

### **Other Authorities with Open Book Approach and Government Guidance**

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places a requirement on councils to facilitate community involvement in planning decisions.

National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) states that transparency of viability evidence is encouraged wherever possible.

More recently the direction of travel in regards to viability information is for transparency to achieve greater public accountability in the planning process.

The *London Borough Development Viability Protocol* (November 2016) and *Homes for Londoners: Affordable Housing and Viability Supplementary Planning Guidance* (August 2017) both set out that Viability Assessments containing standardised information are expected to be submitted at validation stage and that these should be available to be viewed by the public alongside the rest of the application submission documents. The London SPG states,

*...given the importance of wider scrutiny and the direction of travel indicated by information tribunal decisions, the Mayor will treat information submitted as part of, and in support of, a viability assessment transparently. This information should be available for public scrutiny and comment like all other elements of a planning application, as should any review or assessment of the appraisal carried out by or for the LPA. As such, boroughs should implement procedures which promote greater transparency where not already in place.*

In September 2017 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) released a consultation paper titled *Planning for the Right Homes in the Right Places* seeking views on a number of changes to planning policy and legislation, much of which was initially set out in the latest housing white paper published in February 2017. This consultation document has sections on viability and transparency and states, 'We propose to update planning guidance to help make viability assessments simpler, quicker and more transparent'.

A number of London Authorities, for example, the Royal Borough of Greenwich and the London Borough of Hackney require Viability Assessments at validation stage with an assumption that these will also be available to be viewed by the general public. Greenwich's local validation requirements which were adopted in 2016 set out that Viability Assessments are to be published in their entirety with no exceptions.

The London Borough of Hackney, and a number of other London Boroughs such as Islington and Lambeth also publish full un-redacted details of the viability information unless there are exceptional circumstances. In these cases the applicant is required to set out a clear case for the exception. The council will assess the sensitivity against the test of public interest. In most instances it is not considered that commercial sensitivities would override the public interest.

The London Borough of Southwark expects full transparency of documents but only make the full Viability details public one week before the decision date of the application.

There is no indication that full disclosure of details has resulted in developers being dissuaded to submit planning applications in specific boroughs with these policies in place.

Since the publication of *The London Borough Development Viability Protocol* (November 2016) and *Homes for Londoners: Affordable Housing and Viability Supplementary Planning Guidance* (August 2017) it is expected that all London Boroughs will be working towards transparency of viability information in the future.