

## Case study

### Planning for older people's housing: the shock of the new



September 2015

# Summary

The substantial increase in the amount of older people households in England in the coming decade and beyond presents a significant and urgent challenge for local planning authorities; Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) describes the need to provide housing for older people as 'critical'.

This case study is based on interviews with officers from Cheshire East Council, Royal Borough of Greenwich, South Gloucestershire Council, Suffolk County Council and Sunderland City Council. It looks at how these councils are being proactive when it comes to meeting the need for older people's housing.

## Lessons

- Housing and adult social care teams have a stake in helping local planning authorities to successfully plan for and deliver housing for older people
- Planners can help the local authority to prioritise housing for older people by writing up-to-date policies based on evidence shared between councils (particularly in two-tier areas) and other stakeholders
- Assessing housing need is complicated by a changing housing market for older people
- Evidence of older people's housing needs should be complemented by a better understanding of their housing aspirations
- Good housing teams support development management to deliver older people's housing
- Uncertainty continues for some authorities regarding use classes and implications for the community infrastructure levy (CIL) and section 106.

## Tips

- Identify a single point of contact in the local authority for older people's housing in the local area
- Regularly review information on housing needs and aspirations for older people
- Focus on developing an attractive housing offer for older people to help meet general housing need
- Get elected member and corporate buy-in.

# Introduction

The [2012-based population projections for England](#) were published in 2014. They show that:

- the percentage of the population aged 65 and over is projected to increase by between one fifth and one quarter in all regions by mid-2022
- the number of local authorities where more than a quarter of the population are aged 65 and over is projected to increase from an estimated 24 areas in mid-2012 to 83 areas in mid-2022.

The projected increase in the number of households aged 65 and over accounts for more than half of the new households according to the Department for Communities and Local Government Household Projections (2013).

In fact, PPG says that older people's housing includes bungalows, step free apartments, sheltered or extra care, retirement and residential care homes.

In fact, there is something of a transformation in the provision of housing for older people. A range of housing types now exist in the market – such as extra care and retirement villages – that are targeted at people aged 55 or more who do not yet have a care need, but who are looking to move because of the lifestyle and facilities that they can enjoy as relatively healthy ageing adults. Care is also provided on-site for when the time comes, and this avoids a difficult move when people are least able to bear it. One of the case study authorities – Sunderland – is aiming to eliminate all nursing care homes in the city in favour of facilities that offer different levels of care.

## **Changes to Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)**

To reflect these trends the government updated some sections of the PPG in March 2015 to 'encourage the development of more housing for older people'.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/housing-update-march-2015>

These changes include:

- adding that 'many older people may not want or need specialist accommodation or care', and prefer to stay in general housing 'that is already suitable' or 'that can be adapted to meet the changes in need'. It says that 'local authorities should therefore identify particular types of general housing as part of their assessment' ('Housing and Economic Development Needs', para 21).
- inserting the statement that 'evidence that development proposals for accessible and manageable homes specifically for older people will free up under-occupied local housing for other population groups is likely to demonstrate a market need that supports the approval of such homes.' ('Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment', para 37).
- including a new section on how LPAs should 'express the need for different types of housing in their local plan'. The guidance says that authorities should,

where appropriate 'identify specific sites for all types of housing to meet their anticipated housing requirement.' If an LPA does not consider it appropriate to allocate these sites, it should ensure 'sufficiently robust criteria to set out when such homes will be permitted', possibly supplemented by targets for the number of homes to be built ('Local Plans – Key Issues', para 6).

- adding 'developers specialising in older people's housing' to the list of organisations that LPAs should involve as early as possible when preparing local plans ('Housing and Economic Development Needs', para 7).
- spelling out that 'supporting independent living can help to reduce the costs to health and social services' ('Housing and Economic Development Needs', para 21).

Also in March 2015 the government published its [changes to the Technical Housing Standards](#). This adds higher levels of accessibility and provides local authorities with the potential to require higher levels based on their housing need evidence (subject to viability). Based on the case studies set out here it is not yet clear what impact the changes to access and adaptability are likely to have for the provision of housing that will be appropriate for the needs of people as they age.

## About the case studies

### **Cheshire East Council**

The authority is located between the north west conurbations and the Staffordshire Potteries, and is regarded as a popular place to retire to. However, the council is also keen to attract new jobs and workers, while protecting the green belt. The authority's local plan examination was suspended in December 2014 to allow officers to prepare more evidence including a revised assessment of objectively assessed housing need. The examination is due to recommence in October 2015.

### **Royal Borough of Greenwich**

The borough local plan was adopted in 2014 and includes a policy on supported housing. The council has begun to build housing for older people. Since 2012 it has built five small housing schemes (bungalows, flats) on infill sites, all built to extra care standards, which complement the developments being provided by the private sector and housing associations.

### **South Gloucestershire Council**

The authority, which neighbours Bristol City Council, published its first older people's housing strategy in 2006, which included a target for the number of extra care housing schemes it wanted built. Since then planners have included a specific policy on extra care housing in the local plan (adopted 2013) and published an Affordable Housing and Extra Care Supplementary Planning Document.

**Suffolk County Council:** the county is working with its seven districts to ensure that the evidence for older people's housing is aligned with the joint strategic needs assessment and local plan policies. The health and wellbeing board includes the chief executives from all the district councils and is an important conduit for securing cross-district agreement on providing housing for older people, including via the Suffolk Housing Charter.

**Sunderland City Council:** the city has prioritised housing for older people through its draft plan policies and via a proactive partnership approach by the council's housing team. This focus has delivered nine extra care schemes so far, with more on-site and in the pipeline. These projects have secured around £150 million of inward investment and created more than 300 new jobs (not including construction jobs and apprenticeships).



# Lessons

## Housing and adult social care teams have a stake in helping local planning authorities (LPAs) to successfully plan for and deliver housing for older people

Better integration between different local authority departments is so often put forward in lists like this that it risks becoming a cliché. But when it comes to older people's housing, the incentives for close working are clear. Good housing teams see the value for their own targets and objectives of helping LPAs to approve new housing for older people. They are able to communicate effectively between the different worlds of adult care, planning and housing by understanding the language and statutory requirements of the three sectors. As Adrian Fisher, Head of Planning at Cheshire East Council, puts it:

*'Skilled officers working for housing are wheel turners because they have a good understanding and links with adult social care, and they filter those connections and knowledge in a way that planners understand.'*

In practice, housing teams can assist LPAs in the following ways:

- providing evidence for older people's housing
- supporting policy making and assisting with site allocation
- identifying developers for allocated sites
- supporting development management with applications and negotiations around decisions.



*South Gloucestershire, provided by South Gloucestershire Council*

These themes are picked up in more detail through some of the lessons set out below.

***Planners can help the local authority to prioritise housing for older people by writing up-to-date policies based on evidence shared between councils (particularly in two-tier areas) and other stakeholders***

The case studies demonstrate both the advantages of having up-to-date policies and the difficulties of having contested policies that are not yet adopted.

South Gloucestershire adopted its local plan in 2013. It includes a policy (CS20) to increase the amount of extra care housing in the district, including in new communities. Preparation of this policy was driven by a corporate-wide strategy to stimulate the private market to provide housing for older people that will complement the affordable extra care housing schemes being built by housing associations.

In 2014 the council adopted a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on Affordable Housing and Extra Care Housing to provide detailed guidance on how the LPA would assess the compliance of applications against policy CS20. It also clarifies South Gloucestershire's interpretation of what it defines as extra care housing so that the LPA can engage more constructively with potential developers as early as possible.

According to Brian Glasson, Head of Strategic Planning and Housing at South Gloucestershire, these policies have had 'a demonstrable effect':

*'We have successfully negotiated land to be set aside for extra care development in all of the "new neighbourhoods" (strategic housing allocations) that have come forward as planning applications since the policy was put in place.'*

The policy has also helped to stimulate market-led initiatives for retirement housing and other specialised housing with care. This is helping to increase choice and to offer older people a planned progression towards housing for higher care needs over time.

One of the reasons the LPA wrote the SPD was because the lack of clarity on appropriate locations in the local plan meant that the council was having to accept extra care proposals that it felt were not in appropriate locations. The guidance set out in the SPD has helped to ensure that extra care schemes put forward within strategic developments since the SPD was adopted – for example, at North Yate and Cribbs Patchway – are located near to community services, facilities and transport. A future local plan review will look to widen the CS20 policy to include all housing for older people, not just extra care.

Sunderland's draft local plan includes both strategic and development management policies, with specific references to older people's housing and a development management policy that is linked specifically to the council's wider programme of providing for an ageing population. According to Joanne Scott, Senior Policy Officer for Economy and Place at Sunderland City Council, these policies are 'working well',

especially when combined with the proactive approach by the council's housing team that looks to engage developers in early discussions around suitable and available sites within the city.

LPAs without up-to-date policies have found it more difficult to guide the location and type of housing for older people. Cheshire East is under considerable pressure to meet housing and jobs growth while protecting the countryside. At the time of writing the examination on its local plan had been suspended to allow the LPA to review, among other things, its objectively assessed housing need evidence. The lack of up-to-date policies is, says Adrian Fisher, 'unhelpful':

*'We have draft policies for older people's housing, but they are caught up in a plan that has other issues. So it is very hard to insist on those and to drive them through.'*

### ***Assessing housing need is complicated by a changing housing market for older people***

In the past older people had fewer housing choices, and they tended to stay in their own home until a care need forced them to move to a nursing home or other high care setting.



*Extra care housing scheme, Sunderland, provided by Sunderland Council*

With the expansion of housing choice to include models such as extra care and retirement villages, which can cater for a range of care needs over time, some older people (defined as 55 and over in some cases) are choosing to move well ahead of requiring high care accommodation.



At the same time, there has been a push to provide more adaptable general needs housing, which enables people to stay in their own home for longer.

Case study authorities report that it is challenging to develop a methodology that can successfully take account of these trends. Karen Ross, Strategic Housing Enabling Manager at South Gloucestershire Council, describes it like this:

*'For our SHMA we are struggling with the relationship between housing needs and care needs. Historically the driver for the public to move when they were older was a care need not a housing need. Now that extra care is an aspirational choice then the housing element becomes a stronger driver for moving because you don't necessarily need a care need to buy into an extra care scheme.'*

Suffolk County Council is assisting its district councils to assess their need for older people's housing, and is grappling with the implications of policies that aspire to enable people to stay in their own homes for longer. James Cutting, Planning Strategy Manager, is concerned that LPAs will underestimate general housing need if they don't make the right assumptions about how long people are likely to stay in their own home. However, without knowing for certain exactly how this trend will play out, LPAs are left to test scenarios without being sure of which one to select.

PPG suggests that planners use an online tool to assess need and housing tenure and type (for example, extra care, residential, and sheltered). For example, the Greater London Authority used [a tool](#) developed by Three Dragons for the Retirement Housing Group when making alterations to the London Plan.

Interviewees found the tool useful, but stressed the need for caution in interpreting and using the figures generated. Sunderland was one of the pilot areas for the development of the SHOP@ tool. Anne Prentice, Strategic Development Lead at Sunderland City Council, urges users to 'interpret the data prudently':

*'For example, the tool might suggest that there is a need in the local authority area for 2,000 new extra care units. However, this does not reflect 2,000 older people saying that this is what they want. Many may prefer to stay in their own family home to the end of life, but they would prefer extra care to residential.'*

This adds to the level of uncertainty about what figures to use for plan preparation, and the amount of older people's housing to provide as a proportion of all housing need. At the very least, it is critical that planners liaise with housing and adult social care colleagues to ensure that evidence and assumptions for the housing assessment, local plan, joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) and the market position statement (see below) align.

*Evidence of older people's housing needs should be complemented by a better understanding of their housing aspirations*

When assessing housing need PPG advises planners to avoid commissioning primary data and instead 'rely predominantly' on secondary data sources such as the Census.



*South Gloucestershire, provided by South Gloucestershire Council*

However, housing officers interviewed for this case study are clear that a rounded approach to assessing local need should include asking older people about their housing aspirations. Anne Prentice again:

*'Without true consultation you will never get an accurate picture of the real housing needs.'*

Some of the housing departments included in this case study have commissioned their own primary research on housing aspirations of older people, and this can be invaluable data to inform local plan and policy making. For example, consultation by the Royal Borough of Greenwich revealed an appetite from older people for housing that was better suited to their needs without being in an institutional setting. This led to the borough developing its Senior Living Schemes, which are new council-led developments on its own infill sites. These are small schemes of flats and bungalows (largest scheme so far is 37 units) that are built to adaptable standards, including providing Telecare, but look and feel like general market housing. For example, there are no wardens on site because older people said they would find this to be intrusive.

Other authorities have derived information on older people's housing preferences through their consultation on local plan policies. Adrian Fisher reports that:

*'We engage with town and parish and community groups – many of these people are slightly older and say they need more housing to downsize into. They understand the need for more of a housing mix, and planning potentially is absolutely on the front foot in influencing all of that.'*

As ever, it is important that the overall evidence base includes quantitative data (see above) along with this kind of qualitative information. For example, Cheshire East rejected two applications for nursing homes based on a view that the market would decline for these facilities based on emerging preferences, and that the area had too much nursing care. The council lost both cases at appeal. Adrian Fisher reflects that:

*'The appeals demonstrated that a perception might not be entirely borne out by the facts. Since then we have worked more closely between adult social care, housing, planning and public health, and we have a more robust understanding and evidence base than we had in the past.'*

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### ***Local planning authorities need to understand and enable the council's role to shape the market for older people's housing***

The Care Act (2014) places a duty on local authorities to:

*'facilitate and shape their market for adult care and support as a whole... to influence and drive the pace of change for their whole market.'*

The Institute of Public Care's [Market Shaping Toolkit](#) says that key to this market shaping task is:

*'engagement with the market and the stimulation of innovative services that meet local need. This extends beyond those providers funded by the local authority to all those operating within the local market.'*

Many local authorities have now prepared a Market Position Statement – an up-to-date list is available at

[http://ipc.brookes.ac.uk/services/DCMQC\\_Published\\_MPSs.html](http://ipc.brookes.ac.uk/services/DCMQC_Published_MPSs.html)

Market position statements set out the types of housing needs provision that a local authority wants, including for older people, targeted at providers of care services. For example, Sunderland's Market Position Statement is contained within a wider housing strategy called Enabling Independence.

James Cutting notes a particular challenge in two-tier areas:

*'It's quite common for district planners to assume that the county has no influence over private providers. The role of the county as a market shaper is yet to be really understood by the district tier, and we are working with adult care and housing colleagues to improve that.'*

Another factor for planners to be aware of is the role that the local authority has as a purchaser of care and services, and the pressure to reduce social care budgets. Indeed, PPG says that: 'Supporting independent living can help to reduce the costs to health and social services'.

This local authority role as purchaser can provide more leverage for influencing planning negotiations on schemes where the developer hopes the local authority will be funding the costs of some of the future residents. Karen Ross says:

*'When a developer rings us up at an early stage one of the things they are really interested in is whether the council might consider committing to some of the units, and there is no way we are going to agree to that if they don't meet our standards.'*

### **Good housing teams support development management to deliver older people's housing**

Planners in some of the case study authorities – notably Sunderland, Greenwich and South Gloucestershire – cite the proactive role that housing officers take with guiding applications through the planning process. These officers have seen the value of becoming planning literate. They regard it as part of their role to liaise between developers and designers, local authority personnel in housing and adult care, and development management planners to identify planning concerns early and to participate in negotiations to resolve these concerns. For example, Karen Ross says that her aim is to 'take a problem away' from development management officers:

*'My team has built up a lot of planning knowledge, and we can deal with the difficult stuff around older people by being actively helpful.'*

Brian Glasson confirms that the housing team has:

*'gone the extra yard to encourage development management colleagues to understand and education them on older people housing issues.'*



In Sunderland, housing staff take development management planners to visit completed schemes to show them how the design of extra care housing has evolved so they know what to look out for when new applications come in. They are also on hand to participate directly in planning negotiations around viability and suggesting acceptable modifications to schemes.



*Dovecote Meadow, Sunderland, provided by Sunderland Council*

### ***Uncertainty continues for some local planning authorities regarding use classes and implications for the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 (S106)***

Much has been published about whether the use classes order covering housing for older people – C2 (residential care homes, hospitals, nursing homes, boarding schools, residential colleges and training centres) and C3 (a dwelling house) – need updating in light of the increasing number of housing choices that don't fit easily into the existing categories because they provide a continuum of accommodation from independent housing to high needs care (for example, see [Retirement Housing](#) published by Knight Frank Residential in 2014).

Currently developers of C2 care housing are exempt from affordable housing contributions, and local authorities have discretion as to how they will apply CIL. Older people's housing defined as C3 is subject to the same CIL and S106 obligations as general market housing, although developers argue that applying these same rules is unfair because of the large communal spaces that schemes like extra care provide. The report [New Approaches to Housing for Older People](#) (CIH and Housing LIN, 2014)<sup>1</sup> suggests that:

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<sup>1</sup> Housing LIN provides more explanation on CIL and the treatment of housing for older people at <http://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Planning/S106-CIL/CIL/>



*‘There is an argument for looking at how CIL and section 106 requirements are applied in respect of bespoke accommodation where there is clear evidence of need, and what flexibility can be applied locally to support viability of these developments in lower value areas. This is particularly appropriate where the local welfare authority and strategic housing authority require the provision of communal facilities in support of wider plans for health and wellbeing services available to older people in a locality.’*

In the meantime, LPAs need to work within the existing system, and the experiences of the case study authorities suggest that more clarity would help, especially as many LPAs are still devising their CIL charging schedules (research published by Savills revealed that only 25 per cent of councils had an adopted charging schedule in place as at April 2015).

For example, South Gloucestershire’s draft local plan specified that all extra care housing schemes should be classed as C3. The planning inspector rejected this policy; the council amended it to say that extra care could be C2 or C3.

The council’s current position is that it will accept a development as C2 overall if a residential care service, in addition to the extra care scheme, is physically located on-site or adjacent to the site. All extra care and sheltered housing schemes are exempt from paying CIL; whether other types of retirement housing will also be exempt is yet to be tested.

In contrast, Sunderland reports no issues regarding distinctions between C2 and C3 applications, with the authority aspiring to only approve C3 schemes.

## Tips

### 1. Identify a single point of contact in the local authority for older people's housing in the local area

A striking feature of the case study areas that have a range of new older people's housing schemes is at least one officer with expertise in both older people's housing (needs, aspirations, funding) and the relevant planning issues (design, location, planning obligations). This single point of contact is useful internally for helping to integrate the different parts of the council that are involved. But it's also an important role for developers, funders (such as the HCA), potential residents and others external to the council who value having one person they can speak with. Anne Prentice says:

*'From conversations I have had with developers and partners they do seem to come to Sunderland because I can talk to them about both what the care model needs to be within the building alongside how the building needs to be look structurally and design wise – it's being able to take a holistic look at the whole thing.'*

South Gloucestershire's Extra Care Officer was originally funded jointly by a partnership of housing associations that worked in the council area. They saw the benefits for them of investing some resources to increase the flow of extra care housing schemes. Brian Glasson says that:

*'There is huge added value in having an identified individual who is the champion and owns that area of specialism – one person owning council ambitions is very helpful rather than it being a dispersed ambition.'*

No case study authority had costed the benefits of such a post. However, one put forward the following benefits that could be attributed directly to the programme of encouraging independent living schemes for older people that had been developed by the council:

- created new council tax income for the local authority in excess of £2m through releasing under-occupied family homes and re-letting them
- generated inward investment of approximately £100m, rising to £150 million when schemes in the pipeline are included
- created more than 300 new jobs in the care sector alongside construction, training and apprenticeship opportunities.

These benefits do not take into account the reduced costs to health and social care budgets that are likely to flow from the focus on independent living for older people (as indicated in PPG).

## 2. Regularly review information on housing needs and aspirations for older people

Planning for older people's housing is going through a period of evolution and change. The rapidly ageing population is making this more of a priority nationally, and housing preferences are diversifying to reflect changing aspirations and a better understanding of what works well for older people, within the budgets available.

This makes it challenging to keep local plan policies on older people's housing relevant and up to date. James Cutting suggests that what is required is 'an institutional change that allows for an iterative approach where you revise often.'

Again, working closely with housing colleagues and other community-based organisations such as Age UK may help. Gill Ackrill, Head of Strategy and Partnerships within Housing Services at the Royal Borough of Greenwich, reflects that:

*'We keep going back to the client group because people's needs and aspirations about where they want to live have changed.'*

She has noticed an evolving picture as developers, including the council, better understand the needs of older people locally:

*'Initially we assumed everyone would want homes built to full extra care standard, but as we go along we are realising that in our borough what many people want are schemes built to HAPPI standards but without all the additional communal facilities and service charge that goes with them.'*



*Extra care housing scheme, South Gloucestershire, provided by South Gloucestershire Council*

### **3. Focus on developing an attractive housing offer for older people to help meet general housing need**

All the case study participants were motivated to provide an attractive housing offer for older people because of the potential to free up existing housing stock, most commonly family housing. Gill Ackrill says that:

*'If you are providing good quality homes for older people then you are meeting a range of care needs, but also you are persuading older people to move out of family homes, and doing something about housing need more generally.'*

The first bungalow scheme that Greenwich built contained seven new homes and provided the borough with six 3- and 4- bedroom family homes to re-let. Freeing up this stock is especially critical in areas such as inner London where land prices mean that developers are not building new family homes.

Key to this is providing new housing that older people want to move to. The case study authorities have worked with developers (private and registered providers) to varying degrees to help them understand local needs and the potential that creates for new development, and the market advantage for early adopters that provide adaptable housing options in their development portfolio.

While these activities are not led by planning, it reinforces again the value of working together so that planners understand the strategy for providing more older people's housing ahead of applications rolling in.

For example, South Gloucestershire has invested in raising developer awareness of what extra care housing is and how adaptable housing is different from more

traditional models of providing housing for older people. It publishes a magazine targeted at prospective residents that profiles good local developments.

Other experiences suggest that developers can be over-enthusiastic. In Greenwich, planners have observed that developers are preferring to provide their Section 106 affordable housing contribution as housing for older people because it is more accepted by local communities. Andrew Parker, Planning Manager for Major Decisions, reflects that:

*'We'd be concerned if all developers started coming forward with older people's housing as their only offer on affordable housing – we'll have to keep an eye on the numbers, demand and potential for overprovision.'*

#### **4. Get elected member and corporate buy-in**

Most case studies reported that this is an issue where it is relatively easy to get the support of elected members. However, participants still underlined the importance of helping elected members to understand the changing needs and demand for older people's housing as part of the wider work on housing needs and plan-making. Making the link between providing suitable housing for older people and freeing up family housing may also need spelling out.

Suffolk has the added complexity of being a two-tier area, where the districts are responsible for planning and housing while the county is in charge of adult care. To help achieve corporate buy-in across both tiers, the county is working through the Health and Wellbeing Board, which includes as members the chief executives of all the district councils. The board has recently approved the Suffolk Housing Charter, with the aim to drive a cross-county approach to affordable and adaptable housing through the districts now that the chief executives have signed up.



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- Anne Prentice, Strategic Development Lead, Sunderland City Council
- Karen Ross, Strategic Housing Enabling Manager, South Gloucestershire Council
- Joanne Scott, Senior Policy Officer (Economy and Place), Sunderland City Council.

Cover photo provided by South Gloucestershire Council: South Gloucestershire

The case study was written by Andrew Ross, Final Draft Consultancy,  
[www.fdconsult.co.uk](http://www.fdconsult.co.uk)

## Sources of useful information

### **Retirement Housing**

Knight Frank Residential (2014)

<http://www.knightfrank.com.au/research/retirement-housing-2014-2388.aspx>

### **New Approaches to Housing for Older People**

Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) and Housing LIN (2014)

[http://www.cih.org/publication-free/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/publication-free/data/New\\_approaches\\_older\\_people](http://www.cih.org/publication-free/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/publication-free/data/New_approaches_older_people)

### **Market Shaping Toolkit**

Institute of Public Care (2015)

<http://ipc.brookes.ac.uk/services/mast.html>

### **Ready for Ageing?**

House of Lords Select Committee (2013)

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201213/ldselect/ldpublic/140/140.pdf>

Planning Advisory Service  
Local Government House  
Smith Square  
London SW1P 3HZ

Telephone: 020 7664 3000  
Twitter: @pas\_team  
Email [pas@local.gov.uk](mailto:pas@local.gov.uk)  
[www.pas.gov.uk](http://www.pas.gov.uk)

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