

Manchester launches consultation to improve transparency in the planning process



TCl commentary:

Several councils, including in London boroughs of Croydon, Greenwich and Southwark, as well as Bristol and Brighton & Hove have already implemented the below proposed policy. This reinforces the requirement of the developer to demonstrate that the maximum reasonable amount of affordable housing has been met when that amount is below the local authority's affordable housing target.

A note of caution must be sounded, however; the policy has already been challenged in the High Court (*Parkhurst Road Ltd v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and London Borough of Islington*), over the correct Benchmark Land Value (BLV) applied to the appeal site. In a postscript to his judgment dismissing the appeal, Mr Justice Holgate invited RICS to reconsider its guidance on viability to address any misunderstandings.

If the planning process is to be more transparent, policy under consultation must be clear to avoid misunderstandings, delays and challenges which will inevitably compromise the delivery of much-needed affordable homes – and not just in Manchester.

Article:

Manchester City Council has set out measures it says will “improve the transparency” of the planning process, including adding public viability assessments for new housing projects.

The council has started a consultation on the changes, which it says would signal “a new approach for developer contributions”.

Among the key changes will be the inclusion of affordable housing statements and viability assessments for all new housing projects; typically, viability statements are not typically made available on the city’s planning portal.

The council said public affordable housing statements would “provide an overview of the affordability ambition of a new development”. Currently, the council stipulates that 20% of new homes should be designated as affordable.

Under the consultation, it is proposed that affordable housing statements are made public for schemes of 15 or more homes. Where no affordable housing is proposed, a full, un-redacted copy of the viability assessment will need to be submitted.

Meanwhile, the inclusion of viability assessments would allow the public to scrutinise developer requirements for Section 106 contributions.

These will be required when a project does not “include the necessary policy provision or financial contributions”, justified on viability grounds.

Viability assessments will need to be provided “in its entirety,” according to the consultation guidelines. This includes the purchase process, purchase costs, estimated construction costs, professional fees, land acquisition price, and estimated profit and developer target returns.

The consultation is now open and is set to run until 14 September, and the documents can be accessed [here](#).

Cllr Angeliki Stogia, Manchester City Council’s executive member for environment, planning and transport, said: “We want the people of Manchester to have faith in the planning process so they know the decisions being made have been fully scrutinised and where possible, Section 106 is being negotiated working with developers on larger developments.

“This consultation signals a new approach for developer contributions so that everyone who has an interest in the planning process is clear whether affordable housing contributions will underpin new development in the city.

“The move towards publication of viability assessments and affordable housing statements mark the first step in making the process more open and transparent bolstering our clear commitment to affordable housing through the planning process.”