

Green Party response to Charnwood Area Plan with regard to new build housing standards

Given the number of new homes to be constructed (nearly 20,000) in the district it is essential that they meet the highest energy standards to as not to increase the CO2 emissions from the Charnwood area. These new homes will almost all be with us in 2050 when Government policy aims to achieve carbon neutrality across all sectors. They should thus be constructed now so as to achieve net zero emissions.

The independent Sustainability Appraisal commissioned by Charnwood makes specific relevant comments:

“Minimise the likely impacts of climate change through promotion of appropriate adaptation measures in new development.”

And suggests that new development should achieve ‘good’, ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ BREEAM or EcoHomes rating with a proportion of total electricity consumption coming from renewable sources.

Although BREEAM® is still a voluntary scheme, the majority of local authorities in the UK have incorporated the building certification system into their planning process as a mandatory requirement for new buildings.

A key point highlighted in the Appraisal is that “The government announced in January 2021 that there will be no restriction on local authorities to set higher standards for energy efficiency in new homes. There is therefore potential for the Local Plan to set more ambitious standards for development, rather than ‘encourage’. In the medium to long term, the mandatory standards for new homes will most likely increase, but a large amount of new homes will be built in the short term. Emissions associated with new homes are significant over their lifetime and tackling climate change is an urgent challenge. Therefore, every effort must be made to ensure that new development is energy efficient.”

Charnwood’s plan with regard to housing standards is not consistent with this, and thus should be revised.

The Charnwood Borough Council Local Plan 2021-37 Housing Topic Paper makes no reference to energy standards. The best the local plan can offer is “encouraging the development to, where viable, exceed Building Regulations for carbon emissions”. And more specifically to “encourage these schemes to provide a 10% reduction in CO2 emissions when compared to the Building Regulations”. This limitation to encouraging is exactly what the Sustainability Appraisal sanctions against.

To achieve a net CO2 performance, new buildings must be built to the highest thermal standards (either passive house, or BREEAM outstanding). They should use electric space and water heating, ideally through ground source heat pumps, and they should include the installation of solar PV panels and solar water heating.

David Infield Loughborough Green Party