of approval transactions the council would have to undertake and avoid delays in clearing post-construction conditions. By clearing conditions sooner, the delivery speed of quality development can be increased which is necessary to help reduce the housing crisis.

10. Will there be any unacceptable impact on housing delivery and development generally as a result of the overarching strategy and Policy NZC1 of the DPD, as submitted?

- 10.1 As set out above and in the representations at Appendix 1, concerns relate to the build cost uplift for exceeding national policy for energy in buildings. Positive action towards net zero can and should also be achieved through embedding multifunctional solutions in high quality placemaking e.g. facilitating active and sustainable travel modes, co-locating land uses, including renewable energy generation and encouraging behavioural shift to less carbon intensive lifestyles. By adopting a more inclusive approach to reducing emissions instead of requiring excessively onerous requirements on the buildings themselves, good progress could be made without affecting viability in an untenable way.