

Environmental Building Design Standards

Meeting: Cabinet

Meeting date: Thursday 16 September 2021

Report by: Cabinet member housing, regulatory services, and community safety;

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

This paper seeks agreement to approve the output of the proposed environmental building design standards which will set the standard for future developments and retrofit of housing schemes across the county. At Cabinet on 26 November 2020 the decision was taken on how the council would progress the delivery of net carbon zero affordable housing across the county over the coming years.

Cabinet also approved the appointment of an independent expert to advise on building housing to maximise the environmental benefits to meet the council's climate emergency responsibilities.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) The Herefordshire Future Homes report be approved; and**
- b) The recommendations in the report are adopted as the recognised standards for future housing developments and retrofit work undertaken by the council.**

Alternative options

1. The council could choose not to define future environmental building design standards for housing delivered by the council in the county and allow the current standards to remain. However, the council has declared a climate emergency, recognising the severe

impacts of climate change and the need for urgent action. The proposal for the council to advance housing and have at least an element of control over design helps deliver the council's environmental policy commitments and aligns to the success measures in the County Plan so therefore this option was rejected.

Key considerations

2. The council commissioned Zero Carbon House to create a proposal and advise on standards for building housing to maximise the environmental benefits to meet the council's climate emergency responsibilities. The output of that work is summarised in Appendix 1.
3. The report titled, Herefordshire Future Homes (HFH), aims to set standards for net zero carbon homes developed by the council, and its partners across the county. It is aimed at all stakeholders involved in housing.
4. By embracing these principles in the HFH, the aim is to drive net zero carbon development in the region, create new jobs and skills, and support the local economy. Building homes for those who need them will enable communities to flourish for years to come. It is important that existing homes are not left behind, and are upgraded and properly insulated to make them fit for the future too.
5. Working alongside other council policies, such as the forthcoming Environmental Building Standards Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), these standards should raise expectations and inspire the council and others to provide the higher quality greener homes needed.
6. The proposed standards will aim to increase local resilience, by reducing energy supply needs, and reducing stress on the local electrical grid, both through lower energy demand and through smart grid renewables and or on-site storage.
7. It is accepted that Passivhaus is more expensive than traditional forms of construction, and therefore each site will require a viability assessment to verify economic deliverability. If commercial viability cannot be achieved alternative options will be considered.

Community impact

8. The County Plan aims to shape the future of Herefordshire and encourage and strengthen communities whilst creating a thriving local economy and protecting and enhancing the environment to ensure Herefordshire remains a great place to live, visit, work, learn and do business. Taking forward the proposed standards would support those strands being achieved.
9. The council recognises that healthy, connected and vibrant ecosystems strongly support the local economy, improve health and wellbeing and make the County an attractive place to live and to visit. It is vital that we protect and enhance this environment while stewarding it for future generations. This proposal aims to support that aspiration.

Environmental Impact

10. The proposal for the council to advance housing building standards and have control over design helps deliver the council's environmental policy commitments and aligns to the following success measures in the County Plan:
 - Increase flood resilience and reduce levels of phosphate pollution in the County's rivers – by ensuring that new developments take into account opportunities to minimise the impact on the environment including, where appropriate, through grey water capture and other methods.
 - Reduce the council's carbon emissions – seeking high levels of sustainability and energy efficiency in the construction and operating costs of new homes delivered.
 - Work in partnership with others to reduce County carbon emissions – working with partners to minimise our carbon footprint in terms of methods of construction and in seeking the use of local materials and labour wherever possible.
 - Improve the air quality within Herefordshire – supporting the development, where appropriate, of car free schemes in new developments and making provision for safe cycling and walking spaces.
 - Improve residents' access to green space in Herefordshire - ensuring new developments make appropriate provision for green space and the use of appropriate, indigenous planting.
 - Improve energy efficiency of homes and build standards for new housing – good design and high levels of energy efficiency in council-owned or influenced developments will provide a blueprint principle to other developers in Herefordshire.
 - Increase the number of short distance trips being undertaken by sustainable modes of travel – walking, cycling, and public transport – promoting access to sustainable modes of transport in the master-planning of larger scale developments.

11. The council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the people of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment

Equality duty

12. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:
- A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -
- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
13. Consideration will be given to the types and standard of accommodation developed taking a "fabric first" approach to building design, maximising the performance of the components and materials. Taking this approach can minimise the need for energy consumption so will be cost beneficial to the occupant, demonstrating the council's commitment to equality and their pro-active approach to ensuring the right properties are available in the right location and built to a high specification to meet the their needs.

Resource implications

14. The adoption of the new standards may have implications in terms of viability and deliverability of individual sites and that the resource implications of this will be reflected in the decision reports for individual developments.
15. There are no further financial implications from this report other than the agreed spend already agreed by Cabinet on 26 November 2020 to appoint an independent expert to advise on building housing to maximise the environmental benefits to meet the council's climate emergency responsibilities.

Legal implications

16. There are no legal implications arising from the council choosing to adopt the recommendations in the HFH report to inform future housing developments undertaken by the council and council commissioned retrofit work to housing in the county.

Risk management

17. The key risks associated with the options outlined in the paper are as follows:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
The council's wider sustainability objectives are not adequately incorporated in the proposal	The existing housing decisions already embeds the wider sustainability objectives and forms the starting point to develop any potential sites
The proposal does not incorporate proposed legislation changes and will become undeliverable.	The proposal has considered current and future legislation requirements including the revised minimum standards set to be introduced in 2025.
The proposal only considers new built developments.	The proposal has also included suggested approach for retrofit of existing properties to ensure they benefit from the initiative.
There is a risk of lower housing delivery rates due to increased cost of Passivhaus.	Use Passivhaus in conjunction with other forms of construction. Reduce S106 contributions to pay for Passivhaus additional construction costs.

16. Risks are managed according to the council's risk management framework, aligned with corporate risk strategy and recorded on a service risk register, being escalated to the directorate or corporate risk register according to the significance of the risk.

Consultees

17. Consultations have taken place with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regulatory Services and Community Safety; and the Cabinet Member for Environment, Economy and Skills.
18. This paper and the recommendations contained within it incorporate comments received during the above consultations

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Herefordshire Future Homes (net zero housing standard)

Background papers

None identified

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.