

POLICY H3– HOUSING MIX & TYPE

New residential developments should demonstrate how they have been designed to meet the most up to date assessment of local housing need. New residential developments should provide a mix of dwellings to meet the identified need, e.g. affordable housing, starter homes and provision for housing an ageing population.

New developments should primarily seek to deliver the following types of market housing:-

- One, two or three bedroomed housing
- Single storey housing or apartments for older people or those with reduced mobility
- Nursing and care homes and sheltered accommodation for older people

Affordable housing should be delivered in line with policies within the Cheshire East Local Plan, with house type and tenure taking into account the most up to date Sandbach housing need assessment. On site provision is preferred rather than contributions. In particular, there is a need for social rented properties, and for one and two bedroomed properties. Where the affordable housing is for older people, there is a particular requirement for one and two bedroomed single storey accommodation.

Larger housing types will only be acceptable if they form part of a wider mix of house types and must be justified with appropriate evidence to meet an up-to-date specific housing need.

Planning applications should demonstrate how they have delivered a mix which responds to the sites' specific location, context and character through delivering appropriate densities and landscape treatment, especially when creating a new urban edge.

Justification:

The Sandbach Housing Needs Report undertaken by Urban Vision in 2015 identified a need for affordable housing and housing designed to meet the needs of an ageing population. The report stated that significant falls were projected in the need and demand for family housing and very significant increases projected in the need and demand for housing suitable for older households. Additionally, the Plan Phase 2 consultation survey (2015) showed that 84% of respondents wanted to ensure that new housing meets local needs.

An updated Sandbach Housing Needs Report was undertaken in 2021 and prepared by Cheshire Community Action. This report indicated that Sandbach performed exceptionally well in terms of dwelling completions during the plan period from 2010 to 2020, delivering 2699 of the 2750 dwellings target (with a further 1089 dwellings with planning permission remaining to be built). However, despite this high number of new dwellings, the area fell quite short of achieving the 30% affordable housing target with only 19% of new builds being affordable tenures since 2010. This is despite average property prices in Sandbach necessitating a mortgage of between 5.7 and 8 times the annual average Sandbach salary. The vast majority of affordable units built were two and three bed houses (76%).

There has also been an imbalance in the mix of tenures of affordable new builds since 2015. The 2015 housing needs report identified a need for 29% social rent, i.e. below 80% of market rent – typically meeting the needs of households in the lowest 25% income bracket. However, only 3% of

affordable completions since 2015 were social rent, meaning that there is a strong case going forward to significantly increase the proportion of social rent tenures. The 2021 report highlighted that there were 551 households on the Cheshire East Housing Register that had selected Sandbach as a location, and the majority (85%) were under 55. These are households that cannot afford market priced accommodation. 43% of these households needed houses, 29% needed bungalows and 28% flats or maisonettes. Most (78%) needed 1 or 2 bed accommodation for affordable (80% market rent) or social rent.

81 out of the 551 households on the housing register were over 55 years old. Over half of these households (54%) needed bungalows, 26% needed flats and all of them needed 1 or 2 bed accommodation. When looking at existing affordable housing stock, 96 properties became available and were relet during 2020. There was a very high demand for 1 bed flats, 1 bed bungalows, and 2 + 3 bed houses with an average of 58 bids per property that became available.

In contrast to the need identified in the 2015 housing needs report, the majority of market completions were three and four bedroomed market properties (77%) with only 23% of market completions being one and two bedroomed market properties. 82% of homes were sold on the open market, which exceeds the recommended need of 62% from the 2015 housing needs report.

The policy allows some flexibility for larger house types to ensure a broad mix, but due to the large amount of this type of development that has taken place in Sandbach in recent years, the need for this house type must be justified and evidenced. The provision of smaller house types, affordable housing and housing for older people should be the starting point, in order to help to redress the imbalance of house types that have been built since 2010.

The requirement that the mix should consider the density, layout and landscaping to be delivered seeks to ensure that the smaller unit types prioritised by this policy, which are often delivered as higher density, urban forms, are not developed in inappropriate locations and do not have a negative impact on the character of Sandbach. For example, development at the edge of the town should include dwellings with gardens, or bungalows to offer a softer and more suitable landscape edge, to create a sympathetic transition between the built form and wider countryside.

From the Darnhall Neighbourhood Plan

Policy CE3 – Hedgerows, Trees, and Watercourses

Any development that would result in the loss of, or the deterioration in the quality of an important natural feature, including trees and hedgerows and watercourses will not normally be permitted. Where it is demonstrated that integration of these features into the development is not possible and the assets would be lost, developments may be permitted in line with the requirements of Local Plan (Part Two) policy DM45. The retention of trees, hedgerows and other natural features in situ will always be preferable. Where the loss of such features is unavoidable, replacement provision must be at a ratio of at least two new trees for each tree which is lost. New tree planting will be supported within new developments, and throughout the Parish in line with The Mersey Forest Plan.

Justification and Evidence

13.7 Figure E shows the extent of ancient woodland, usually following water courses. The Cheshire Wildlife Survey shows the biodiversity of these areas as outstanding (classified as high distinctiveness) compared with other areas surveyed on the Cheshire Plain. Rare and endangered species were noted throughout these woodlands.

13.8 The mix of woodlands, fields, ponds, flashes and marshes in the Neighbourhood Plan area provide a cooling effect. This helps to mitigate the effects of climate change affecting the parish and the neighbouring urban area of Winsford. The Cheshire Wildlife Trust report on Damhall states that The Flashes, the historic woodlands and the marl pits are of particular importance and that the ancient woodland in Damhall is highly likely to support roosts of UK priority bat species which will forage for insect prey along the woodland edge and watercourses and along any intact hedgerows.

13.9 The Mersey Forest Plan details that in the Weaver Valley the wooded nature should be extended by planting on the valley shoulders, sides and, where appropriate, floor, buffering and connecting ancient woodland. In the Damhall Plain -10a LCA (Landscape Character Assessment, see Appendix 9), occasional woodlands should be created, buffering ancient semi-natural woodland. Tree planting should help to screen views of large-scale industry, and screen the visually intrusive urban area from the surrounding

landscapes, whilst not obscuring long distance views of the Sandstone Ridge and Peak District.