

Collas Crill explains... The Island Development Plan Review - Part I

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In the first of a series of articles relating to the review of Guernsey's Island Development Plan, Senior Planning Consultant Chris Crew focuses on current issues with - and potential future changes to - housing land supply and delivery.

Introduction

A review of Guernsey's Island Development Plan ("the IDP") was launched on 23 January 2023, with the aim that it be completed before the current political term ends in June 2025.

Originally intended to begin in 2021, the Covid pandemic led the States to pause the review in order to ensure that it would focus, "on matters which are critical to strategic recovery and will support future States' priorities to ensure that land use policies do not stand in the way of the States' recovery strategy".

Scope of the review

The Development & Planning Authority ("the DPA") has stated that the review will address the following matters:

- Housing and employment land supply;
- The effectiveness of policies relating to housing delivery;
- An update to Area of Biodiversity Importance (ABI) designations; and
- Other minor issues and clarifications.

Earlier statements by the DPA suggested that the review would *ensure "sufficient breathing space within the Main Centres"*, and address "*concern over loss of land to domestic curtilages*", but these matters do not appear to have been carried through to the review proper.

A parallel review of the planning law, ordinances and regulations is also due to be carried out, with the aim of identifying opportunities to streamline future development plan preparation and review processes.

Housing land supply and delivery under the IDP

The States' spatial strategy, which has remained largely unchanged since 1988, has been to concentrate the majority of new housing development in Guernsey's main urban areas of St Peter Port and St Sampson ("the Main Centres").

Under the former Urban Area Plan, 90% of new housing was intended to be located in these areas, while the current IDP was drafted assuming a slightly lower figure of 80%; the majority of which was expected to be delivered on 15 housing allocation sites.

Island-wide, conservative figures set out in the *2021 IDP Annual Monitoring Report* ("the AMR") estimate that Guernsey's current supply of land is capable of delivering 1,463 new dwellings.

In practice, however, only around a third of that supply of housing land (some 531 dwellings) is made up of sites that have received planning permission or that are under construction, and it is also true that not all permitted sites will actually be developed.

Furthermore, the AMR also sets out that only 52 dwellings -or 6.5% of new housing permitted since the IDP was adopted in November 2016, -have been approved on the allocated sites.

Those figures will have increased following the more recent approval of applications relating to the *Les Bas Courtils* and *Pointues Rocques* housing allocation sites, but it remains the case that too few large-scale housing developments have been brought forwards under the IDP. The consequences of this are evident in both Guernsey's record average property prices, and the ongoing struggle to recruit and retain key and other workers.

Alternative approaches

Delivering sufficient housing to meet the needs of existing and future Islanders is critical to supporting economic growth and building resilience to future global social, economic and environmental changes.

The States has recently agreed a strategic population objective (which assumes that net migration will average up to 300+ per year over the next 30 years), and is currently considering a new Strategic Housing Indicator for the period 2023 – 2027, which is intended to be set at creating an annual average of 313 additional units of accommodation.

In this context, and against the backdrop of consistent and significant under-delivery on the allocated housing sites, it seems probable that a greater number of sites will need to be allocated within the Main Centres, and that existing Main Centre boundaries will need to be expanded.

Whilst consideration may also be given to expanding the boundaries and allocating specific sites within the Local Centres, a more radical approach would be to consider revising the current spatial hierarchy through designation of a new category of "Built-up Areas". Any such designation, which could focus on significant clusters of existing residential properties (even where these are not served by the full range of services and facilities as the Local Centres), might enable infill housing development to take place in locations where this is currently precluded, and without causing harm to open landscape character or the natural environment.

This latter idea is something of a throwback to the *Rural Area Plans* of the 1990s and early 2000s, where limited infill housing development was provided for throughout the Island so long as it

- did not represent an encroachment into open countryside;

- did not have an adverse impact on the character of the built form;
- did not occupy an important local open space or block an important open view;
- did not have an unacceptable effect on neighbouring properties; and
- achieved a satisfactory grouping in relation to neighbouring buildings.

Care would need to be taken to ensure that the majority of new housing remained directed towards the Main Centres, so as not to conflict with the States' Strategic Land Use Plan (which the IDP must, by law, be consistent with). But with an increase in the number of allocated Main Centre sites and scope to revisit the current assumed 80-20 split between the Main Centres and other parts of the Island, this seems a feasible proposition.

Conclusion

Instead of doggedly persisting with the current, longstanding, and arguably failing spatial strategy, bold action on the part of both the DPA and States as a whole has the potential to garner far broader public support for the revised IDP.

Expanding the Main and Local Centre boundaries and allocating a greater number of housing sites could shift the balance of power between developers and landowners, incentivising the latter to release sites more readily than has been the case historically, and potentially making it economically viable to deliver high-density, high-quality housing that makes the most effective and efficient use of land.

At the same time, removing barriers to property owners developing infill housing in already built-up areas would provide more opportunities to small building firms, further boosting the delivery of new housing as well as economic productivity. It would also be likely to deliver wider economic, social and community benefits by increasing the potential for younger Islanders to build homes on family-owned plots.

This is not to say that this approach would be a panacea, but any downsides must surely be manageable and capable of being outweighed by the wider benefits that improved housing supply and delivery would bring.

For more information or advice on engaging with the IDP review process in Guernsey, contact [Chris Crew](#) on 01481 734253.

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