

# Representations to Belfast City Council Draft Plan Strategy

On behalf of Beechill Inns Limited

November 2018

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**Client**

Beechill Inns Limited

**Our reference**

BEEB3006

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# Executive Summary

1. This representation is submitted on behalf of Beechill Inns Limited and sets out the aspects of the Belfast City Council Draft Plan Strategy (dPS), which we consider to be unsound on the basis that the legal compliance tests have not been met and a number of policies contained within the dPS do not satisfy the tests of soundness as set out in the relevant legislation and guidance notes.
2. The schedule below identifies the policies considered to be unsound and suggests changes to the policies to ensure the Draft Plan can be considered sound.

## **Schedule of Key Comments**

Policy	Comment	Cross ref.
HOU 1	<p><i>Accommodating New Homes</i></p> <p><b>Change required:</b></p> <p><i>HOU 1 is unsound as the policy fails the tests of CE 2 and 4 - Coherence and Effectiveness</i></p> <p><i>The policy is not founded on a robust evidence basis which explains the rationale in respect to the proposed nil provision of net additional dwellings for Hannahstown.</i></p> <p><i>Clarification is sought as to why the Council consider there is no scope within Hannahstown to contribute towards the delivery of the Council's target for new homes. We also recommend that a robust, up to date assessment of the urban footprint is undertaken to ensure the suitability and availability of sites to facilitate the growth ambitions of the Council.</i></p>	<p><i>Section 3 paragraphs 3.1 – 3.15</i></p>
HOU 4	<p><i>Density of Residential Development</i></p> <p><b>Change required:</b></p> <p><i>Policy reworded to promote increased density in housing and mixed use developments in city centre locations and other locations which benefit from high levels of accessibility</i></p> <p><i>Removal of density bands from draft Plan Strategy.</i></p>	<p><i>Section 3 paragraphs 3.16 – 3.19</i></p>
HOU 5	<p><i>Affordable Housing</i></p> <p><b>Change required:</b></p> <p><i>HOU 5 is unsound as the policy fails the tests of CE 1, 2 and 3- Coherence and Effectiveness</i></p> <p><i>The policy is not founded on a robust evidence base which explains the rationale behind the policy triggers and provides a clear understanding on the implications arising from the policy.</i></p> <p><i>We request that the Council reconsiders its evidence base to support the Affordable Housing policy.</i></p>	<p><i>Section 3 paragraphs 3.20-3.43</i></p>

HOU 6	<p><i>Housing Mix</i></p> <p><b>Change Required</b></p> <p><i>HOU 6 is unsound as the policy fails the tests of CE 1 and 2 - Coherence and Effectiveness</i></p> <p><i>The policy should be deleted as it duplicates provisions already set out in HOU 5 and places unnecessary restrictions on private housing developers.</i></p>	<p>Section 3 paragraphs 3.44 to 3.51</p>
HOU 8	<p>Specialist Residential Development</p> <p><b>Change Required</b></p> <p><i>That the policy is reworded to reflect Council's evidence base, that criterion (a) of the policy is deleted and that Council collates evidence to inform consideration of exemptions to the second strand of the policy.</i></p>	<p>Section 3 paragraphs 3.52 to 3.62</p>
TRAN 8	<p><i>Parking and Servicing Arrangements</i></p> <p><b>Change required:</b></p> <p><i>Policy TRAN 8 is unsound as the policy fails the tests of CE 2 and C4.</i></p> <p><i>The policy should introduce flexibility and we would suggest deletion of 'DfI standards' and replacement with 'published standards.'</i></p>	
OS 1	<p><i>Protection of Open Space</i></p> <p><b>Change Required</b></p> <p><i>Council prepares an up to date evidence base to support the policy and on the basis of the evidence collated reassesses whether there is sufficient evidence to support the policy</i></p>	<p>Section 4 Paragraphs 4.1 to 4.6</p>
OS 3	<p><i>Ancillary Open Space</i></p> <p><b>Change required</b></p> <p><i>There is insufficient evidence within the technical supplement to support the policy proposed.</i></p> <p><i>A robust, up to date evidence basis should be prepared to support this policy.</i></p>	<p>Section 4 paragraphs 4.7 to 4.11</p>
TRE 1	<p><i>Trees</i></p> <p><b>Change required</b></p> <p><i>Policy should be deleted.</i></p>	<p>Section 4 Paragraph 4.12 to 4.15</p>

# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Turley has been instructed by Beechill Inns Limited to submit this representation to Belfast City Council's Draft Plan Strategy.
- 1.2 This response has been structured to reflect the template provided by Council. In line with Council's procedures, each representation is set out on a separate page within each of the Chapter headings with the policy clearly identified.
- 1.3 The structure of the submission is as follows:
- **Chapter 2:** Provides an assessment of how the draft Plan Strategy addresses the legislative compliance tests;
  - **Chapter 3:** Details our representations to Shaping a Liveable Place (Questions 12 & 15 -17);
  - **Chapter 4:** Details our representations to Building a Smart Connected and Resilient Place (Questions 12 & 15 – 17); and
  - **Chapter 5:** Details our representations to Promoting a Green and Active Place (Questions 12 & 15 - 17).
- 1.4 **Appendix 1** sets out our response to the preliminary questions posed in Council's questionnaire regarding Data Protection, information on the planning agent who has prepared this suite of representations and the organisation represented. We have also outlined our preferred procedure for hearing our representations.

## 2. Legislative Compliance

- 2.1 In preparing their Draft Plan Strategy (dPS), Belfast City Council (BCC) is required to adhere to the provisions of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 ('Act') and the Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 ('Regulations').
- 2.2 This section identifies weaknesses in the compliance of the draft Plan Strategy (dPS) with the Act and the Regulations.

### **Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011**

- 2.3 Under Part 2 (8) of the Act the Plan Strategy must set out:
- the council's objectives in relation to the development and use of land in its district;
  - its strategic policies for the implementation of those objectives; and
  - such other matters as may be prescribed.
- 2.4 We note that the dPS does identify a number of strategic objectives under the themes of shaping a liveable space; creating a vibrant economy; promoting a green and active place; and building smart connected and resilient place. Furthermore the dPS includes proposed strategic policies under the same themes. Whilst this information is included within the dPS the remainder of this representation sets out our comments on the soundness of the proposed objectives and policies.
- 2.5 The Act also stipulates that the Plan Strategy should be prepared in accordance with the Council's Timetable, as approved by the Department and in accordance with Council's Statement of Community Involvement.
- 2.6 The BCC Timetable, as approved and published on Council's website is dated, March 2018. We note that Council has published its dPS within the broad timeframe that they provided (i.e. Spring –Autumn 2018). However, we would highlight that the timeframe proposed was to include:
- A period of 4 weeks for the viewing of the document;
  - An 8 week statutory public consultation period followed by an 8 week statutory consultation on counter representations;
  - Publication of Sustainability Appraisal (inc. SEA) and Public Consultation Report; and
  - Publication of EqIA and HRA where required.
- 2.7 Given that the first period of statutory consultation will end on 15 November, the remaining consultation will not take place in accordance with the published Timetable. Furthermore the published Timetable proposes that the Independent Examination to the dPS will take place in Late 2018. This will not be the case. Should there be any

information relating to a revised timetable or agreement for an extension from the Department this should be made public.

2.8 In preparing a plan strategy, the council must take account of:

- “the regional development strategy;
- the council's current community plan
- any policy or advice contained in guidance issued by the Department;
- such other matters as the Department may prescribe or, in a particular case, direct, and may have regard to such other information and considerations as appear to the council to be relevant.”

2.9 These representations consider all of the above requirements which form part of the soundness test. Please refer to individual policy comments for our consideration on whether this requirement is met.

2.10 The Act also requires that the Council:

- (a) carry out an appraisal of the sustainability of the plan strategy; and
- (b) prepare a report of the findings of the appraisal.”

2.11 We note that this information has been prepared and is provided as part of the consultation information, however our detailed comments on the findings of the SA are provided in response to individual policies.

### **The Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015**

2.12 In addition to the Act, Parts 4 & 5 of the Regulations set out the requirement for the preparation of the Plan Strategy DPD. Part 4 set out the requirements for the Form and Content of Development Plan Document

2.13 Part 4 Regulation (1) establishes that a development plan document must contain:

- (a) a title which must give the name of the council district for which the development plan document is prepared and indicate whether it is a plan strategy or a local policies plan, and
- (b) a sub-title which must indicate the date of the adoption of the development plan document.

2.14 We note that the title required by Part 4 (1)(a) is provided as required, however the date of adoptions of the development plan documents is not provided. The date provided is 2035. We do however acknowledge the draft status of the documents at this stage but request that this is corrected prior to formal adoption of the DPD.

2.15 Part 4 Regulations (2) & (3) set out that a development plan document must contain a reasoned justification of the policies contained in it and that the policy and justification

text should be readily distinguishable. We note that the Council has provided justification text associated with each of the proposed policies, however this should be considered alongside detailed comments on the soundness of the proposed policies, contained within the remainder of this representation.

- 2.16 Regulation 13 refers to the requirement for a proposals map/s to be provided within the DPD. The BCC dPS provides a range of maps; however the Regulations stipulate that the map *“is sufficiently detailed so as to enable the location of proposals for the development and use of land to be identified”*. Whilst the dPS includes a number of maps, the legibility of the information provided is questionable and little further information is provided in the supporting information to provide clarity.
- 2.17 Part 5 of the Regulations relates to the procedures for the preparation of the Development Plan Documents. Regulations 15 and 16 relate to the preparation of the dPS. Regulation identifies a schedule of the information that should be made available alongside the publication of the dPS. This includes:

*“such supporting documents as in the opinion of the council are relevant to the preparation of the local development plan.”*

- 2.18 It is our view that insufficient supporting information is available to support a number of the proposed policies in the dPS. Reference is made within the dPS and supporting documents to a range of reports and information that has informed the DPD, however the information is not available for consideration. We have identified these concerns within the remainder of these representations.

### 3. Shaping a Liveable Place

#### Housing HOU1 – Accommodating New Homes

**HOU 1 is unsound as the policy fails the tests of CE 2 and CE 4 - Coherence and Effectiveness**

**The policy is not founded on a robust evidence basis which explains the rationale in respect to the proposed nil provision of net additional dwellings for Hannahstown.**

**Clarification is sought as to why the Council consider there is no scope within Hannahstown to contribute towards the delivery of the Council's target for new homes. We also recommend that a robust, up to date assessment of the urban footprint is undertaken to ensure the suitability and availability of sites to facilitate the growth ambitions of the Council.**

#### **Full Response**

- 3.1 HOU1 defines the requirement for new homes in the Plan Period to facilitate the Council's ambitious population growth plans across the areas and settlements within the Belfast City Council area.
- 3.2 We are supportive of the Council's ambitious growth strategy and proposed overall provision of 31,660 new homes however we would query the suggested distribution of the housing figures and in particular the proposed zero net provision of new dwellings in Hannahstown. There is no evidence in the housing research and technical supplement that an assessment of the capacity for Hannahstown to grow has been carried out to inform this position.
- 3.3 We assume that this assessment would form part of the Local Policies Plan process however in lieu of this it is our consideration that applying a nil figure is premature at this stage and should not be applied at this time without a full and proper assessment of capacity being undertaken.
- 3.4 The proposal to deliver no further housing in Hannahstown during the plan period will not provide for the future viability of the settlement and it is unclear whether the changing demographic of the small settlement has been taken account of in arriving at this figure.
- 3.5 We note from the NISRA information that whilst between 2001 and 2011 the number of households increased by 224, the resident population of Hannahstown decreased by 303 people and that 15.8% of the population were aged 60 and over which represents an increase of 4.7% from 2001.
- 3.6 This changing demographic suggests the need for more, smaller homes to serve the future likely demand trend in the area. The plan does not provide sufficient flexibility to address the changing demographics of the area.

- 3.7 On this basis we consider the policy fails to satisfy the test of soundness – CE 4 in that the provision set out in the policy does not allow for flexibility in dealing with changing circumstances throughout the plan period.
- 3.8 Beyond Hannahstown, we are generally supportive of the Council’s proposed sequential approach towards new development being located primarily within the existing urban footprint. That said, the preparation of a new Local Development Plan affords the Council the ability to, where appropriate, decide where the settlement limit and/or urban footprint should be drawn in order to facilitate the growth ambitions.
- 3.9 Again, this must be informed by a detailed assessment of the capacity of the settlements to quantify and qualify the suitability and availability of sites to meet their growth ambitions. Where a shortfall of sites is identified within the urban footprint, the Council must be flexible in assessing new sites beyond the current limits which could be zoned for a particular land use.
- 3.10 The NIHE housing need figures<sup>1</sup> indicate that in the period from 2017-2022 there is a defined need for 417 new dwellings in the Outer West area and 2136 new dwellings for west Belfast as a whole (Inner West, Middle West and Outer West) to meet the prevailing social housing demand, without taking account of any private demand. This demonstrates a significant level of prevailing short-term demand in the area for new dwellings in West Belfast.
- 3.11 The policy fails to satisfy the test of Soundness - CE2 in that full and proper consideration of the urban capacity has not been undertaken to establish whether there are sufficient suitable and available sites to achieve the housing numbers proposed in the identified areas. We also consider there to be sufficient evidence at this time to justify the nil provision proposed for Hannahstown.

### **Recommendation**

- 3.12 We respectfully suggest that Council reconsiders the evidence base to support this policy and on the basis of the evidence collated reassesses whether the evidence available at this time supports this policy position.
- 3.13 The dPS allows for the provision of 18,100 new homes in the area stated as the ‘rest of Belfast’ which includes West Belfast. It is unclear from the Policy how this figure will be allocated across the areas of Belfast and whether the Council intends to apply greater focus on specific areas to ensure housing need is addressed where the demand is greatest, i.e. north and west Belfast. We suggest that the housing growth figures for the ‘rest of Belfast’ are considered in a less generalised manner to ensure development is directed to areas of greatest need.
- 3.14 Turley has prepared an illustrative layout to test the development potential for residential use of a site along Hannahstown Hill which could be zoned through a minor extension of the settlement limit defined in BMAP. The layout takes cognisance of the

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<sup>1</sup> NIHE – Belfast Commissioning Prospectus, March 2017  
[https://www.nihe.gov.uk/belfast\\_comm\\_prospectus\\_data.pdf](https://www.nihe.gov.uk/belfast_comm_prospectus_data.pdf)

key site constraints and character of the area. The layout demonstrates that the yield can be achieved whilst retaining a sufficient landscape wedge between the site and St Joseph's Church, retaining and enhancing the existing landscaping buffer to the river corridor and retention of part of the land towards the north as open space to soften the transition from the urban to rural areas.

- 3.15 On the basis of this assessment we consider the site to have potential to accommodate up to 24 residential units towards the Council's target of 18,100 homes in the 'rest of Belfast' area and the overall figure of 31,660 homes in the plan period.

## Housing HOU4 – Density of Residential Development

HOU 4 is unsound as the policy fails the test of CE 2- Coherence and Effectiveness

The policy is incoherent and is at odds with other housing policies in Section 7 of the draft plan strategy

We seek that the density bands are removed from the policy and included in the appendices to the Local Policies Plan (LPP) as a guide, in tandem with the policy being reworded

### Full Response

3.16 HOU4 sets out density ranges for new developments across Belfast. The opening sentence of the policy sets out a positive stance in that *planning permission will be granted for residential developments which are brought forward in accordance with the following density bands*. The latter part of the policy text directs that the density bands are to be used as a guide to inform proposed developments.

3.17 The policy fails to satisfy the test of CE2 in that:

- The policy is not founded on evidence which demonstrates that the density ranges are realistic and achievable having taking account of other policies within the draft Plan Strategy, in particular policy RD1.
- There is a tension within the policy. The opening paragraph jars with the final paragraph insofar as the opening paragraph directs that development proposals *should accord* with the density bands, but later it states that the *density ranges are guide*.

### Recommendation

3.18 Beechill Inns fully supports the intent behind the policy and acknowledges that the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) advocates the need for a housing strategy which provides for increased housing density without cramming in town and city centres and in other locations that benefit from high accessibility to public transport facilities (paragraph 6.137).

3.19 We would support the policy being reworded to read:

*'An increase in the density of housing and mixed use developments will be promoted in town and city centres and other locations which benefit from high accessibility to public transport facilities.*

## Housing HOU5 – Affordable Housing

HOU 5 is unsound as the policy fails the tests of CE 1, 2 and 3- Coherence and Effectiveness

The policy is not founded on a robust evidence basis which explains the rationale behind the policy triggers and provides a clear understanding of the implications of the policy

Beechill Inns requests that Council reconsiders its evidence basis to support the Affordable Housing policy

### Full Response

3.20 Council's proposed policy for securing affordable housing is set out at Policy HOU5. The policy states that: *"Planning permission will be granted for residential development on sites greater than 0.1 hectares and/or containing 5 or more dwelling units where a minimum of 20% of units are provided as affordable."*

3.21 The draft policy then goes on to clarify that:

- Affordable housing will comprise social and/or intermediate housing.
- The size, type and tenure of provision will be determined by an up to date analysis of demand.
- A tenure blind approach is proposed.
- Where it can be demonstrated that it is not sustainable or viable for a proposal to meet the requirements, Council will consider suitable alternatives on a case-by-case basis.
- Provision will be secured via a Section 76 Legal Agreement.

3.22 The justification and amplification text proposed goes on to set out that:

- The 20% requirement is a minimum and Council could seek more where it is considered necessary and viable. In this instance the applicant will be required to provide the relevant amount. This will be secured through key site requirements.
- Council will seek to secure the affordable housing element through the use of a Section 76 Agreement.
- Affordable Housing is defined as social rented housing and intermediate housing.
- Intermediate housing is currently defined as a shared ownership housing product provided by registered housing associations. It is acknowledged that other intermediate products do exist in other jurisdictions.
- The definition of intermediate housing may be further expanded in the future to include these products.

- Viability assessments will be required where an applicant is proposing to provide less than the policy requirement.
- 3.23 Whilst the intent of the policy which flows from the Regional Development Strategy 2035 and the SPPS, does not currently meet the tests of Soundness for the following reasons:
- The proposed threshold approach does not fully align with the approach set out in the SPPS (soundness test C3);
  - The proposed approach does not align with the Council’s own evidence base (soundness test CE2);
  - A more robust evidence base is required (soundness test CE2);
  - The proposed approach will not be effective as it does not reflect the mechanisms for the provision of social and intermediate housing in Northern Ireland (soundness test CE2 and CE3); and
  - It has not been demonstrated that the policy is coherent with other policies proposed (soundness test CE1).
- 3.24 These aspects are considered further below, along with recommendations for actions that could be undertaken to ensure that the policy will pass the Soundness test when subject to an independent examination.
- 3.25 The policy as proposed is a threshold policy that applies across the Council area. The SPPS is clear at paragraph 6.143 that:
- “The development plan process will be the primary vehicle to facilitate any identified need by zoning land or indicating, through key site requirements, where a proportion of a site may be required for social/affordable housing.”*
- 3.26 The approach set out in SPPS directs us towards a locational policy approach where affordable housing is catered for through zonings and key site requirements. Whilst Councils can depart from the approach set out in the SPPS, they should only do so where the evidence exists to justify such a departure. We note that the feedback received from the Preferred Options Paper (POP) showed that a move to social housing zonings would not be welcome, however Council’s evidence for underpinning a varied approach is lacking and therefore there is no evidential case for a departure from the SPPS in this case and as such fails soundness test C2.
- 3.27 Council alludes to the Developer Contributions for Affordable Housing framework which was published for consultation by DSD in 2015. It is reliant upon a document which is subject to representations, has not been the subject of a thorough assessment and is not policy. Furthermore, the document does not reflect the current and most up to date position and evidence within the draft framework should be relied upon with caution.

- 3.28 In order to comply with soundness test CE2 it is recommended that Council should undertake their own assessment and consideration of affordable housing to reflect the baseline and future requirements for Belfast. This should also include a robust assessment of various thresholds for provision.
- 3.29 The Council has published a number of evidence base documents in support of their proposed policies in the Draft Plan Strategy, including:
- Size and Type of Housing Needed (December 2017); and
  - Housing Market Analysis Update (September 2017);
- 3.30 These reports, prepared by external bodies, have been used to inform technical supplement 2 – Housing (August 2018) and form part of the evidence base for Policy HOU5.
- 3.31 While Council acknowledges that the areas identified as being in highest need of social housing are the areas where land is in short supply, it fails to consider the intricacies of the housing markets within Belfast, the political and community backdrop and the impact on the delivery of social housing. The proposed policy does not reflect this position but instead it is proposed that this will be considered through the Local Policies Plan. As such Council has not duly considered the implementation of the policy and therefore fails against soundness test CE3.
- 3.32 We would suggest that this cannot be dealt with in isolation as it goes to the heart of ensuring the deliverability of affordable housing and as Council has already set out, there is insufficient land within areas of high need.
- 3.33 Paragraph 7.1.25 of the Draft Plan Strategy sets out that the purpose of the LDP is to ensure the delivery of a range of housing types and tenures and more specifically minimise the disadvantage often associated with large areas of social housing. In relation to the effectiveness of a policy which proposes a 20% contribution, we would firstly identify that Council's evidence identifies that 75% of the proposed housing requirement (23,550 units) is needed to meet affordable housing need across the plan period. Whilst, it is recognised that a 75% contribution would undoubtedly impact on the housing market, its goes to demonstrate that 20% may not be effective.
- 3.34 Council acknowledges that 75% is an unrealistic requirement, yet provides little evidence to support a 20% requirement. Council assert that the justification for a 20% requirement is set out within the Housing Market Analysis (HMA) prepared by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) in 2017 and the Developer Contributions for Affordable Housing in Northern Ireland – Report of Study in 2015. Whilst the NIHE HMA identifies areas where affordability is an issue for the sales and rental market this report does not consider the levels of requirement needed.
- 3.35 The Report prepared by Three Dragons in 2015 is not available as part of the evidence base supporting the Draft Plan Strategy and therefore cannot be commented upon. Failure to provide this report as part of the evidence is an error. In any event, whilst the report may have considered a 10-20% requirement appropriate in this location, it did not consider the viability of site development in the city which takes account of the

other policy requirements being put forward within the Draft Plan Strategy. This incoherent approach to assessing policies is unsound (soundness test CE2). Council has chosen a 20% requirement without any robust assessment to discount 10% as suggested in the 2015 report.

- 3.36 The HMA amongst other things considers house prices and affordability, intermediate housing and social housing. The paper does not make recommendations, however it does state in the conclusion that:

*“Land availability is a key issue for the future delivery of social housing in Belfast. There was insufficient land zoned for social housings within BMAP and it is hoped that the new LDP will address this. The predominance of single person and small family households on the waiting list will mean that smaller units and higher densities will be required. Such developments can be problematic from management and maintenance viewpoints. It is therefore important that larger scale developments deliver mixed tenure, mixed income communities to avoid large concentrations of social housing, deprivations and social inequality.”*

- 3.37 This statement would suggest a conflict with the 0.1 hectare or 5 unit threshold proposed in the draft Plan Strategy. The policy approach does not therefore reflect the delivery and management of social and intermediate housing. It appears from the proposed policy that the delivery of affordable housing is dependent upon registered social housing providers. However, given the statement above, providers may not be willing to partner up with private developers on small schemes and as such this could impact of the effectiveness of the policy. Council has also failed to consider the practical implementation of the policy and therefore fails against soundness test CE2 and CE3.

- 3.38 Finally, it is unclear from the draft policy or the supporting evidence base how affordable housing requirements will be applied to the Build to Rent/ Private Rental Sector housing market. Given the recognition within the Council’s City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy that the private rental sector provides an unrealised opportunity to deliver city centre housing it is disappointing that no consideration has been given to the impact of the draft policy on this product. The rental market will provide a significant opportunity for the city, as is already been seen in emerging proposals that are coming forward. In ensuring that the development plan does not prevent the delivery of alternative housing products the Council should consider the impact of affordable housing requirements on the delivery of such schemes, particularly given the financial model they work within. The failure of the council to consider other housing products is a flaw under soundness test CE2.

- 3.39 In order to have robustly and coherently assessed the effectiveness of the policy it would have been appropriate to:

- Identify a sample of sites of varying scales and types across the housing markets within the city;
- Undertake a feasibility appraisal to understand the residential capacity of the sites;

- Identify the other policy requirements and developer contributions that would be applied to the development;
  - Identify a series of affordable housing requirements (e.g. 5, 10 and 20% - 'reasonable alternatives');
  - Undertake a strategic viability appraisal of each requirement level for each site to understand the threshold for viability; and
  - Apply the findings of the viability assessment to inform a proposed policy approach.
- 3.40 This approach is well established within other jurisdictions and without such a robust approach it is not possible to:
- ascertain the effectiveness of such a policy;
  - understand the operational implications of such a policy; and
  - understand the cumulative impact of policies on the delivery of housing numbers within the city.
- 3.41 In relation to the proposed site threshold, Council has no substantive evidence to
- to justify the proposed threshold; and
  - to justify a 20% requirement across all site sizes.
- 3.42 We would suggest that the steps identified above should be undertaken by Council to ensure that reasonable alternatives have been considered and that the proposed policy is founded on robust evidence.
- 3.43 At this stage no reasonable alternatives have been considered within the supporting SEA and the Council's position there are no reasonable alternatives to assess is difficult to sustain.

## Housing HOU6 – Housing Mix

**HOU 6 is unsound as the policy fails the tests of CE 1 and 2 - Coherence and Effectiveness**

**The policy should be deleted as it duplicates provisions already set out in HOU 5 and places unnecessary restrictions on private housing developers**

### **Full Response**

3.44 HOU 6 sets out that planning permission will be granted for new residential development on sites greater than 0.1 ha and /or containing 5 units or more where the proposed development provides a suitable mix of house types and sizes to promote choice and assist in meeting community needs.

3.45 Specific reference is made to providing smaller homes across all tenures to meet future household requirements. The policy clearly directs that the exact mix of house types and sizes will be negotiated with developers on a case by case basis.

The policy fails to satisfy the tests of Soundness in that:

- It has not been demonstrated that the policy is coherent with other proposed residential and design policies (soundness test CE1).
- The policy is not founded on evidence which demonstrates how Council has tested the viability implications arising from the policy (soundness test CE2).

3.46 Council has published a number of evidence base documents in support of their proposed policies in the Draft Plan Strategy, including:

- Size and Type of Housing Needed (December 2017); and
- Housing Market Analysis Update (September 2017).

3.47 It is important to note that within the Size and Type of Housing Need report it clearly states that a housing mix policy *should not be applied on a site by site basis, as there needs to be flexibility to respond to the local market context, viability, demand and local market need* (paragraph 3.3, page 15).

3.48 Notwithstanding the above, Beechill Inns has concerns that information regarding housing need is set out in the Housing Needs Assessment prepared by the NIHE. This is specific to social rented housing and does not provide any justification for the type of houses which should be developed by private developers.

3.49 There are a number of ways that mixed tenure developments can be delivered. Housing Associations themselves could develop mixed tenure schemes or they may, depending on scale and risk want to work in partnership with private developers to deliver mixed tenure developments, such developers will want to deliver a housing product which is bespoke to and likely to be successful in that housing market area i.e. a product that home owners want to buy. There is no evidence within the plan

documents which sets out how viability has been considered and justifies why the policy should be applied to all housing developments irrespective of tenure.

**Recommendation**

- 3.50 Beechill Inns fully supports the intent behind the policy and acknowledges that the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) advocates the need for a variety of house types and sizes and tenure to meet different needs in order to support balanced communities (page 70, SPPS). We disagree however with Council's approach on this aspect and contend that the issue of housing type and size should only apply to affordable housing (as defined within the SPPS) and be considered as an integral part of a revised version of HOU 5.
- 3.51 Policy HOU 6 should be deleted.

## HOU 8 – Specialist Residential Development

**HOU 8 is unsound as the policy fails the test of CE 2 & 3 - Coherence and Effectiveness**

**The policy is incoherent when read in tandem with the policy justification and amplification. There is no evidence to support the criteria based assessment proposed**

**Clarification is sought as to why a need assessment is required for specialist accommodation when the policy justification clearly acknowledges the need for such developments and there is no policy basis within the SPPS to support the approach advocated**

### **Full Response**

- 3.52 Policy HOU 8 sets out a positive policy position in that planning permission will be granted for specialist residential accommodation providing applications are accompanied by a statement of specialist housing need and that proposals will deliver convenient access to local services and facilities.
- 3.53 Beechill Inns welcomes the identification of the policy; however, we have concerns about how the policy would operate in practice.
- 3.54 The policy fails to satisfy the tests of soundness as:
- There is no evidence to support the policy position adopted by Council regarding the requirement for a Needs Assessment and the requirement to deliver convenient access to local services and facilities (soundness test CE 2).
  - Due to the lack of an evidence basis Council has not appreciated the range of uses which could be provided within a specialist housing development which has implications for the implementation of the policy (soundness test CE 3).
- 3.55 The SPPS requires Local Development Plans to make provision for the full range of specific housing needs, including supported housing. The requirement for supported housing will be identified within the HNA undertaken by the NIHE. Any proposal by a public body to deliver supported housing will only be pursued if there is an identified need which responds to a specific user group.
- 3.56 The SPPS does not contain similar policies for retirement villages/developments, assisted living and care home developments, or developments which consist of a mix of these elements.
- 3.57 In formulating the policy, Council has applied the same policy context that applies to supported housing schemes delivered by a public sector body to all specialised residential accommodation proposals despite there being no policy basis for this approach. What's more within the policy justification and amplification, Council acknowledges that there will be an increase in the proportion of people over the age of 65 which will create a demand for specialised housing developments.

- 3.58 There is a degree of tension between Council's policy intent and the supporting information to the plan. Little consideration has also been given to the market criteria that a private developer would consider. Without an identified market demand, a private operator will not pursue such a specialist product.
- 3.59 The second strand of the policy focuses on the requirement for proposals to deliver convenient access to local services and facilities on the basis that such developments would be developed in established residential areas. The policy has failed to set out any exemptions to this component whereby proposals may be progressed which encompass a mix of specialist housing products and associated ancillary facilities (local shops, health care facilities – e.g. GP Practice) within the development proposal itself, which is often the case elsewhere.
- 3.60 We recommend that Council should collate evidence on the range of products that could be delivered in order to support an exemption being introduced to this policy interlinked with the understanding that there may be instances when developing a specialist residential development within an existing residential development may not be appropriate due to the medical/care requirements of the residents.

#### **Recommendation**

- 3.61 Beechill Inns requests that the policy is reworded to reflect the Council's evidence base and accordingly that criterion (a) of the policy is deleted.
- 3.62 We respectfully ask that Council collate evidence on the range and nature of specialist residential developments to inform consideration for exemptions to the second strand of the policy.

## 4. Promoting a Green and Active Place

### OS1 – Protection of Open Space

**OS 1 is unsound as the policy fails the test of CE 2**

**There is insufficient evidence within the technical supplement to support the policy proposed**

**A robust, up to date evidence basis should be prepared to support the this policy**

#### **Full Response**

- 4.1 OS 1 sets out Council's approach to the retention and improvement of existing open space. The policy provides that there will be a general presumption in favour of retaining all such lands and uses, including protecting any character and amenity value, whether specifically identified in the LDP or not, unless the lands are identified within the LDP for an alternative use.
- 4.2 The policy goes on to note that development resulting in the loss of open space on lands specifically identified for these uses in the LDP and/or Council's Open Space Strategy and/or GBIP will only be considered in exceptional circumstances where it is clearly shown that redevelopment will bring substantial community benefits that decisively outweigh the loss of open space.
- 4.3 The policy sets out two exceptions as currently detailed in PPS 8 and concludes by stating that Council must be satisfied that the loss of open space would not result in detriment to the overall green infrastructure provision.
- 4.4 The policy fails to satisfy the test of Soundness - CE2 in that there is insufficient evidence within the technical supplement to support the policy as it is currently worded. Specifically, there is no evidence to support an improvement of existing open spaces when there is no audit which assesses the quality and quantity of open space. Technical supplement 8 identifies the location of open spaces and their associated typologies but no information is provided on the quality of the space and how current provision addresses space standards. Evidence needs to be provided to justify this element of the policy.
- 4.5 Without a robust evidence basis it is difficult to understand the rationale for the penultimate aspect of the policy which introduces a catch all approach to considering the loss of the open space when applicants will already have had to demonstrate that the redevelopment of the site provides substantial community benefits.

#### **Recommendation**

- 4.6 We respectfully suggest that Council prepares an up to date evidence basis to support this policy and on the basis of the evidence collated reassesses whether the evidence supports this policy position.

### OS 3 Ancillary Open Space

OS 3 is unsound as the policy fails the test of CE 2

There is insufficient evidence within the technical supplement to support the policy proposed

A robust, up to date evidence basis should be prepared to support the this policy.

#### Full Response

- 4.7 OS 3 requires all new development proposals to include appropriate provision for open space, including hard and soft landscape areas and outdoor amenity areas, to serve the needs of the development.
- 4.8 The policy largely mirrors the current policy provisions set out in Planning Policy Statement 8 (PPS8): Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation, policy OS 2 bar a few notable changes Council proposes to introduce:
- The provisions of the policy will apply to all new developments, not just residential development.
  - In instances where public open space is required regard should be had to providing complementary and ancillary equipment and facilities, including for active or passive enjoyment of residents or occupants should be incorporated into the design of the development.
- 4.9 The policy fails to satisfy the test of Soundness – CE 2
- It is unclear when the requirement to provide public open space for non-residential developments will apply.
  - No evidence has been provided to demonstrate why complementary and ancillary equipment and facilities are required in providing public open space. In addition no consideration has been given to the impact such a requirement has on the overall viability of a project and the implications arising out the maintenance and management of such areas.

#### Recommendation

- 4.10 We respectfully suggest that:
- Council prepares an up to date evidence basis to support this policy; and
  - defines what is meant by *complementary and ancillary equipment*.
- 4.11 On the basis of the evidence collated Council should reassess whether they have sufficient evidence to support this policy position.

## **TRE 1 Trees**

**TRE 1 is unsound as the policy fails the tests of CE2 and C3.**

**There is insufficient evidence within the technical supplement to support the policy proposed.**

**The policy should be deleted.**

### **Full Response**

- 4.12 TRE 1 – trees seeks to protect existing trees from new development, particularly those that are of visual, biodiversity or amenity quality and significance, and there will be a presumption in favour of retaining and safeguarding trees that make a valuable contribution to the environment and amenity.
- 4.13 Beechill Inns fully supports the careful integration of the natural and built environments, but considers that policy TRE 1 fails soundness test CE 2 as there is no evidence basis to support this policy.
- 4.14 The policy also fails soundness test C3 in that there are already legislative provisions within the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 for the protection of trees by way of Tree Preservation Orders. In absence of any evidence it appears that the Council's approach duplicates current planning legislation.

### **Recommendation**

- 4.15 That the policy be withdrawn from the draft plan strategy.

## Appendix 1: Background Information: Council's LDP Template

This section responds to Sections A, B, E of Council's template.

We confirm that we have read and understand the privacy notice detailed at Question 1 and give consent for Belfast City Council to hold our data for the purposes outlined.

We understand that Council are required to publish responses received in response to the Plan Strategy. We consent to Council publishing this information with our name and organisation detailed.

This response has been prepared by a planning agent whose contact details are:

**Name:** Gary Dodds

**Practice:** Turley

**Email Address:** [REDACTED]

**Telephone:** [REDACTED]

This representation is submitted on behalf of:

**Name:** Beechill Inns Limited

**Address:** 33 Manse Park, Carryduff, Belfast, Down, BT8 8RX

**Client Contact:** Seamus Harrison

We confirm that Beechill Inns Limited did not submit a response to the Preferred Options Paper and all correspondence relating to the draft Plan Strategy are to be sent to Turley.

### Section I

Question 19 of Council's template requests that participants indicate the method by which their representation is to be heard.

We respectfully ask that our representations are heard by way of an oral hearing.

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