



# Aberdeen Local Development Plan Review

## Main Issues Report Response Form 2019

Aberdeen City Council has published a Main Issues Report (MIR) which is part of the process of preparing a new Local Development Plan. It is designed to gather views on specific proposals and sets out options for dealing with the key planning matters facing Aberdeen over the next 20 years such as the location of new housing and employment development, the future of retailing and the City Centre, housing needs and tackling climate change. It also includes a number of potential new policies which would be used in the determination of planning applications.

The MIR has been published alongside a Monitoring Statement and Environmental Report. Copies are available to view at Marischal College, Broad Street, Aberdeen. These, and other supporting documents, are available at: - [www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/alp2022](http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/alp2022)

Everyone now has the chance to comment on the report and associated documents. All comments received will be considered and used to inform the preparation of the Proposed Aberdeen City Local Development Plan. There will be a further opportunity to comment on the Proposed Plan when it is published in early 2020.

**The consultation runs from 4 March 2019 to 13 May 2019.**

Responses to the published documents can be:

- made online at:- <http://consultation.aberdeencity.gov.uk/planning/mir2019>;
- emailed to:- [ldp@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:ldp@aberdeencity.gov.uk); or
- by post to:- Local Development Plan Team, Strategic Place Planning, Aberdeen City Council, Business Hub 4, Ground Floor North, Marischal College, Broad Street, Aberdeen, AB10 1AB.

**Completed response forms should be with us no later than 13 May 2019.**



## YOUR DETAILS

Name	Michael Lorimer
Organisation (if relevant)	Ryden LLP
On behalf of (if relevant)	Barratt North Scotland
Address	
Postcode	
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E-mail	

Thank you for taking the time to complete this response form. If you wish to be added to the LDP e-mailing list to be kept informed of our progress in producing the next Local Development Plan, please tick here



If yes, please provide an e-mail address

### PRIVACY STATEMENT

As part of the review of the Local Development Plan, Aberdeen City Council (ACC) will offer you several opportunities to submit your views and comments. These opportunities will range from the current consultation stage, the Main Issues Report, where we will ask you to comment on specific proposals and alternatives to the Proposed Plan stage where the set view of ACC has been established.

ACC are legally required to consult at this stage and at Proposed Plan stage. This is set out in the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended) and supporting regulations. The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 also requires us to consult on a Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report.

By submitting a response to the consultation, you understand that ACC can use the information provided in this form, including personal data, as part of the review of the Aberdeen City Local Development Plan. ACC will not share or disclose any personal data about you to any organization or person unless it is authorized or required to do so by law.

The data controller for this information is ACC. We understand our legal basis for processing this information as Article 6(1)(c) of the General Data Protection Regulation as this is an activity we are legally required to carry out under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended) and supporting regulations and The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. The data on the form will be used to inform the preparation of the Proposed Aberdeen City Local Development Plan 2022. At the end of the consultation, where contact details have been provided, the Local Development Plan team will provide you with a respondent number. You may also be contacted about the comments you have made and, as obliged by the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended) and supporting regulations, the Local Development Plan team will contact you to inform you of the publication of the proposed Aberdeen Local Development Plan in early 2020. If you chose not to provide your contact details, your comments will still be valid but we will not be able to contact you in the future.

Responses will be collated, redacted, summarised and stored electronically or in locked cabinets in Marischal College. All redacted responses will be published, alongside the respondents name (if provided), on the Aberdeen City Local Development Plan website. Contact details will not be made public, but your name and respondent number will be published.

Aberdeen City Council will only keep your personal data for as long as is needed. Data will be kept until the emerging Local Development Plan is itself replaced – this is likely to be around 5 years following its adoption in 2022 – so 2027. Following this, data will be disposed of in a secure manner.

### YOUR DATA, YOUR RIGHTS

You've got legal rights about the way ACC handles and uses your data, which include the right to ask for a copy of it, and to ask us to stop doing something with your data. Please contact the Council's Data Protection Officer by e-mailing [DataProtectionOfficer@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:DataProtectionOfficer@aberdeencity.gov.uk) or writing to Data Protection Officer, Aberdeen City Council, Governance, Level 1 South, Marischal College, Broad Street, Aberdeen, AB10 1AB. More information is available at: - <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/your-data>

## YOUR COMMENTS

<p>Which document(s) are you commenting on?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Main Issues Report</li><li>• Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report</li><li>• Monitoring Statement</li></ul>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
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Please indicate the document and the specific Issue, Question, Site, Policy, Map or Table you are commenting on. Please provide your comments below and explain your reason for supporting, opposing or commenting on this specific part of the document.

Please refer to attached Paper Apart.

**YOUR COMMENTS CONTINUED**

## **PAPER APART**

# **Representations to the Aberdeen City Local Development Plan 2019 Main Issues Report on behalf of Barratt North Scotland**

## **Introduction**

Barratt North Scotland (Barratt) welcome the fact that Aberdeen City Council have published their Main Issues Report (March 2019) as an early indicator of key areas of policy change from the extant Local Development Plan (LDP) 2017 and identification of new sites where development may be permitted. This response focuses on the identified policy areas and numerically referenced Main Issues. A separate, site specific response has been prepared in relation to Development Bids pursued at Pre-MIR Stage by Barratt.

At the outset, it should be expressed that there remains a general concern across the Housebuilding Industry over the lack of clarity regarding issues surrounding Housing Land Supply and associated allowances derived from the Strategic Development Plan (SDP), particularly given this document has yet to be formally scrutinised by Scottish Ministers and the figures have not been adopted. A detailed response on this matter has recently been submitted by Barratt to the consultation into the Aberdeen City and Shire Proposed SDP and this has been summarised in response to the MIR's proposed Settlement Strategy pertaining to 'Housing Allowances and New Sites'.

Additionally Barratt wish to comment and specifically object to a number of Policy matters. The following representations highlight the areas of concern, as well as the associated recommendations and changes which should be factored into the preparation of the Proposed LDP.

## **Vision and Objectives**

My client is generally content with the vision contained within the extant Local Development Plan (LDP) and feels it is worthy of retention, albeit with a number of minor tweaks as proposed within the recent publication of the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan (SDP) Main Issues Report 2018. These changes promote industry diversification and resilience, in recognition of the challenges the North East has experienced through the recent Oil and Gas restructuring. It is acknowledged that the Local Government and Communities Committee voted to retain SDPs during consideration of amendments to the Planning Bill Stage 2, despite the Bill previously outlining that they should be removed from the Planning System. Given these ongoing uncertainties with regard to the future of SDPs, Barratt would agree that maintaining strong links and consistency between the LDP and the Aberdeen City and Shire SDP is appropriate, as well as close ties with the Regional Economic Strategy.

## **Local Development Plan Polices and Supplementary Guidance**

It is noted that in cognisance of the proposed abolition of Supplementary Guidance as proposed as part of the new Planning Bill, the MIR suggests that a review of existing Supplementary Guidance (SG) to bring some policy aspects into the next LDP. Such an approach is tentatively welcomed, as Barratt feels that the some of the existing SG is cumbersome, over prescriptive and confusing for local communities. Whether such abolition is carried forward as part of the future of the Bill or not, Barratt would welcome such a review and rationalisation of SG. However, it should not be seen as an opportunity to overly complicate the content of LDP Polices, which should remain succinct and understandable for all those engaged with the planning system.

## **Settlement Strategy**

Barratt note the settlement strategy outlined within the MIR, which emphasises that any new housing and employment allowances are put forward in line with the Proposed SDP 2018. However, as touched on within the introductory paragraphs above, Barratt maintains concerns over the calculation of Housing Need and Demand and the associated Housing Allowances that have been derived from this within the Proposed SDP. This is a result of the identification of a Housing Supply Target (HST) based upon a modified version of the Principle Growth Scenario as contained within Housing Needs and Demand Assessment. Barratt have submitted comprehensive responses in response to Housing Need and Demand to the ongoing Review of the SDP, both at MIR and Proposed Plan stage. Whilst some modifications were undertaken between the two stages, which substituted the previous use of a 'Composite' Growth Scenario in favour of a Modified Principle Growth Scenario in setting the HST, it is maintained that the latter still lacks ambition and contradicts the wider growth aspirations for the regional economy.

Considering that the extant SDP set clear aspirations to move toward building 3,000 homes per annum by 2020, setting the HST at 2,200 per annum between 2020 – 2032 is unacceptable. Barratt believes that the Proposed SDP should have utilised the High Growth Scenario presented within the Housing Needs and Demand Assessment. This is the only growth scenario which provides any degree of comfort that sufficient growth and delivery will be achieved in the housebuilding industry. Through an ambitious Housing Supply Target, Housing Land Requirement and sufficiently generous additional allowances, this would provide the next LDP the ability to create substantially more allocations across the lifetime of the plan, supplementing the existing supply and thereby creating the optimum conditions to achieve accelerated housing delivery and growth within the industry.

Unlike previous MIRs, it is disappointing that the current document does not identify land supply and the scale of new allocations as a Main Issue in its own right. This would have afforded the Development Industry the opportunity to properly debate the current proposal for only 4,168 new homes to be allocated in the period 2021-2031 within the next LDP. Such an approach is considered all the more crucial given the current status of the Proposed SDP, which has yet to undergo formal scrutiny by Scottish Ministers. In that respect, the content of the SDP and the housing allowances set out therein could be subject to change and increased, should a Reporter appointed to undertake the examination adopt a different methodology in calculating the Housing Land Requirement in line with unresolved

objections from Barratt, Homes for Scotland and the wider housebuilding industry. Whilst the MIR concludes that land for an additional 640 requires to be identified to supplement the existing supply of housing land, it is maintained that this number is misleading, as in its calculation a lot of sites which are ineffective and constrained have been considered effective; accordingly the number of sites that require to be identified should be significantly increased to ensure an appropriate supply of housing land.

#### Question 1 – New Housing Sites

In arriving at the 640 unit figure, the MIR sets out the various sources from which it anticipates that new housing could come forward and count toward the 4168 Period 1 (2020 – 32) Allowances. Whilst it is welcomed that constrained greenfield sites identified within the base 2018 HLA have been discounted, Barratt objects to the suggestion that some 3,408 units could come forward by way of existing Brownfield sites, as identified within the Brownfield Urban Potential Study undertaken to inform the MIR. Brownfield sites by their very nature can pose issues with deliverability due to constraints such as contamination, demolition requirements and overarching viability issues. This is evident for a number of sites listed within the Brownfield Urban Capacity Study, which have been allocated for redevelopment for a sustained period of time, yet have failed to come to fruition. Furthermore, a significant proportion of the sites listed within the Study are within private ownership. There is no apparent delivery strategy or timescales identified for these sites to come forward, therefore suggestion that 3,408 units (over 80%) derived from brownfield sites should account towards the SDP allowance of 4168 homes is very concerning. It is maintained that such an approach would contravene Paragraph 119 of Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) which requires local development plans in city regions to allocate a **“range of sites”** which are effective or expected to become effective in the plan period.

Accordingly, and in response to Question 1 – *Do you agree with our preferred housing sites?* Barratt is not in agreement with the limited range of sites identified within the MIR. It is considered that the MIR in its current form does not allocate an appropriate mix of sites to ensure a range and choice which are capable of delivery. It should therefore be supplemented with an additional greenfield release, free from constraints and capable of delivery, such as those promoted by Barratt as Development Bids at pre-MIR stage and subject to the submission of separate representations to the MIR.

There is a high reliance on sites that are currently in either local authority or NHS ownership, around half of all preferred sites. These sites have not necessarily been considered surplus to requirements, or have the potential to cater for multiple uses. In a lot of cases there is no capacity associated with them and thus there is no indicator as to whether the preferred sites are sufficient to deliver the housing land supply alone.

## Question 2 – Housing Allowances beyond 2032

It is noted that Aberdeen City Council do not propose to identify sites for longer term development or “Strategic Reserve”, which is identified as a non-mandatory option within the Proposed SDP. Barratt object to this stance and maintains that to be consistent with the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan review, which seeks to conform to the same Strategic Development Plan (SDP), sites should be identified for longer term development following a mid-term review of the LDP. These could either be identified as stand-alone sites that are reserved or indeed subsequent phases of sites identified through the proposed LDP 2022. This would provide more certainty to both the development industry and local communities on the future direction of growth for the City. Such an approach would also provide additional flexibility to draw down on future allocations should any shortfall in meeting the housing land supply be experienced within the LDP period.

### **Main Issue 1 – Living in the City Centre**

Barratt generally welcome the preferred option contained within the MIR to include Policy support for residential use within the City Centre within the main body of the LDP, as opposed to the existing approach which outlines such support within SG. Whilst it doesn’t represent a step-change in approach from that of the current LDP, it does place greater emphasis on supporting the aims of the City Centre Masterplan CCMP. As such, in order to deliver the aims and objectives of the City Centre Masterplan and the new LDP policy should provide as much flexibility as possible to attract a range of uses to the city centre to bolster its existing retail offering and therefore tentatively welcomes Policy NC9: City Centre Living contained at Appendix 1 of the MIR. Flexibility must be demonstrated when assessing levels of residential amenity, in recognition of the dense urban form and restrictions in achieving external amenity space, particularly within conversions of existing non-residential buildings.

City centre developments whether conversions or redevelopment of brownfield sites should not be promoted at the expense of new greenfield sites, which are free from constraints and deliverable. Whilst the principles of city centre living are to be supported and encouraged, they are unlikely to significantly support the delivery of new homes as identified within the SDP, across the next LDP plan period.

## Question 15 – Percentage for Art

Whilst Barratt recognise the role that art projects can attribute to the placemaking and distinctiveness of the City Centre, objection is taken to the proposal set out within Question 15 and related new Policy NC12: Public Art Contribution contained within Appendix 1 of the MIR. This would require developers to contribute 1% of construction costs for all developments which incur construction costs of over £1 million. It is felt that such a contribution, on top of ever growing list of Developer Contributions sought from the housebuilding industry would be too onerous and disproportionate. Instead, the focus for the Council should be to ensure the overarching placemaking agenda contained within numerous LDP policies of the LDP are delivered within developments across the city, rather than extracting funds to attempt to deliver aspiration art projects.



Furthermore, there appears to be a discrepancy in relation to the implementation of this policy. The question falls under Main Issue 1 which relates to City Centre Living, which would infer that the intended policy approach to extract public funding would only relate to developments located within the defined Centre boundary. However, the wording of proposed Policy NC12 suggests that all developments will be required to allocate 1% of their construction costs. Notwithstanding Barratt's objection to the principle of such a policy, if this was to filter into the next LDP, the Policy should clearly distinguish that it relates only relates to City Centre development. It is understood that the intention is that this policy applies to large scale commercial development within the city centre, however this does not translate to the draft policy wording. Commercial development does not yield developer contributions to mitigate impacts on education and community facilities and in this respect a percentage for art policy is likely to be more viable.

#### **Main Issue 4 – Minimum Space Standards for New Residential Development**

It is noted that the MIR seeks to introduce a minimum internal space standard for new residential development across the city in line with the 'Nationally Prescribed Space Standard'. This would see a significant change from the current position, which does not currently enforce such standards, instead adopting a more flexible, design-led approach, which is regulated by other placemaking policies and supplementary guidance. As part of the justification for the proposed change in policy approach appears to be a suggestion that the UK has the smallest homes by floor space area of any European country at 76m<sup>2</sup>. It is noted that the MIR provides no source to back up these statements. In conjunction with HFS, this matter has been further investigated and the 76m<sup>2</sup> appears to be based on historic analysis dating back to an English House Condition Survey undertaken in 1996. Concern is therefore raised at the lack of credible, up-to-date and Scottish based evidence presented to support the Council's preferred option to introduce a minimum space standard.

Indeed, a more pertinent approach would be to undertake a more focussed research review of the average floor areas of new housing within Aberdeen City approved over the last 5 years. This would present a more accurate reflection of the average internal floor space areas for recent residential developments throughout the city. Barratt believes that the current LDP approach, which advocates a design / masterplan-led approach to new development better reflects the spirit of creating a varied and interesting range of new housing, situated to particular site characteristics and circumstances and is a more appropriate mechanism for the delivery of homes. Overreliance on an overly prescriptive and uniform set space standards could sterilise development and lead to serious viability issues for developers and also the affordability for potential purchasers. It is recognised that this matter is highlighted within both the preferred and alternative options.

Presently, internal space standards are to an extent governed by Building Standards, whereby minimum activity and circulation space standards within new housing are set. Adding another layer of complexity through the introduction of an internal space standard through planning policy would therefore be unnecessary and counterproductive.

Barratt would therefore object to implementation of either the Preferred or Alternative Options as contained in relation to Main Issue 4. Instead the current approach should be maintained.

### Question 16 External Space Standards for new Residential Development

In general, Barratt feels that the existing policies of the LDP command appropriate levels of external amenity space within developments. As highlighted above in respect of the proposed introduction of a set of standards for internal space, a similar approach for external space would not be welcomed. Instead new development should be design-led and respond to the specific nature and characteristics of a particular site. Application of a “one size fits all” approach to set for new dwellings, flats and conversions are likely to present issues of unworkability for certain scenarios and would likely lead to conflict with other policy agendas such as attracting significant residential development within the city centre. Barratt instead request a more flexible approach to identifying the exact quantity and quality of amenity on a site by site basis, as is currently the case and favour more innovative approaches to the provision of amenity space, particularly within city centre redevelopment schemes where space is much more restrictive. A rigid list of standards is unlikely to achieve this.

### Question 17- Natural Environment

The MIR proposes to roll forward the existing 2017 LDP policies pertaining to the Natural Environment into the next LDP, albeit consolidated under a more streamlined list of policy topics. Barratt are generally supportive of this approach, however maintain a number of concerns over the overly restrictive content and wording of a number of these policies as summarised below. It is therefore contented that a review of the existing policy wording should be undertaken prior to publication of the Proposed Plan.

Policy NE4 – Open Space Provision in New development, which is proposed to be merged into a new Policy NE2: Green and Blue Infrastructure, stipulates that 2.8 hectares per 1,000 people of meaningful and useful open space must be provided in new residential development. Such a requirement advocates a “one size fits all” approach to all sites. This contradicts other parts of the Policy which, recognise the findings of Aberdeen’s Open Space Audit 2010, which proposes a more flexible approach to identifying the exact level and mix of open space and being responsive to the level of existing provision, its quality and accessibility, and on a site by site basis.

Policy NE5 – Trees and Woodlands and its existing supplementary guidance needs to be substantially reviewed as it is not fit currently for purpose, placing overly restrictive policy and guidance which serves to stymie development across the city, rather than promoting a more flexible approach to tree management. The reading of the policy asserts that no development will take place if there is an impact on trees. Such an approach applied within the built up confines of a city, with significant areas of established trees is entirely unworkable. There will undoubtedly be a requirement for tree management on both brownfield and greenfield sites, however it should be guided by appropriate mitigation strategies.

My client, as well as the wider development industry has difficulties engaging with this policy and in particular the details within the Supplementary Guidance. A main area of concern is in relation to “*Proximity of Structures and Infrastructure to Trees*”, which relates to their zone of influence. Strict application of this guidance would have serious implications for the wider delivery aspirations in relation to existing sites and allocations contained within the LDP. Development proposals offer the opportunity

to work with existing trees to promote sustainable tree management and supplementary landscaping and planting arrangements to ensure any potential loss is appropriately mitigated. It is therefore requested that this policy be reviewed and it would be beneficial to have input and advice from an appropriately qualified, third party arboriculturalist. Unless some degree of flexibility is provided, there is a danger it could lead to more rogue measures being adopted by individuals, such as felling unprotected trees on sites prior to lodging planning applications. This is a situation that needs to be avoided, therefore a serious review of this policy and guidance should be undertaken.

### **Main Issue 5 – Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure**

Barratt wish to highlight their concern in respect to the Preferred option outlined within the MIR which seeks to increase the electrical vehicle charging infrastructure for all new developments that have parking. This would place a significant financial burden on the housebuilding industry in addition to concerns in relation to the capacity of the existing network to accommodate an unknown and potentially significant increase in new demand. Therefore, the inclusion of an LDP policy requiring all new developments which provide parking to provide for EV charging may exacerbate such issues and require significant network reinforcement if undertaken at scale.

The requirements and standards around EV charging points is currently being reviewed as part of a new set of Building Standards which will come into effect in 2021. It is essential that planning policy does not restrict the continual evolution of new technology, which could see the introduction of new charging infrastructure, at significant cost which is likely to become outdated in the very near future. Planning policy should not be used to duplicate or pre-empt what Building Standards requirements are or will be and must be cognisant of grid capacity issues to ensure that policies are achievable.

Barratt would therefore seek a continuation of the current approach, and to ensure housing and other development sites are adaptable to allow the fitting of renewable technologies where appropriate and where there is a demand, rather than a blanket policy approach requiring all new housing developments to include such technology, which at present is expensive and will soon be superseded. This would continue to provide flexibility to consider existing capacity and timescales for necessary grid upgrading and advancements in technology, ensuring that the LDP remains adaptable to change and avoid any potential duplication or conflict with regulations coming through under new Building Standards requirements.

### Question 20 – Digital Infrastructure

Whilst Barratt agree that new development across the city should benefit from access to high speed broadband connection, concern would be expressed to any policy which places that burden on housebuilders, given such connectivity is dependent on a third party provider. Instead, collaborative work should be undertaken between the City Council and infrastructure providers to ensure that appropriate connections can be made, as development comes forward.

## Question 21 – Developer Obligations and Infrastructure Delivery

Barratt maintains concern over the existing provisions contained within LDP Policy I1 – Infrastructure Delivery and Planning Obligations. Aberdeen City Council are increasingly utilising planning obligations as a roof tax on the development industry. Objection is also taken to the ever growing list of services and infrastructure which developers are expected to contribute to, which ultimately impacts on the viability of development projects and often results in long and protracted negotiations and significant and unnecessary delays through the preparation of associated S75 Agreements.

The wording of the existing Policy and Supplementary Guidance makes no reference to Scottish Government Circular 3/2012: Planning Applications & Good Neighbour Agreements nor the associated tests set out in that Circular, **all of** which must be met before Planning Obligations can be sought. As presently worded, Policy I1, its supporting text and the Supplementary Guidance on Planning Obligations do not properly reflect Circular 3/2012. The Circular highlights that Planning Obligations have a **limited**, but useful role to play in the development management process. This would imply that Planning Obligations should be the exception, rather than the rule. In reality, Planning Obligations are sought on practically every development, covering a wide range of infrastructure requirements towards community facilities, education, healthcare, etc, even where there is a pre-existing capacity, particularly in relation to education and healthcare. Barratt maintain that where there is existing capacity, there should be no obligations sought, as that would conflict with the tests of the Circular.

Greater transparency is required in relation to the methodologies used for calculating the cost of providing community infrastructure. At present the Policy and Guidance does not include sufficient provision to account for individual site and local circumstances. Additionally, if the cost of that infrastructure is ultimately less than the Planning Obligations made then there should be greater scope for the return of any unspent funds within an appropriate timescale.

## **Main Issue 6 – Low and Zero Carbon Generating Technologies and Water Efficiency**

Barratt recognise the importance of addressing climate change, however, the requirements set out in Policy R7 – Low and Zero Carbon Buildings and Water Efficiency are too onerous, are not directly reflected within SPP and should, therefore, be more appropriately addressed through stringent Building Regulations rather than through the policies of the Local Development Plan, which should instead be directing the appropriate management of the use of land. The requirements for carbon reduction and the calculation of those reductions are a complex requirement and meeting these requirements at pre-planning stage is not necessary. The Policy is in effect stipulating similar measures as implemented through building warrant regulations which is in effective creating a duplication of work.

The requirement to install low and zero carbon generating technologies in new residential developments does not flow directly from SPP. Instead, SPP encourages Local Development Plans to take a more holistic view through, for example, heat mapping to identify the potential for co-location of developments with a high heat demand with sources of heat supply. It advises that heat demand sites for particular consideration include high density developments, communities off the gas grid, fuel poor areas and anchor developments, such as hospitals, schools, leisure centres and heat intensive industry. The onus is, therefore, on the planning authority through their Local Development Plans to be more proactive in terms of identifying opportunities for co-location of development

Barratt maintains that a “**fabric first**” approach should be adopted ahead of the requirement to install low and zero carbon generating technologies. Such technologies are often unproven and add significantly to the cost of development, when other, more efficient methods can deliver the required carbon reduction. This can further exacerbate viability issues for sites which already experience substantial development costs. Furthermore, the development industry is at the forefront of delivering sustainable and energy efficient new homes. The Council should instead focus of measures to implement schemes to improve older housing stock across the city, which are much less energy efficient.

Similarly, and in regard to MIR Question 22, water efficiency measures are more appropriately controlled through Building Regulations rather than through the Local Development Plan, which essentially controls the use of land.

### **Main Issue 7 – Heat Networks**

Barratt would object to the Preferred Option 2 contained within Main Issue 7 to include a policy supporting the development of Heat Networks across the city. It is noted that reference is made to the proposed wording of this Policy at Appendix 1, unfortunately however it is not listed there.

Due to the lack of clarity on how these areas will be identified, the criteria for which sites will be required to provide/connect and how they will be funded and maintained, Barratt cannot support the implementation of such a policy requirement within the next LDP. Accordingly, support is offered for the current approach as detailed within Option 1. This would allow heat networks to come forward for appropriate developments where they are considered viable, but would not require heat networks to be created when these are not feasible, appropriate, or indeed deliverable.

The MIR even states that option 3 is likely to have a significant financial impact on new development and may prevent new development from coming forward, such an approach is wholly contrary to the aims of a Local Development Plan.

## **Main Issue 8 – West End Office Area**

The West End Office Area forms a substantial specialist employment area on the western fringes of the City Centre, with related existing LDP Policy B3 highlighting it as a “prestigious, high quality office location on the edge of the city centre”, with a focus on promotion of the area for continued Class 4 Office development. It is therefore welcomed that recognition of the recent shift in the market, which has witnessed a number of high profile and established businesses moving from the typical large granite villas which dominate area, in favour of newly built Grade A office accommodation, is provided within Main Issue 8. Whilst the current approach does give some provision for alternative uses, such as residential, it simply states that these will be assessed “on their own merits”. There are however a substantial number of unlet office buildings on the market within the West End Office area, therefore LDP Policy needs to be more flexible and open to a wider mix of alternative uses. Barratt would therefore welcome the Preferred MIR Option which advocates such an approach, which would ultimately stimulate investment and promote vibrant and sustainable new uses for these vacant buildings.

## **Question 25 - Affordable Housing**

Barratt agree with the existing LDP approach, which seeks a benchmark 25% affordable housing requirement from sites of 5 units or more; this reflects the approach adopted within the Proposed SDP and remains in line with SPP. The wording of Policy H5 should however be amended to more properly reflect the requirements of SPP. As worded it seeks to impose a minimum requirement across the City. Also, it does not provide enough flexibility for a reduction in exceptional circumstances.

Furthermore, the provision of affordable housing currently relies too heavily on the delivery of mainstream housing, with the onus placed on landowners to make land available for development. If an unacceptable burden is placed on land values there is likely to be a reluctance on the part of landowners to release land for development. Whilst the supporting text to Policy recognises this to an extent, concern must be expressed regarding the lack of flexibility in approach to delivery, as set out in the text and the associated Supplementary Guidance.

Off-site provision should be viewed as acceptable as onsite provision. In many instances, it is simply not viable to provide affordable housing on-site. This is particularly evident on smaller sites close to the city centre. For example, the factoring costs for shared amenities and open space provision are often not capable of being met by RSLs or the occupiers of affordable housing. Therefore the existing “hierarchy” of preferred delivery mechanisms contained within Supplementary Guidance should be removed, instead opting for additional flexibility and support for delivery across all mechanisms, whether on-site, off-site or commuted payments, depending on the circumstance. The key is the delivery of affordable housing in areas of need. Off-site provision and Commuted sums can therefore play a vital role in the delivery of affordable housing, acting as a catalyst for delivery on specific sites. Accordingly, there should be a wider acceptance of the benefit of all forms of affordable housing delivery mechanisms, not the current overreliance on developers to meet 25% delivery on-site.

With regard to other measures the Council could consider to assist with the delivery of Affordable Housing, the LDP should seek to be more pro-active in terms of identifying and allocating specific sites for affordable housing. Planning Advice Note 2/2010 promotes four additional or alternative means of delivering affordable housing, which could be considered by Planning Authorities. These include:

1. *Allocating new sites in Local Development Plans specifically for affordable housing.*
2. *Identifying plots for self-build dwellings.*
3. *Using Compulsory Purchase powers to support the delivery of a new supply and regeneration.*
4. *Making appropriate surplus Local Authority land or buildings available for affordable housing.*

Given the mechanisms available to Aberdeen City Council as set out above, this should be reflected through the Local Development Plan, as an alternative to the current blanket 25% approach across all sites. In that regard, specific sites should be identified for the provision of affordable housing along with the preferred method by which they will be delivered. The alternatives also clearly support the principle of off-site provision, which should be better reflected in the Policy of the next LDP.

In considering off-site provision and the scale of commuted sums, the Supplementary Guidance makes reference to sub-market areas. This is unacceptable. Aberdeen City, along with its immediate hinterland lying within Aberdeenshire, comprise a single housing market area and it is not appropriate to divide this into sub-market areas. This policy approach is unwarranted and serves to stifle the delivery of affordable housing, rather than encourage it and my client would seek to have it removed from the next plan. Such an approach contravenes SPP and the Strategic Development Plan. If sub-market areas are to be adopted then the Strategic Development Plan should be identifying the housing requirement for those sub-market areas. There is a danger that continuation of such an approach could distort the housing market. Similarly, inconsistencies in the delivery of affordable housing and the calculation of commuted sums in those parts of the Aberdeen Housing Market Area lying within the City and Shire could also distort the market and favour development in certain areas over others. There should be a consistent joined-up approach applied throughout the Aberdeen Housing Market Area comprising both the City and part of the Shire.

The MIR suggests that there is a need to review the level of commuted payments. Such a review of the existing commuted sums figures and the low cost home ownership benchmark should however be undertaken in consultation with the development industry and the appropriate forum for that is through the Development Plan process. At present the commuted sum figures listed within the Supplementary Guidance are often in excess of the private plot values. It must be emphasised that any figure used should be for the duration of the Plan and not be subject to further increases, without a full and informed consultation with the housebuilding industry. My client also feels that the existing benchmark figures need to be reviewed to reflect a continuing surge in build costs and prevailing market conditions.

## **Main Issue 9 – Inclusive Housing Mix**

Barratt object to any deviation away from the current policy approach, which provides housebuilders the flexibility to develop a range of house types and sizes throughout their sites. It is imperative that this continues to be the adopted approach, which allows housebuilders the ability to deliver homes with regard to what will sell in the open market and to respond to changing demand. At present it is felt that the mix across sites is appropriate and the Planning Service already have the ability to influence the range and house types within a development as part of the existing masterplanning process.

In that respect, Barratt do not support the introduction of a minimum requirement for a housing mix to be specified by the Planning Authority, either through the Alternative or Preferred Options contained within Main Issue 9. As recognised by the MIR, setting the mix of housing within a private development site could present serious viability issues for sites, if that mix does not accurately reflect market demand. It is evident from applications submitted for a revised mix in latter phases of housing developments which are underway that flexibility to respond to market conditions and requirements is necessary to provide homes which meet customer requirements and that developers are actively doing so. Prescribing a mix which is not informed by up-to-date market analysis could lead to units being built and lying unoccupied on sites due to lack of interest from prospective purchasers. The housebuilding industry needs to be able to react to deliver the range and mix suitable for particularly sites and prevailing market conditions, therefore the current approach set out in Option 1 should be maintained.

Furthermore the Preferred Option suggests that units which are demonstrated to be adaptable for varying needs or designed for lifetime living would be supported in principle. In reality this is an approach currently adopted by my client in the delivery of their new homes. This is a current requirement set out within Building Standards, therefore duplication into Planning Policy wording is not necessary.