

Local Plan Panel Meeting	
Meeting Date	25 April 2018
Report Title	Building for Life 12
Cabinet Member	Cllr Gerry Lewin, Cabinet Member for Planning
SMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Regeneration Director
Head of Service	James Freeman, Head of Planning
Lead Officer	James Freeman, Head of Planning
Key Decision	No
Classification	Open
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is recommended that 'Building For Life 12' be adopted as a technical document for assessing major planning applications for development consisting of more than twenty dwellings. 2. That the use of 'Building for Life 12' as an assessment tool be trialled for twelve months and reviewed.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 'Building for Life 12' (BfL12) is a useful tool for planning officers to initially assess the acceptability of developments in a practical and meaningful way, without significant costs in terms of time, resources, or training. Whilst it is a nationally recognised document, very few Council's to date have formally adopted for development management purposes.
- 1.2 This report recommends the use of 'BfL12' in the short term as a technical document to assess planning applications against. This should be for an initial trial period of 12 months, on applications of more than 10 housing units (those categorised as a 'major' planning application), after which its effectiveness can be reviewed.

2 Background

- 2.1 Building for Life is a tool for assessing the design quality of homes and neighbourhoods developed by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (now a part of the Design Council). Originally launched in 2001 it has been through several reviews, most recently through a redesign in 2012 which reflected the National Planning Policy Framework's (NPPF) commitment to build more, better, homes. The new draft NPPF includes reference to Building for Life 12 (see paragraph 128 (on Page 38)) as "an appropriate tool for assessing and improving the design of development".

2.2 'BfL12' is the 2012 redesign of the document, which sets out a range of 12 key criteria under which new developments can be clearly and methodically assessed. Each headline criterion features a number of sub-criteria designed to guide you through the thought process of thoroughly considering all aspects of a scheme.

2.3 The headline criteria under which developments are assessed include (amongst others):

- Does the scheme integrate into its surroundings by reinforcing existing connections and creating new ones, while also respecting existing buildings and land uses around the development site?
- Does the development provide (or is it close to) community facilities, such as shops, schools, workplaces, parks, play areas, pubs or cafes?
- Does the scheme have good access to public transport to help reduce car dependency?
- Does the development have a mix of housing types and tenures that suit local requirements?
- Does the scheme create a place with a locally inspired or otherwise distinctive character?
- Does the scheme take advantage of existing topography, landscape features (including water courses), trees and plants, wildlife habitats, existing buildings, site orientation and microclimate? And
- Is the development designed to make it easy to find your way around?

2.4 Consideration of the 12 criteria is based on a traffic light system, and the document recommends that proposed new developments aim to secure as many greens as possible, minimise the number of ambers and avoid reds.

2.5 In simple terms: the more 'greens' that are achieved the better a development will be. A red light gives warning that a particular aspect of a proposed development needs to be reconsidered, while an amber indicates that there *might* be scope for improvement. Criteria can be waived when justified, for example where local circumstances preclude normal best practice due to land ownerships. For this reason BfL12 advises against setting minimum scoring requirements, but instead advises minimising reds and ambers and maximising greens.

2.6 The application of the criteria provide the opportunity to add more specificity to the vaguely worded requirements set out within the National Planning Policy Framework and provides more detail in the application of the Adopted Local Plan design based policies.

2.7 Planning officers routinely assess applications using similar criteria as a matter of course. However some elements of the BfL12 criteria are outside of planning officer training and fall within the realms of architecture, urban design, or ecology. The way the document is set out draws such matters to the attention of officers and developers, and once identified they can be swiftly resolved. In this respect BfL12 is a powerful tool. BfL12 can also be easily used by non-planning

professionals, and is a useful way to convey the acceptability, or reasons otherwise, to Councillors and the general public.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 At present no Kent authorities have adopted 'BfL12', and few use it routinely. Ashford Borough Council refers to it within the supporting text of their Local Plan (rather than in specific policy wording), but have not formally adopted it. Their officers consider it to be useful.
- 3.2 It is considered that the Council should make reference to 'BfL12' as a technical document and formally applied to the assessment of those schemes comprising of more than 10 dwellings in accordance with being defined as a 'major' planning application and where most design benefit would be derived from its use.. This should be trialled over a 12 month period after which its effectiveness can be reviewed via the Planning Committee and reported back to the Local Plan Panel.
- 3.3 The 'BfL12' assessment would be used to inform pre-application discussions and form part of the Officers report on the application either for delegation or Planning Committee determination and used for planning appeal purposes if required.
- 3.4 If the above was agreed, it is intended that the 'BfL12' requirements would be published on the Council's web site and an introductory letter sent out to the main developers and housebuilders introducing our requirement to assess schemes against BfL12. Officers would then be able to routinely use 'BfL12' to assess proposals in the knowledge that they have the Council's backing in the event that a scheme is considered to be unacceptable.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Council could decide not to adopt the 'BfL12' standards and the service would continue through a less formal structured approach to handling design quality issues for major schemes.
- 4.2 Members may wish to review of the trial period or the limit of scale of planning application which would require its use. However, the proposal for a 12 month trial period and applying only to 'major' applications would appear to be proportionate and easily understood by developers.
- 4.3 The Council could decide to progress the adoption of BfL12 through a formal Supplementary Planning Document. However, this would require a formal consultation process on what is a nationally recognised design standard and would require at least 12 to 18 months before formal adoption. At this juncture, it is considered there is limited benefit on taking this more formal approach and to trial the use of BfL12 as a technical assessment tool to establish effectiveness in the first instance. Should its use as a technical document be challenged by developers, then the Council could consider taking a more formal approach.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

5.1 Discussions have taken place with the Cabinet Member for Planning and the Planning Committee Chair. Both support the approach proposed.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Supports 'A Council to be proud of' and 'A Borough to be proud of'
Financial, Resource and Property	None identified at this stage. Any training requirements for officers shall be met from within existing training budgets
Legal and Statutory	None identified at this stage.
Crime and Disorder	The 'BfL12' assessment supports proposals which are considered 'secure by design'.
Environmental Sustainability	'BfL12' assessment looks to ensure sustainable communities are designed and created.
Health and Wellbeing	The health and well being of new communities are central to the BfL12 approach of integrating new communities with existing established communities.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage.
Equality and Diversity	None identified at this stage.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage.

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: 'Building for Life 12 – The sign of a good place to live', Design Council, CABE, Design for Life, Home Builders federation, 2012.

8 Background Papers

None