

Planning for Climate Change

- **Local authority area:** Harrogate Borough Council
- **Stakeholders:** Forward Planning, Development Control, Environment and Strategy Team, respondents to consultation on the Harrogate District Core Strategy

Summary

This case study focuses on the implementation of part b) of Policy EQ1 of the Harrogate District Core Strategy, which requires all new non residential development and all non-residential conversions and extensions to meet BREEAM 'very good', and all new dwellings to meet Code level 4 (Code level 6 from 2016 onwards).

Key learning points

- Carry out regular training with development management officers. They will need to have the confidence to advise as part of pre-application discussions and ultimately they will be required to discharge conditions. Speak to those with a technical knowledge of issues surrounding installation of various renewable energy technologies;
- Produce a guidance note to help applicants through the process.
- Before introducing the policy, email all agents and developers with guidance about the new policy and the information they will be expected to provide. Make clear that there are costs associated with implementing Code/BREEAM standards including the certification process and build costs, which need to be incorporated into project plans.
- Provide training for Members so that they understand issues relating to the Code/BREEAM when planning applications are discussed at committee.
- Ensure that applicants are aware of exactly what is expected at the earliest opportunity (e.g. pre application discussions). Applicants may not be familiar with the Code/BREEAM standards and it is important that the measures required to meet the minimum standards are integrated into the design process from the beginning. It is much more expensive to meet these standards retrospectively.
- Think about the types of development that are likely to be exempt from the standards and set these out within the guidance.
- Have a process in place to deal with cases where the applicant puts forward a case for technical or financial viability issues.

Background

- The importance of reducing risks to the environment, particularly mitigating and adapting to climate change, is clearly set out within national policy. It is also an important local issue as demonstrated through consultation, local evidence base, and Harrogate Borough Council's Strategic Plan.
- The Harrogate District Core Strategy was adopted in February 2009 and includes Policy EQ1: Reducing Risks to the Environment. Part a) of this policy encourages a partnership approach to minimising energy and water consumption, reducing the use of natural non-renewable resources, reducing travel by car, managing flood risk and waste. Part b) sets out minimum standards of sustainable construction and design for all new development. Part c) sets out the Council's approach to proposals for renewable energy projects.
- Part b) of Policy EQ1 is broadly in line with the previous Government's aspirations for new housing to meet higher levels of the Code for Sustainable Homes through changes to building regulations (Building a Greener Future: Towards Zero Carbon Development (DCLG, 2007)).

Method

- In order to ensure that part b) of Policy EQ1 is met, the Council sets out requirements as part of the validation process:
 - All applications are required to be accompanied by a pre-assessment estimator, carried out by an accredited BREEAM/Code assessor to demonstrate a commitment to meeting the minimum standards of BREEAM/Code.
 - The pre-assessment estimator sets out the measures that will be taken to meet the required standards. These measures should be incorporated into the design of the development.
 - Each application must be accompanied by a signed Sustainable Construction and Design Validation Certificate, to show the level that will be achieved. The accreditation number of the assessor must also be included.
 - If the pre-assessment estimator and certificate are submitted and they demonstrate that the minimum standards will be achieved the application is validated.
 - If the applicant puts forward a case regarding financial viability they are required to submit all costs associated with the development, which are then forwarded to the Council's Valuation Office for consideration.
 - If the applicant puts forward a case stating that the requirements cannot feasibly be achieved (e.g. due to site constraints) these are discussed further with the BREEAM/Code assessor and the applicant. If the required standard cannot be met a lower standard may be accepted. Then the application can be validated.

- Once the application is validated and if permission is granted, a condition is applied which requires a design stage BREEAM/Code certificate to be submitted to the Council before construction starts and a post construction certificate to be submitted prior to first occupation.
- In terms of resources, officer time has been the key input.
- We are still developing a monitoring system for Policy EQ1.
- **Barriers**
 - Lack of knowledge of the BREEAM/Code standards (applicants and development control officers). This has improved over time through regular training with development control officers and the production of a guidance note to accompany Policy EQ1, available to developers and officers.
 - The amount of time required to check that planning applications are valid and to explain the process to applicants. We developed a flow chart for officers in the Information and Plans Processing Unit (IPPU), which has reduced the number of queries to Planning Policy Officers.
 - Frustration from applicants due to extra cost and information required. Meeting the standards does mean additional cost for the development in terms of the certification process and build cost. Over time the local agents and developers have become familiar with the requirements. Once they have been through the process it is much easier the next time. We make clear that this is a policy that the majority of applications must be in conformity with and that we treat all applications in a consistent manner.

Key contact

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References / Links

LDF part of the Harrogate Borough Council Website
www.harrogate.gov.uk/ldf

Core Strategy – Policy EQ1 and the Sustainable Construction and Design Validation Certificate and guidance note
<http://www.harrogate.gov.uk/Pages/harrogate-3161.aspx>