



## MERROW RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

[www.merrowresidents.org.uk](http://www.merrowresidents.org.uk)

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Guildford Borough Council,  
Millmead House,  
Guildford,  
Surrey,  
GU2 4BB  
[Planningpolicy@guildford.gov.uk](mailto:Planningpolicy@guildford.gov.uk)

Dear Sirs,

**Ref: Merrow Residents' Association (MRA) - Comments on Climate Change, Sustainable Design, Construction and Energy Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)**

This letter is the MRA's considered response to Guildford Borough Council's (GBC) consultation on the Climate Change, Sustainable Design, Construction and Energy Supplementary Planning Document. We recognize and appreciate the opportunity to review and comment on this important document within the timeline given by GBC from Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> March to Monday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Should you have any questions related to this MRA response or wish to communicate with us, please do so via Mr. Gordon Farquharson, the MRA coordinator in these matters.

MRA recognises the importance of this detailed document in setting out a rigorous and forward-thinking approach to meeting the GBC and National Climate Change initiatives through the sustainable design, construction and energy objectives within the Local Plan. We congratulate GBC on this document, its scope, content and references. It contains essential detail required to implement important parts of the Local Plan.

We have a number of suggested improvements that are highlighted in detail in this letter. However, we also have a major concern about how GBC Planning Department is going to ensure small and large scale developers are going to follow the SPD immediately. Neither the Local Plan nor this SPD identify how GBC is going to provide the necessary resources and skills. We must remember that a home built today will have to achieve our zero carbon 2050 targets. In reality, this is less than a mortgage life away, and new homeowners must not find they have a huge refurbishment bill as 2050 approaches. We are concerned that this SPD may just become words on paper unless relevant skills are available, and that GBC has the teeth to ensure delivery of the requirements:

- Does GBC have the power to force developers to implement the guidance that goes way beyond current building regulations?
- Does GBC have the skills in the planning department to police these policies?
- Do the developers have the competencies to comprehend the impact and implement suitable designs in a sustainable way?

Whilst not directly relevant to this document, we are concerned that there might be conflicts between best low energy practice (as exhibited in "Passivhaus" and "LETI solutions"), what homeowners want to buy, affordability and developer's short term profit approach. Nearly all the design concepts from "Passivhaus" and "Leti" will look radically different from the traditional approach we have become accustomed to today in developments in MRA's area like Merrow Park for example. This may be a bit controversial, but the days of spreading the surface of former farmland with near identical detached and semi-detached little

boxes with fenced off gardens and no-where to park has probably gone. We are likely to see more dense energy efficient buildings, factory modular pre-built buildings, underground parking maybe, with shared green space.

### **MRA comments on specific clauses in the SPD:**

**Policy D2.** The opening clause (1) is weak and needs to be reinforced.

Suggest “(1) Proposals for zero carbon development **are strongly supported mandatory**. Applications for development, including refurbishment, conversion and extensions to existing buildings ~~should~~ shall include information setting out how sustainable design and construction practice will be incorporated including (where applicable):”

This clause has no meaning, what national standard?

“(1) (d) water efficiency that meets the **highest national standard** and”

We don’t understand what proportionate means in this context. It seems difficult to police. (note, the same comment applies to clause 3.2 (2).

“(2a) Major development should include a sustainability statement setting out how the matters in this policy have been addressed. Smaller developments should **include information proportionate to the size of the development in the planning application.**”

We don’t understand how this aspiration can be implemented, and what mechanisms might be used to support and encourage implementation.

“Climate change mitigation, decentralised, renewable and low carbon energy (4) **The development of low and zero carbon and decentralised energy, including ©CHP\* distribution networks, is strongly supported and encouraged.**”

Please explain why these retail units are excluded.

**(10) Retail units falling within Use Classes A1, A2, A3 and A4 in Guildford Town Centre are not subject to the carbon reduction requirement at paragraph (9).**

We have major concerns with two other matters identified in the GBC SPD.

**Carbon Offsetting.** There are major concerns in the market about the reality and robustness of carbon credit and carbon offset schemes. These often present a major risk to the investor and can be extremely difficult to validate when claimed by a developer as a part of their energy and carbon compliance. Does GBC have the knowledge, expertise and ability to scrutinise the viability of any carbon offset elements within a developer’s proposals?

“Zero carbon, for the purposes of the policy and this SPD, means that all regulated emissions are eliminated or offset. Regulated emissions are those emissions from buildings that are regulated under Part L of the Building Regulations (the energy consumed by building services for space heating/cooling and hot-water systems, ventilation and internal lighting). Unregulated emissions are those arising from energy use other than for building services, such as appliances, cooking and IT equipment.”

**UK Building Regulations and “Future Homes Standard”.** These are quoted several times in the SPD and we don’t believe they are compatible with the tenor and direction of the guidance. We are very concerned that reference to Part L of the Building Regulations will lead to almost total reliance on low/zero carbon energy sources and carbon offset as the prime mechanisms of achieving the SPD objectives. This may also lead to a future increase in energy poverty. More broadly, we are seriously concerned about the government’s proposals for the Future Homes Standard, which sets out energy efficiency and carbon emission standards for new homes. The proposals will allow new homes to be built to lower energy efficiency standards than homes built today. This is a depressing step backwards rather than the huge leap forwards we need to take in the face of the climate emergency.

Our primary concerns are:

- a) The Future Homes Standard does not target zero carbon emissions, but a reduction in carbon emissions compared with the current Part L (the national building standard on energy efficiency and carbon emissions). This approach is unnecessarily complex and fails to respond to the UK's legal commitment to achieve carbon zero by 2050.
- b) The Future Homes Standard does not prioritise energy efficiency. Instead it relies on bolt-on technologies to reduce emissions. This approach fails to address fuel poverty or occupant health and will likely mean that new homes are more expensive to run. In addition, they will have to be retrofitted not long after they're built – at huge cost – to meet carbon zero standards.
- c) The Future Homes Standard has the effect of removing and diluting local authorities' powers to demand greater energy efficiency or carbon emissions than the building regulations. This will not only prevent towns and cities from reaching their own zero carbon targets but will send the more ambitious backwards compared to what they're achieving today.
- d) The Future Homes Standard makes no requirement for post-occupancy monitoring. Currently most houses do not meet the energy efficiency standards they are designed to meet. Without monitoring, we will be unable to measure or ensure compliance with the building regulations.
- e) The Future Homes Standard does not consider embodied carbon. This is the carbon emissions related to building the house. Reducing embodied carbon is the necessary next step to reduce carbon emissions quickly.

There are several well informed professional groups such as LETI (London Energy Transformation Initiative), the Passivhaus Institute and as mentioned in the SPD The Building for Life 12 document that publish much specific technical guidance.

We note with great interest the technical detail of the guidance included in the SPD, and applaud GBC for their comprehensive approach.

*4.22 It can be expensive and difficult to convert high temperature heat networks fuelled by gas boilers or gas ©CHP to low carbon/renewable sources such as heat pumps and waste heat because heat networks that use these sources typically operate at lower temperatures than those fuelled by gas. Therefore, in order to facilitate a future shift to zero carbon energy, the system should be designed to be able to operate at lower temperatures suitable to very low carbon heat sources (fifth generation networks run at a temperature close to ambient ground temperature). This should not compromise the ability of the system to run at the optimal temperature for the energy source used at the outset.*

Finally, you (GBC) specifically stated that you were particularly interested in receiving answers to the following questions within the representations. We have addressed them below.

- 1) *Are the alternative submission documents listed in section 3 (see 3.9 to 3.11) correct? Are there any other accreditation schemes that have standards that are equivalent to or better than the standards set out in Local Plan policy D2 that should also be accepted in lieu of energy and/or sustainability statements? Please tell us the schemes and standards.*

MRA doesn't have any comments to add.

- 2) *Is the guidance within the Sustainable Design and Construction Guide in section 5 correct? Is there any other guidance that should be added?*

MRA doesn't have any guidance to add.

- 3) *Are the questions in the questionnaire at Appendix 2 appropriate and adequate to ensure that non-major developments provide information that demonstrates that the requirements of Local Plan policy have been met? Will developers of non-major developments be able to answer the questions? Should any further questions be added?*

MRA believes that the questionnaire is reasonable as a check-list against the SPD requirements, but needs some reinforcement to test the integrity of the developers and their capability to deliver the technical solutions required.

We fear that there will be many developers not able to provide satisfactory answers to the questions unless they up their game from current expectations. Historically, satisfying building regulations in the UK has been totally reliant on compliance rather than deploying a deeper understanding of more complex philosophies and principles. The SPD moves into a much more complex territory where there is often more than one solution to meet the objective. Good design is likely to require some iteration and modelling the performance of different solutions. Also, the quality and completeness of workmanship is more critical, and the era of simple reliance on the capacity and competence of building control assessment has passed. MRA suggests that it would be wise to add some further questions to test/check the following:

Qualified and experienced design is essential to ensure delivery of a building meeting the SPD objectives.

- Are the members of your design team that influence the energy and sustainability aspects of your design in-house staff or sub-contractors?
- Provide the names and credentials of the key staff taking responsibility for the energy and sustainability aspects of your design.

Construction and installation quality forms an essential component of any building. However, sustainable and energy efficient solutions require the application of a properly managed quality assurance programme throughout the design and build. Ad-hoc reliance on GBC building inspectors is wholly inappropriate.

- Provide an outline of your QA programme, including specifically how you intend to address those aspects that have an impact on the sustainability and energy efficiency of the design.
- Who is responsible for your QA programme? If sub-contracted external resources are used, provide details that demonstrate their suitability.

We trust that these MRA comments on your SPD help with its refinement and improvement. We reiterate that MRA believes this is an essential support tool for the Guildford Local Plan.

Yours faithfully,



Gordon Farquharson  
For Merrow Resident' Association (MRA)