



**DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT AND PLANNING SUPPORTING STATEMENT**

**BASEMENT, QUEEN COURT, QUEEN SQUARE,**

**BLOOMSBURY, LONDON WC1N 3BA**

**PROPOSED CONVERSION OF EXISTING BASEMENT TO SELF CONTAINED**

**RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY (RESUBMISSION)**

**Our Ref: AAH/0607/12PLA**

**October 2012**

## PLANNING SUPPORTING STATEMENT

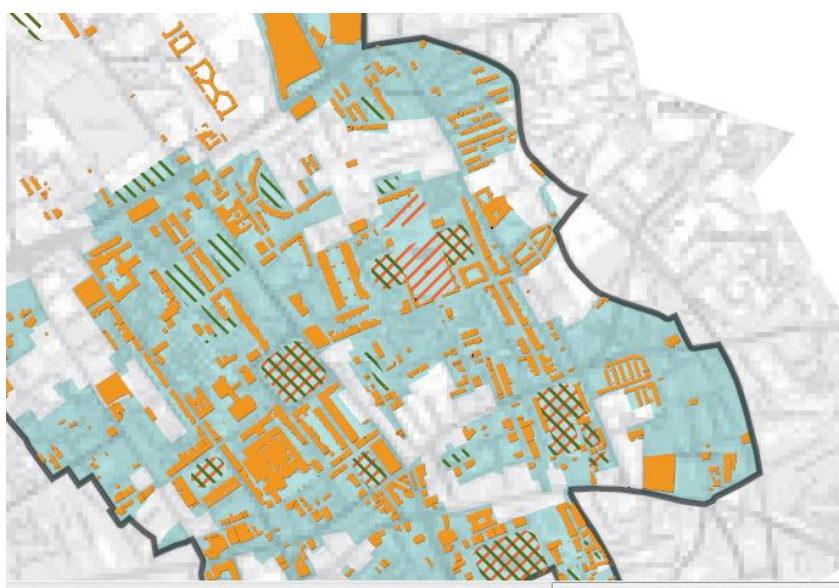
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## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 This statement sets out an analysis of the relevant planning policy principles which need to be considered in support of this application, for the conversion of an existing basement which forms part of an existing dwelling at Queen Court, Queen Square, Bloomsbury.
- 1.2 The development proposal involves the subdivision of the existing boiler and electric room, and then the conversion to provide a one bedroom self contained flat. The proposal would involve no external alterations to the building, rather the erection of internal walls. This has been made possible by the reduced bulk of modern electrical and boiler equipment.
- 1.3 It is proposed to create a self contained one bedroom flat, providing a double bedroom, open plan living/dining room and a bathroom area. This part of the building already has an independent entrance to street level, and would comfortably be able to be converted with minimal external works, the main alteration being the enlargement of one of the windows fronting the basement, which would allow more natural light to enter the proposed premises.
- 1.4 The proposed development would be located within central London, to the east of Russell Square. The site is surrounded by Great Ormond Street Hospital, and The University of London colleges. Queen Court is arranged around a green area, which is central in the courtyard.

## 2.0 The Site Details

- 2.1 The site is characterised as consisting of large scale Victorian buildings, which vary in scale and mass. There are a variety of uses within the immediate locality, which is typical of the Bloomsbury area. These include medical, educational, commercial and residential uses which all surround the site. The area has a definite urban character, with high density buildings within the Bloomsbury area of central London. The application site itself is comprised of the basement of the building known as Queen Court. The basement currently houses plant material for Queen Court.
- 2.2 The application site is within the designated Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The conservation extends from Euston Road to the north, to High Holborn, Tottenham Court Road and Kings Cross. One of the principle reasons for the area's designation is the international significance of the urban design and town planning between 1660 and 1840. The conservation area was designated in 1968, with a view to protecting the Georgian area, and subsequent Victorian and Edwardian high quality 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture. The conservation area appraisal continues to identify that the predominate character of the area is three or four storey terraced town houses, with basement and attics. This was altered in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which saw much larger buildings interspersed with the townhouses, to provide large institutions, hotels and public buildings. The application site is the basement level of Queen Court. This area consists of buildings which were redeveloped in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The range of architecture in the square is currently part of its character.



**Conservation Area Map**

## **3.0 Planning Policy**

- 3.1 Planning applications must be determined in accordance with the statutory Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. If the Development Plan contains material policies or proposals and there are no other material considerations, the application should be determined in accordance with the Development Plan. Where there are other material considerations, the Development Plan should be the starting point, and other material considerations should be taken into account in reaching a decision. One such consideration is whether the plan policies are relevant and up to date. The Act provides that if there is a conflict between policies in a Development Plan Document, the most recent policy will take precedence.
- 3.2 The key planning policies relating to the principle of the proposed development are emphasised within this statement. The Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was adopted on 27 March 2012 and this has now replaced PPS1 and PPS3 which would have otherwise been relevant as material considerations.
- 3.3 At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking. Housing applications should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development. The NPPF framework aims to encourage new proposals that promote the principles of sustainable economic, social and environmental development. The document aims to ensure that developments which comply with the principle of sustainable development are encouraged and are not held back or unduly restricted by the planning system.
- 3.4 With regards to the design of new development, the NPPF explains that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people. Further, planning policies and decisions should not attempt to impose architectural styles or particular tastes and they should not stifle innovation, originality or initiative through unsubstantiated requirements to conform to certain development forms or styles. It is, however, proper to seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness. Although visual appearance and the architecture of individual buildings are very important factors, securing high quality and inclusive design goes beyond aesthetic considerations. Therefore, planning policies and decisions should address the connections between people and places and the integration of new development into the natural, built and historic environment.

- 3.5 In terms of housing development, the NPPF provides development objectives which should also be taken into account when making planning decisions. Within its core planning principles relating to housing development, the framework states that planning should:

*"- proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, business and industrial units, infrastructure and thriving local places that the country needs.  
- always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings;"*

- 3.6 Specifically, the NPPF states that local authorities should incorporate a range of processes related to boosting housing delivery, including identifying a deliverable 5 year supply of housing (similar to the principles of PPS3) based on the use of robust evidence. This includes provision of a 5% buffer to ensure choice and competition and where there has been a record of persistent underdelivery, to increase this buffer to 20% in order to "provide a realistic prospect of achieving planned supply".

- 3.7 This application would see the provision of one dwelling through the reuse of the basement of an existing building. The application seeks to enlarge a window in the subterranean forecourt area, and to create a bedroom, open plan living dining area and private bathroom.

- 3.8 The application site is located within Camden Council's remit. The council have an adopted Local Development Framework Core Strategy which provides strategic guidance on development in the area, with the Development Plan. The following policies from the Core Strategy document highlight the strategic focus for development in the district, providing a steer on the specific locations and targets for new residential development:

- 3.9 Policy DP5: Homes of Different Size

The policy identifies that within the borough there are a range of accommodation requirements. The policy seeks to encourage residential development, and to encourage a variety of sized properties in order to create a mix of tenures, scale and occupants. The policy states that:

*The council will contribute to the creation of mixed and inclusive communities by securing a range of self-contained homes of different sizes. We will:*

- a) seek to ensure that all residential development contributes to meeting the priorities set out in the Dwelling Size Priorities Table, including conversion of existing residential and non-residential floor space;*

- b) expect a mix of large and small homes in all residential developments. In considering the mix of dwelling sizes appropriate to a development, the Council will have regard to the different dwelling size priorities for social rented, intermediate affordable and market homes, and will take into account:*
- c) the character of the development, the site and the area, including the impact of the mix on child density;*
- d) site size, and any constraints on including homes of different sizes; and*
- e) the economics and financial viability of the site, including the demand for homes of different sizes.*

### 3.10 Policy DP26: Managing the impact of development on occupiers and neighbours

This policy seeks to ensure that existing amenity levels are retained should the application be approved and implements. The policy sets out the main considerations for the criteria, which are summarised below.

*The factors we will consider include:*

- a) visual privacy and overlooking;*
- b) overshadowing and outlook;*
- c) sunlight, daylight and artificial light levels;*
- d) noise and vibration levels;*
- e) odour, fumes and dust;*
- f) microclimate;*
- g) the inclusion of appropriate attenuation measures. We will also require developments to provide:*
- h) an acceptable standard of accommodation in terms of internal arrangements, dwelling and room sizes and amenity space;*
- i) facilities for the storage, recycling and disposal of waste;*
- j) facilities for bicycle storage; and*
- k) outdoor space for private or communal amenity space, wherever practical.*

### 3.11 DP25 - Conserving Camden's Heritage

The application site is within the designated Bloomsbury Conservation Area, accordingly the policy, which seeks to preserve the special character and appearance of the conservation area, should be considered. The main points in the policy are set out below:

*The council will:*

- a) take account of conservation area statements, appraisals and management plans when assessing applications within conservation areas;*
- b) only permit development within conservation areas that preserves and enhances the character and appearance of the area;*
- c) prevent the total or substantial demolition of an unlisted building that makes a*
- d) positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area where this harms the character or appearance of the conservation area, unless exceptional circumstances are shown that outweigh the case for retention;*
- e) not permit development outside of a conservation area that causes harm to the character and appearance of that conservation area; and*
- f) preserve trees and garden spaces which contribute to the character of a conservation area and which provide setting for Camden's architectural heritage*

### 3.12 DP2 - Making full use of Camden's capacity for housing

The council accept that there is a need for more housing within the borough, and that there should be no net decrease of available accommodation. The policy states that;

*The Council will seek to maximise the supply of additional homes in the borough, especially homes for people unable to access market housing, by:*

- a) expecting the maximum appropriate contribution to supply of housing on sites that are underused or vacant, taking into account any other uses that are needed on the site;*
- b) resisting alternative development of sites considered particularly suitable for housing; and*
- c) resisting alternative development of sites or parts of sites considered particularly*
- d) suitable for affordable housing, homes for older people or homes for vulnerable people.*

*The Council will seek to minimise the loss of housing in the borough by:*

- e) protecting residential uses from development that would involve a net loss of residential floor space, including any residential floor space provided:
 
  - within hostels or other housing with shared facilities; or*
  - as an ancillary element of another use, wherever the development involves changing the main use or separating the housing floor space from the main use.**
- f) protecting permanent housing from conversion to short-stay accommodation intended for occupation for periods of less than 90 days;*



*g) resisting developments that would involve the net loss of two or more homes, unless they:*

- create large homes in a part of the borough with a relatively low proportion of large dwellings,*
- enable sub-standard units to be enlarged to meet residential space standards, or*
- enable existing affordable homes to be adapted to provide the affordable dwelling-sizes that are most needed.*

*As an exception to the general protection of residential floor space, where no alternative site is available, the Council will favourably consider development that necessitates a limited loss of residential floor space in order to provide small-scale healthcare practices meeting local needs.*

3.13 In addition, policy DP27; basement and lightwells, is also a consideration, although the proposal seeks for purely a conversion of the existing basement, rather than the creation of a completely new basement, which would mean that it is not, in its entirety, wholly relevant.

3.14 The site is also within the designated air quality protection area, accordingly policy DP32: Air quality and Camden's Clear Zone, should be considered.

3.15 In terms of additional guidance in relation to the proposed development, the councils 'Guidance on residential development standards', which acts an addendum to policy CSP2, is relevant. This seeks to clarify the council's position with regard to providing satisfactory accommodation, and provides prescriptive guidance for suitable development. It states the following:

- 'All newly created dwellings for households of 2 or more people should be self-contained (applies to homes in Use Class C3, but does not apply to care homes for elderly or vulnerable people, student housing, bedsits, or other Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). '
- Each dwelling should have its own secure private entrance which leads either directly from the street or off a common entrance hall – the number of entrances off one corridor should be limited.

#### Layout

- 4.7 There should usually be a permanent partition between eating and sleeping areas. Kitchens and living rooms that are permanently separated are preferable.

However, combined kitchen and living areas are considered acceptable as long as the floor area is sufficient to allow for the greater range of activities that will take place in them.

### Rooms

- All rooms should be able to function for the purpose for which they are intended. They should have an adequate size, shape, door arrangement, height, insulation for noise and vibration and natural lighting and ventilation.

### Internal Space Standards Ceiling Heights

- All habitable rooms should have minimum headroom of 2.3 metres. The exceptions are habitable rooms in existing basements, which may have 2.1 metres headroom, and habitable rooms in attics which should have a minimum room height of 2.3 metres over at least half of the floor area (not including any floor space where the ceiling height is less than 1.5 metres).

### Space and room sizes

- Although planning cannot control the precise internal layout of individual proposals, it is important to ensure that dwellings are capable of providing a suitable layout and adequate room sizes that reflect the use and type of accommodation. The council will be flexible in the application of these guidelines in order to respond to site-specific circumstances.
- The overall internal floor space in new self-contained dwellings (excluding communal lobbies and staircases) should normally meet or exceed the minimum standards set out in the following table.

Number of Persons	1	2	3	4	5	6
Minimum floor space (sq m)	32	48	61	75	84	93

First and double bedrooms - 11.0 sq m

Single bedrooms - 6.5 sq m

Self-contained homes providing a floor space below the minimum standards may be considered in exceptional circumstances, for example to reduce the cost of Intermediate

Housing to the occupier, however their acceptability will depend on other aspects of the development proposed. Sympathetic consideration may be given where a proposal meets a number of the criteria below:

- Dwellings are targeted at, and affordable to, groups identified by the Borough as being in need.
- External amenity space is provided a limited number of dwellings are accessed from each entry point and corridor (ideally 8 or fewer, unless controlled by a concierge or a CCTV system allowing clear facial identification).

3.16 It is considered that this application complies with the above mentioned policies, guidance and the proposed development would be sensitively sited in a location which would complement the existing housing stock and character of the area. Furthermore, its location and reuse of existing space to provide suitable accommodation can be achieved whilst respecting the amenity of the general area.

## **4.0 Planning History**

- 4.1 The site currently forms the basement of Queen Court. There is no specific relevant planning history related to the basement itself within which it is proposed to accommodate the new dwelling, however, there is some history associated with Queen Court. However, none of the planning history is relevant in terms of considering the current proposal.

## 5.0 Consideration

- 5.1 In this part of the statement, the proposed development will be considered against local and national planning policy and guidance, with relevant material planning considerations being considered sequentially.

### Principle of the Development

- 5.2 The principle of having a net increase of residential accommodation within the borough is considered favourably. Policy DP2, 'Making full use of Camden's capacity for Housing' actively encourages the creation of additional housing and seeks to increase the supply to protect residential uses within the borough, and avoid development which would result in a net decrease in the provision of housing. The proposal is to convert underused accommodation to create a single one bedroom self contained flat, which is compliant with the underlying aims of the policy.
- 5.3 In addition, Policy DP 5 seeks to ensure that the borough has a range of homes of different sizes. The range of sizes reflects the diverse population of the borough, with their varying accommodation needs and requirements, which means that any development should reflect this range of accommodation. The council also refers to the Dwelling Size Priorities Tables', which will be referred to within this report. The policy also considers site constraints, which in this instance, would reflect the available area for conversion. The council state that they consider a one bedroom flat to constitute as a 'smaller home'. The council also state in paragraph 5.8 of the LDF 'where a development involves the re- use of an existing building, this may limit the potential to provide a range of dwelling sizes'. It continues that 'issues that can arise include the creation of access via an existing staircase or lift: respect for the integrity of existing structural walls and patterns of windows: changes in floor levels'. In this instance, as the proposed dwelling would make use of an existing basement, there are limitations to layout by virtue of the windows and doors, which are the primary reason for the proposed layout, which seeks to make the best use of the available space.
- 5.4 The Dwelling Size Priorities Table within the Development Plan identifies that 1 bedroom, market housing is within the lower priority area, however, by virtue of the points previously explained, reuse of an existing building, and with opportunities for larger development not forthcoming, the proposal would still maintain the policy aims of DP2 by materially increasing Camden's housing supply. It may be reasonable to conclude that the principle of the proposed development would be compliant.

## Amenity

- 5.5 Amenity is a material consideration, particularly when it relates to the creation of new residential development. Development should provide satisfactory levels of amenity for future occupiers, whilst preserve amenities of existing uses within the locality. As the proposal seeks to convert an existing basement, Policy DP 27, 'Basement and Lightwells', is a material consideration. The policy is generally focused on the creation of new basements or lightwells. In this instance, the proposed change of use would provide no material alterations to the existing lightwell, and would not involve the extension of the existing basement, therefore the policy has limited weight in determining this application.
- 5.6 The council seeks to ensure that future occupiers of residential development enjoy elements of space within the property which would provide adequate internal accommodation. Policy DP26 seeks to protect the amenity of current occupiers and neighbouring uses. By virtue of the basement having an external self contained entrance and egress, combined with the size of the property, which would generate a limited increase in pedestrian and future occupiers using the premises, the overall impact may be considered to be limited. This would be concurrent with the aims of DP26, in terms of maintaining visual privacy, having no material impact upon overshadowing or loss of outlook. The accommodation itself would provide windows opening onto the sunken forecourt. The enlarged window will assist in the property itself having access to light. Externally the space for cycle and bin storage will also mean that the proposal is policy compliant. Policy CS6, 'Providing Quality Homes' should also be considered when determining the suitability of the proposed development. The proposal, by definition, is 'self contained' meaning that it has its own kitchen and bedroom and a separate front door. The separation between the rooms is permanent, and the rooms are fit for purpose. The proposal would maintain the ceiling height of 2.1m, as deemed acceptable in basements. The minimum floor space is considered to be 32m squared. The double bedroom measuring over the 11m squared, as specified by the council as being acceptable. The proposed window alterations would seek to be compliant with policy in terms of maximising sunlight into the property, with both habitable rooms having access to natural sunlight. By virtue of the single dwelling, and uses at ground floor level, it is not anticipated that there would be any issues with regard to noise and vibration. The external amenity space is limited, however, with space for cycle and bin storage, and access to local open spaces, and the fact the proposal is for a one bedroom property, combined to justify that this property does not require external amenity space.

## **Conservation Area**

- 5.7 The site is within the designated Bloomsbury Conservation Area, and therefore Policy DP25 'Conserving Camden's Heritage' is relevant. This policy seeks to protect the special architectural interest within the area, with a view that development should either preserve or enhance the special character of the area. With this proposal, it would be reasonable to assume that the proposal would not materially harm the special historic setting of the conservation area by virtue of the minor external alteration, and the visual prominence of the site. The proposed external alterations are the enlargement of a single window which fronts onto the basement entrance. The modest alteration does not have a significant material impact upon the wider conservation area, and does not architecturally detract from the building itself. National planning policy, and the wider aims of the LDF, combine to highlight the merits of providing additional housing. The limited external alteration would also be compliant with Policy DP24, which seeks to secure high quality design. The modest alterations, providing the use of appropriate materials is used, would not materially detract from the special character of the area.

## **Protected Area**

- 5.8 The proposed site is within the Camden Clear Zone, which is further described in Policy DP32. By virtue of the scale of the development, and the proposed use, it is not considered that the proposal would cause harm to air quality, and therefore is not wholly relevant in this instance.

## **6.0 Lifetime Homes Standards Criteria**

- 6.1 The Mayor launched the first Supplementary Planning Guidance to the London Plan on 27 April 2004. The guidance is called Accessible London: Achieving an Inclusive Environment and gives advice on how to promote and achieve an inclusive environment in London.
- 6.2 The Lifetime Homes Standard was established in the mid-1990s to incorporate a set of principles that should be implicit in good housing design. Good design, in this context, is considered to be design that maximizes utility, independence and quality of life, while not compromising other design issues such as aesthetics or cost effectiveness. The Lifetime Homes Standard includes a 16 point design criteria, each of which are covered in more detail below:

### **Parking (width or widening capability)**

- 6.3 The principle of this design criteria is to provide or enable by cost effective adaption parking that makes getting into and out of the vehicle as convenient as possible. In this particular instance there is no parking proposed as part of the application. Therefore criterion 1 is not relevant.

### **Approach to dwelling from parking (distance, gradients and widths)**

- 6.4 This seeks to enable convenient movement between the vehicle and the dwelling. As stated in criterion one, there is no parking proposed and therefore this is not relevant.

### **Approach to all entrances**

- 6.5 Criterion 3 seeks to ensure that as far as practical there should be convenient movement along other approach routes to dwellings. The approach to all entrances should preferably be level or gently sloping. The proposed dwelling is located on the basement level and is therefore below the street level. Due to the height of the entrance to the dwelling in relation to the height of the street level, it would not be possible to provide a gently sloping approach to the entrance. There are no other realistic alternatives except for using the existing stepped access.

### **Entrances**

- 6.6 This criteria seeks to ensure that there is ease of use for all entrances and for the widest range of people. The proposal is able to be in compliance with this criteria as the access



would have clear opening widths and have a level external landing and is at a right angle to the access route.

### **Communal stairs and lifts**

- 6.7 This seeks to enable access to dwellings above the entrance level to as many people as possible. The proposed dwelling is located below the entrance level and would have its own designated access and would not require communal stairs and lift.

### **Internal doorways and hallways**

- 6.8 This seeks to ensure that movement in hallways and through doorways is as convenient to the widest range of people. Given the site constraints to access the site it is unlikely that mobility aids and wheelchairs will be operating in the dwelling and therefore these measurements are required for the movement of furniture. The corridor falls within the required criteria being 1 metre wide and the criteria being over 900mm.
- 6.9 The store which is head on is just under the required 750mm. However it is considered that an exemption should be made in this case given that the door room is not habitable and is only required for storage. It is considered that there is suitable room for the movement of furniture into and around the flat. There are suitable door nibs on the pull side of the doors.

### **Circulation Space**

- 6.10 This seeks to ensure that there is suitable space for turning a wheelchair in dining areas and living rooms. Notwithstanding the site constraints and that wheelchair access to the flat will be difficult, there is suitable space within the living areas for turning a wheelchair.

### **Entrance level living space**

- 6.11 The living space and kitchen are located on the entrance level in accordance with the best practice.

### **Potential for entrance level bed-space**

- 6.12 This criterion relates to the potential to provide bedrooms on the entrance level in properties with two or more storeys. The proposed flat would be located on the basement level and would only be a single storey. This criterion is therefore not relevant to the proposal.

## **Entrance level WC and shower drainage**

- 6.13 This criterion relates to dwellings with two or more storeys. The basement flat will only have the single storey and therefore this is not relevant. However it should be noted that the WC and shower facilities are located on the entrance level.

## **WC and bathroom walls**

- 6.14 The walls in the WC and bathroom have the potential to be capable of firm fixing and support for grab rails.

## **Stairs and potential through-floor lift in dwelling**

- 6.15 The proposal is for a single floor dwelling. Therefore this criteria is not relevant to the proposal.

## **Potential for fitting of hoists and bedroom / bathroom**

- 6.16 There is the potential for future fitting of hoists in the bedroom. The design also allows for a reasonable route from the bedroom to the bathroom given that they are located adjacent to each other.

## **Bathrooms**

- 6.17 Given the site constraints and stepped access to the application site, it is considered that this criteria is not relevant to the determination of the application. However it should be noted that the best possible use of space has been made in the bathroom which would incorporate washing facilities, a sink and toilet.

## **Glazing and window handle heights**

- 6.18 There is access to windows in both the living areas. The glazing starts no higher than 800mm and there is an adequate approach route to the windows.

## **Location of service controls**

- 6.19 The dwelling has the potential to locate regularly used service controls or those needed in an emergency at accessible heights.
- 6.20 Overall the proposed development has been designed to ensure that it is compliant with The Lifetime Homes Standard criteria.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

7.1 In assessing this application in relation to policy and environmental context it is considered that the application should be granted for the following reasons:

- The development would make an important contribution to meeting established targets for new housing in the borough.
- The re-use of existing space is a sustainable way to increase housing whilst having a neutral impact upon the wider area. Amenity levels would be retained and the proposal would create a suitable dwelling.
- The proposal, by virtue of its location and limited external alterations, would have a neutral impact on the conservation area.
- The proposal would be compliant with the Lifetime Homes Standards Criteria.

7.2 Having regard to the above and all other matters, it is considered that the proposed development meets the expectations of policies of the Development Plan and other policy guidance including specifically the provisions of the NPPF. It is thus felt that this application should be granted subject to conditions.