

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by the Chief Officer, Housing and Employability****Housing and Communities Committee: 22 November 2023**

Subject: Review of West Dunbartonshire Affordable Housing Design Standard

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to seek approval for a revision to the current *West Dunbartonshire Design Standard for Housing Supported by the Affordable Housing Supply Programme* which has been in place since April 2019, to further improve the quality of new affordable homes being built in West Dunbartonshire.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** It is recommended that the Housing and Communities Committee:
- (i) Note the content of this report outlining the progress in developing the revised Design Standard
 - (ii) Agree in principle the revised West Dunbartonshire Design Standard 2023 as appended to this report
 - (iii) Agree that the new Standard be applied to any new projects receiving funding approval from the Affordable Housing Supply Programme from 1st April 2024
 - (iv) Delegate authority to the More Homes Board to consider any proposed variations to the Design Standard.

3. Background

- 3.1** In November 2015, West Dunbartonshire Council introduced an innovative Design Standard for Housing Supported by the Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP). It required new homes to meet higher standards than are statutorily required, notably in respect of floor space, home accessibility and energy efficiency. The Standard applied both to Council and Housing Association new build homes.
- 3.2** In February 2019 Housing and Communities Committee approved a revised and updated standard which was duly introduced in April 2019.
- 3.3** The West Dunbartonshire Council More Homes Better Homes Local Housing Strategy 2022 - 2027 committed to a regular review of the Design Standard

with a view to keeping it up to date with housing best practice and developments in materials and technology.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** The purpose of the Design Standard is to ensure that the social homes being developed in West Dunbartonshire with the support of the Scottish Government's Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP) funding is of the highest quality and incorporates best practice design, enabling those who live in them to enjoy a high quality home environment regardless of age, ability or health. The last review of the standard took place in 2019 and it was considered timely to carry out a review.
- 4.2** The principal changes proposed by the new standard are as follows:
- A better match of housing mix with identified housing need. In particular, we need to address the shortfall in larger family homes of four and over bedrooms and developers are encouraged to contribute on this issue.
 - All new homes to be net-zero/zero-carbon or passivhaus standard. Currently, the Standard stipulates silver-plus level. We await guidance from the Scottish Government on what energy efficiency standard will be required of new homes supported by the AHSP and we may wish to review this element when the details are known.
 - We wish to look more closely at measures which can be taken to future proof our new homes for example on how best to enable the provision of bathroom/shower facilities to improve accessibility as the tenant's needs change.
 - There is an increasing awareness of the health harms that can be caused by dampness and condensation in homes. Environmental sensors have relatively recently been developed which can track temperature, humidity and Co2 in the home. We propose to make these compulsory elements of new build projects.
- 4.3** The full version of the proposed new Design Standard is contained in Appendix 1 of this report.
- 4.4** When we first introduced our Design Standard, we carried out extensive research and consultations that demonstrated wide support for the measure. The new refreshed standard was the subject of a consultation exercise as detailed below at Section 9.
- 4.5** The proposed new standard follows the format of the current version by listing items which are considered essential and others which are seen to be desirable. We are asking developers to consider the desirable items whilst recognising that these may be of an aspirational nature at this stage.
- 4.6** The Scottish Government is consulting on improving guidance and standards on the accessibility of homes. Essentially this is a review of the Housing for Varying Needs (HfVN) design guide, last published in 1998. While it is not anticipated that the new HfVN will be introduced before 2025/26, it is

reassuring to see that the principles embodied in the review match those driving our West Dunbartonshire Design Standard. Indeed, a number of the specific proposals are already contained in our Design Standard. For example, our more generous space standards and dementia friendly elements now seem set to become mainstreamed.

- 4.7** Notwithstanding our commitment to improve the quality of new affordable housing by means of the Design Standard, there is a recognition that a degree of discretion may have to be applied in certain areas where a project is finding it difficult to meet the full criteria. Decisions on such matters will be the responsibility of the More Homes Board.

5. People Implications

- 5.1** There are no people implications from this report.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1** It is considered that if the principles of an improved standard are incorporated into the scheme design at an early stage, the costs need not be overly onerous for developers. Accordingly, there is no proposal at this stage to increase the new build budget as detailed in the current West Dunbartonshire Council Housing Capital Investment Plan as a result of this review.
- 6.2** The higher energy efficiency required by the new standard would mean more affordable heating costs for residents leading to improved tenancy sustainment and satisfaction, and consequently provide more of a financial asset to the Council's Housing Revenue Account business plan going forward.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** There is a risk some potential housing providers may be discouraged from developing due to concerns over perceived higher costs associated with the standard. However, there is an argument that the higher quality housing arising from the Standard represents a better longer-term asset for the developing housing provider. In addition, the case has been made that better design need not be more expensive, especially if designed-in from an early stage. There is no evidence to suggest that the introduction of the Standard in 2015 had an adverse effect on development interest or on the new build programme generally. Some measures in the standard may attract additional Scottish Government grant. The situation would be subject to ongoing monitoring through the More Homes Board to ensure there was no negative impact on the delivery of the AHSP.
- 7.2** The Passivhaus /zero carbon requirement will mean that specialist suppliers will be needed for these elements with a potential for supply chain issues to arise. The increasing use in the industry of new energy saving technology mitigates against this being a significant difficulty.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 8.1** The proposal following a screening does not alter any existing policy or pattern of service delivery and so is not considered to require an equalities impact assessment.

9. Consultation

- 9.1** Consultation took place through the More Homes Board which involves all the principal departments involved in the Council's new build programme as well as the WD Health and Social Care Partnership. Consultation was also held at our Strategic Housing Providers Forum which brings together the housing associations operating in West Dunbartonshire and our colleagues in the Scottish Government's More Homes Division.
- 9.2** A consultative presentation on the proposed changes was made to the West Dunbartonshire Tenants and Residents Organisation (WDTRO) who have been supportive of the measure from the outset and supported the changes being introduced within the new standard.

10. Strategic Assessment

- 10.1** An improved Design Standard which contributes to improving the quality of the Housing stock in West Dunbartonshire and improves the well-being of our tenants would contribute to all of the Council's strategic priorities.

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Date: 8 November 2023

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Appendices: Appendix 1: West Dunbartonshire Design Standard – Final Consultative Draft November 2023

Background Papers: Report by Strategic Lead, Housing and Employability to Housing and Communities Committee 07 November 2018 - Review of West Dunbartonshire Affordable Housing Design Standard

Wards Affected: All