

Merton CIL responds to Merton Council's Housing Delivery Consultation

17th August 2020

Merton CIL has responded to the council's consultation about the delivery of new housing in the borough as part of the development of the local plan for the next 10 years.

We welcome the opportunity to give input on this vital issue and note that the Council has gone beyond the statutory requirements in holding this consultation which is designed to be quick and accessible for a wide range of people.

However, we are disappointed at the scope of the consultation. It only seems to cover a very limited range of the issues around housing in the borough. We have significant concerns about housing for Disabled people in the borough that are not easily addressed through this consultation.

We note the point made in the survey that Merton has exceeded its targets for new housing in recent years. The Council has also done well by exceeding the target of 90% of new homes meeting general accessibility requirements by 2% in 2016 -2017.

However, only 3% of the target of 10% of new homes meeting the standards for wheelchair accessible housing was met in 2016 -2017 and we believe it is essential that this target is met in future. Ideally, it should be exceeded to make up for the target being missed in previous years and to ensure that there is an adequate stock of wheelchair accessible housing.

This needs to be supported with work to establish what accessible and adapted housing there is in Merton in the social housing sector. This will help to ensure that it is used as effectively as possible and the planning process is as well informed as possible about the levels of need for wheelchair accessible housing and other housing such as sheltered accommodation and supported living.

The survey asked what types of housing would be most successful for the future. We did not make a selection as we felt we did not have a

basis for judging this – though we did say that ‘taller flatted housing’ (tower blocks) is the least successful and raises particular issues around accessibility for Disabled people.

It also asked for three priorities for future housing delivery in Merton. We selected quality of design, affordability and community engagement process. While the quality of design may cover accessibility for Disabled people, we believe this needs to be a clear priority. We also highlighted the importance of providing affordable homes and pointed to work carried out by the London Tenants Association, based on analysis of the Mayors annual monitoring reports for the London Plan, which showed all London boroughs missing targets for affordable homes. ¹

We also found it difficult to answer a question about where new homes should be built and suggested this is something that should be addressed through the planning process to put the homes that are needed in locations that meet people’s varying needs, with consultations around specific proposals. However, we did voice reservations about ‘building upwards’ (tower blocks) as we know Disabled people often experience access problems in such buildings. We would also have reservations about the use of open spaces for building homes.

Merton CIL’s policy and strategy manager, Michael Turner, commented:

‘We are pleased to have this opportunity to comment on the Council’s plans for new homes and hope this will be the start of a longer conversation about housing for Deaf and Disabled People.

‘This is an area that we will be keeping under close review to ensure that we can work towards accessible and suitable housing for all Deaf and Disabled People in Merton.’

¹ <https://londontenants.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Briefing-Social-and-affordable-rent-building-shortfall.pdf>