

# STATUS OF SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE ON HOUSING DENSITY

## **Status**

This Planning Guidance, which is supplementary to Policy HSG19 of the Woking Borough Local Plan 1999, has been formally adopted by Woking Borough Council. In this respect the Supplementary Guidance has the status of a material consideration in the determination of planning applications by this Authority and in its defence of its decisions at appeal.

## **Statement of Public Consultation**

In accordance with the advice set out in Annex A (A3) of Planning Policy Guidance Note 1 (PPG1) on General Policy and Principles, the Supplementary Guidance has been the subject of wide public consultation with a total of 94 consultees, as follows:

i) Professional Practitioners

All developers and professional practitioners who had submitted planning applications for at least one residential dwelling during the previous two years, together with the House Builders Federation, which number 60 in total.

ii) Local Resident's and Amenity Groups

The Byfleet Parish Council and all resident's and amenity groups within the Borough which are known to the Council, together with the Surrey Police, which number 34 in total.

The period of public consultation allowed over 6 weeks for the above individuals and organisations to make comments on the Draft Supplementary Guidance. Altogether nine responses were received. After careful consideration of these representations the Guidance was amended to address the valid points of concern. These amendments were considered at the Council's Planning and Environment Committee on 9 March 2000, when the Guidance was formally adopted. Full details of the representations made to the Council, together with the Council's response can be obtained on request by contacting 01483 743443.

SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE  
**HOUSING DENSITY**  
(Adopted March 2000)

**1.0 INTRODUCTION AND POLICY CONTEXT**

1.1 This document sets out Supplementary Planning Guidance on the methods of calculating and assessing the suitable density for a housing site.

1.2 **This guidance is supplementary to policy HSG19 of the Woking Borough Local Plan** and should be considered by applicants and developers before submitting a planning application for residential development. (The policy is set out in Appendix 1). The Council will also use the guidance in helping to determine planning applications. The guidance will be applied flexibly having regard to the circumstances and other material considerations of each case. Housing density provides an established method of quantifying the intensity of development and is a crude indicator of amenity and environmental quality. However, compatibility of density is only one of many criteria used to assess the suitability of a housing proposal and other factors will often have overriding importance in determining an application.

(i) In general terms Local Plan Policy HSG19 requires that the density of any proposed development should maintain the prevailing character of the immediate area.

(ii) Arithmetic compliance does not necessarily mean that a proposal will be acceptable as a number of criteria are used to assess the suitability of a scheme, including;

- |                                     |                           |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| üsize, shape and topography of site | üiform of layout          |
| üspacing between buildings          | übuilding form and design |
| üamenity and privacy                | üaccess and parking       |
| üretention of trees and shrubs      |                           |

(iii) Exceeding the density criterion will only result in refusal of planning permission if “demonstrable harm” is caused to the character or amenity of the area, but is not usually sufficient reason on its own.

(iv) Higher densities will be favourably considered on central sites in or near the Town Centre and within larger Village Centres which have a range of facilities and good access to public transport.

(v) The Local Plan has designated part of the urban area of Woking for high density housing under Policy HSG13.

(vi) On sites which are sufficiently large( over 1 hectare) it may be possible to provide a range of densities without impacting on the character or amenity of existing residential areas, particularly where the site has an enclosed environment.

(vii) The Local Plan has also designated a number of areas as being of Special Residential Character under Policy HSG20. These are low density areas where compatibility of housing density will be required to maintain their character. Separate supplementary guidance is available on this matter.

**2.0 CALCULATION AND ASSESSMENT OF DENSITY**

2.1 It is the volume and extent of development which is of main concern when assessing housing density.

2.2 For planning purposes, density assessment will be made on the basis of both the number of dwellings and the number of habitable rooms per hectare. However, the plot ratio (gross floorspace to site area) should also be used for more dense urban sites. Each method of measurement and when it should be applied is explained below.

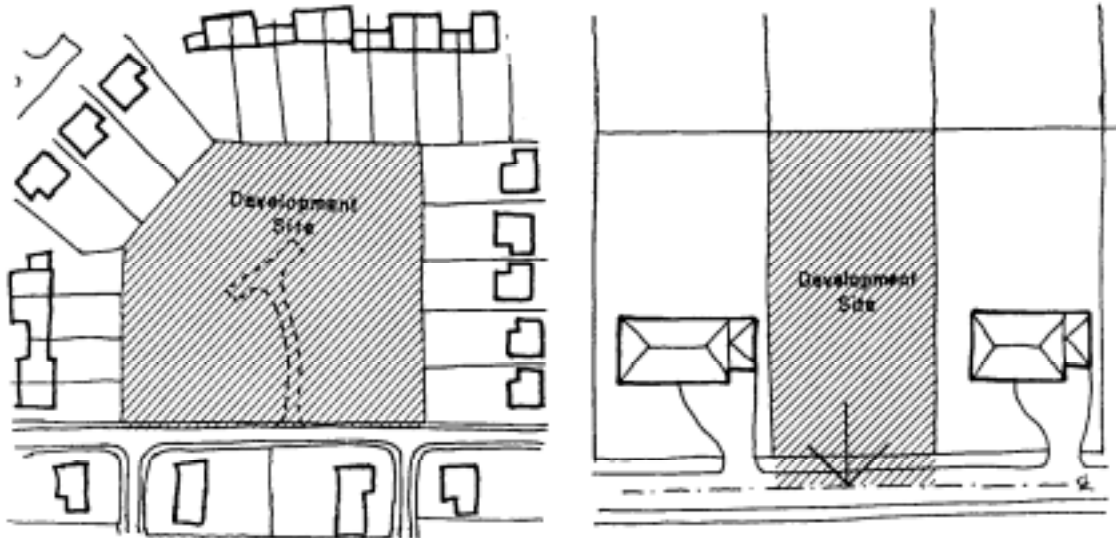
2.3 Information on the number and type of dwellings must always be referred to in order to determine the amount of parking provision required.

- 2.4 In sub-divided properties the extent of the site given over to hard surfaced parking areas must also be considered as this may impact on the character and amenity of the area.

### 3.0 METHODS OF CALCULATION

#### Site Area

- 3.1 On larger sites for multiple dwellings the whole site including areas used for access roads will contribute to the site area. On smaller sites, such as individual house plots the site area will include up to the mid point of the road frontage. Measurements should be in hectares.



larger housing sites

individual house plots

- 3.2 Number of Dwellings per Hectare/Acre (for use in lower density)

This is the most widely used method of measurement, but should only be used for lower density developments as dwellings can vary widely in size and accommodation.

$$\text{Number of Dwellings per Hectare} = \frac{\text{Number of Dwellings}}{\text{Site Area (Hectares)}}$$

- 3.3 Number of Habitable Rooms per Hectare (for use in medium to high density)

The amount of habitable accommodation provides a useful measure of potential population and indicates intensity of land use (Habitable rooms are mostly used in Census data). This measure also provides an approximation of the comparative size of the development. Only habitable rooms are included in the assessment.

$$\text{Habitable Rooms per Hectare} = \frac{\text{Number of Habitable Rooms}}{\text{Site Area (Hectares)}}$$

- For the purpose of assessment Habitable Rooms do not include small kitchens under 2 metres wide, bathrooms, or toilets, but do include larger kitchens over 2 metres wide, bedrooms, dining rooms and living rooms together with all other rooms used for living accommodation. Very large rooms over 19 sq.m. (200 sq.ft.) which are capable of subdivision count as 2 habitable rooms.
- Where it is not possible to ascertain accurate information on the number of habitable rooms in adjoining houses it may be acceptable to make an approximation based on similar house types with known characteristics.

- 3.4 Plot Ratio (for use in higher density such as town centre sites)

Normally expressed as a representative fraction, percentage or decimal ratio; i.e. 1/4, 0.25/1, 25%, or 0.25:1. Provides a comparative measure of the volume of building development in relation to the area of site. The gross floorspace of all accommodation

(measured from the outside dimension) is used for the measurement including ancillary accommodation.

$$\text{Plot Ratio} = \text{Gross Floorspace} / \text{Total Site Area (m}_2\text{)}$$

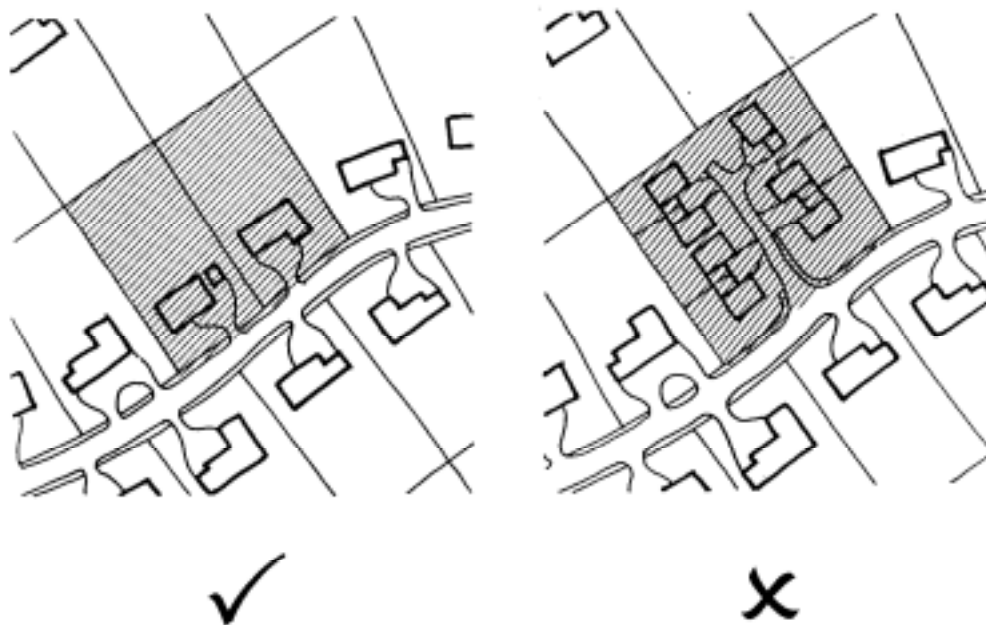
### Comparison of Density

- 3.5 Areas selected for comparative density should have a direct relationship with the site. For small sites such as individual plots, only sites adjoining or opposite the plot and within the same street should normally be assessed. For larger sites for multiple dwellings a wider area for comparison should be taken but this should be related to the size of the proposal site.
- 3.6 The table below sets out examples of comparative density measurements expressed in habitable rooms, dwellings per hectare and plot ratios for a range of different densities.

Comparative Housing Densities	
High	173 - 247 + habitable rooms per hectare 49 - 74 dwellings per hectare > 0.5 : 1 + plot ratio
Medium	100 - 173 habitable rooms per hectare 25 - 50 dwellings per hectare 0.2 - 0.5 : 1 plot ratio
Low	< 100 habitable rooms per hectare < 25 dwellings per hectare < 0.2 : 1 plot ratio

## 4.0 EXAMPLES

- 4.1 Redevelopment's which replace existing large dwellings in large plots with smaller dwellings in small plots will not normally be permitted where the increase in density would alter the areas character, unless this is an established pattern in the area or an approved policy objective; such as the Woking Higher Density Residential Area - policy HSG13.



- 4.2 Redevelopments which replace large dwellings in large plots with similar sized dwellings in cramped plots will not normally be permitted because of the increase in density and

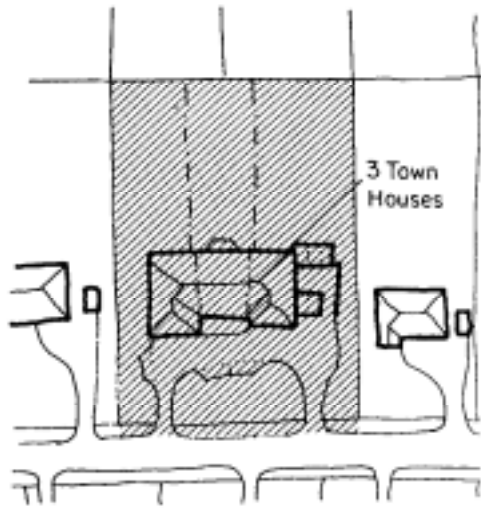
consequent harm to the character and appearance of the street through the reduced spacing of buildings and the proliferation of new accesses.



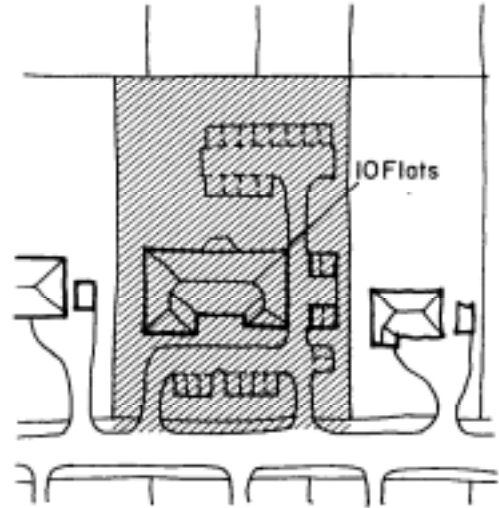
4.3 In areas of mixed density the redevelopment should reflect the prevailing character of the immediate street frontage which could restrict the housing density.



4.4 The sub-division of an existing property into a greater number of dwellings is likely to be unacceptable unless the site is large enough to accommodate the area required for additional parking provision without impacting on the character and amenity of adjoining residential areas. Significant parking areas in rear gardens should normally be avoided where they adjoin family housing. Less stringent controls may be appropriate in the Town Centre, larger Village Centres and identified high density housing areas.

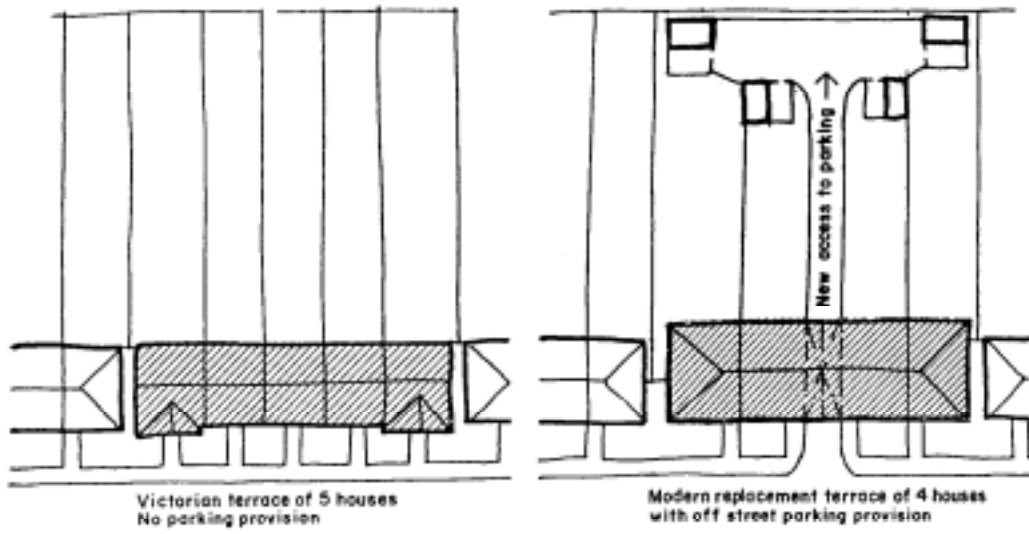


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- 4.5 When redeveloping sites in older housing areas, such as Victorian terraces, it may not be possible to achieve similar levels of density because of the requirement to provide off-street parking and other modern amenities.



**Appendix 1**  
**Woking Borough Local Plan 1999 – Policy HSG19**

HSG19 ii DENSITY AND SITE COVERAGE

THE APPROPRIATE DENSITY AND EXTENT OF INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENTS WILL BE ESTABLISHED BY REFERENCE TO THE FOLLOWING FACTORS:

- (i) THE LOCATION, SIZE, TOPOGRAPHY AND SHAPE OF THE SITE;
- (ii) THE NEED FOR DEVELOPMENT TO REFLECT THE HEIGHT, FORM, EXTENT AND PATTERN OF SURROUNDING DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING SITE COVERAGE BY HARD SURFACED AREAS, TO MAINTAIN THE CHARACTER OF THE AREA;
- (iii) THE NEED FOR SCHEMES TO RETAIN EXISTING SITE FEATURES, INCLUDING MATURE TREES, SHRUBS, HEDGEROWS AND SOFT AMENITY AREAS TO MAINTAIN THE CHARACTER OF THE AREA;

THIS POLICY IS CONCERNED WITH THE VOLUME AND EXTENT OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL TOGETHER WITH THE INTENSIFICATION OF SITE USE. DENSITY WILL BE MEASURED BOTH AS THE RATIO OF GROSS FLOORSPACE TO SITE AREA (THAT IS, OF BUILDINGS WITHIN THE CURTILAGE) TOGETHER WITH THE NUMBER OF HABITABLE ROOMS PER HECTARE.

JUSTIFICATION

- 6.85 The density of a proposed development is only one of a number of criteria used to assess the acceptability of a scheme. Other factors such as the spacing between buildings, the layout and design of the proposal and the loss of trees or other soft amenity will have equal importance in assessing the impact of a development on the character of an area.
- 6.86 The fact that a development proposal exceeds the density of development in the adjoining area is not normally on its own sufficient reason to warrant a refusal as demonstrable harm in terms of the impact on amenity will also need to be shown. In particular, the location of a development site close to the town centre or a village centre, where there are a range of facilities and good public transport is available nearby, can be a material consideration justifying a higher density, provided there would be no demonstrable harm to amenity. In order to assess the scope for development on certain sites, the Council may request indicative layouts to be submitted with outline schemes.
- 6.87 In assessing housing density the main concern will be the volume and extent of the building mass in relationship to the building plot and surrounding developments. However, in the case of a building sub-divided to form flats or terraced housing there will also be an assessment of the area of the site required to provide off-street parking and circulation in comparison to the surrounding area. To help in this assessment information will be required on the proposed building floorspace and plot ratio together with the number of dwellings and habitable rooms.