

Response to Regulation 19 Rutland Local Plan (2021–2041) Consultation

We have taken into account that the Draft Rutland Local Plan has been developed with due regard to:

1. National Planning Policy Framework (2023)
2. The Government Local Housing and Economic Needs Assessment (2020)
3. Rutland Infrastructure Delivery Plan (2024) (IDP)

For the purposes of this response and in accordance with the Healthwatch Rutland role, we draw specifically upon 'The National Planning Policy Framework, Section 2 Achieving Sustainable Development (2023)' which cites 3 broad themes: economic, social and environmental. Of these, our focus is on the 'social' which is further defined as:

'[to] support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of future of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural wellbeing.'

Our comments on the plan are therefore:

Housing and General Practice facilities: We note that, in addition to the many houses that have been built over recent years, Rutland needs to build 123 (+ 10% flexibility allowance) new homes each year of the planning period according to current national planning guidance in order to fulfil its new-build housing obligations. A substantial number of these houses will be built in and around the Empingham area. We, therefore, welcome the plan to construct a new surgery there and with facilities which have the potential to be used by all Rutland residents for procedures and consultations, including minor surgery. We would therefore urge that this building is sufficiently large to accommodate population growth in the future and easy, affordable and regular access to the surgery premises by disability-friendly, public transport for Rutland residents from all areas of the county.

Policy H4 Meeting all housing needs: We note that the Plan considers the needs of different age groups and, particularly, the forecast increase in an aged population. The older generations often do not downsize to smaller, suitable accommodation due to the costs and upheaval involved. A more ambitious plan would recognise this and plan to provide more support and/or incentive in this matter, thus freeing up larger properties for younger families hoping to upsize. In this respect, we would draw attention to the Government’s publication on 26/11/2024: ‘Our future homes: housing that promotes wellbeing and community for an ageing population’¹ for further detail and recommendations to be considered for inclusion in the Plan.

Policy H5 Accessibility Standards The requirement to meet the accessibility standards for M4(2) is laudable as an ambition but is not yet mandatory. It is further weakened by the statement ‘unless by exception only, where M4(2) is impractical or unachievable’, which would seem to present a potential loophole for developers. Achieving M4(2) standards would allow people with disabilities to remain in their own homes and live more independently for longer. We would like to see the requirement to meet M4(2) standards strengthened to remove the opportunity for evasion by property developers.

M4(3) stipulates that homes should be of wheelchair-accessible standard. The national average for wheelchair-dependent occupants is 3.4%. With the current high average age in Rutland and the projected increase in older people, we do not understand the target of 2% of dwellings meeting this standard and only on sites of more than 50 dwellings. This would seem to be overlooking the potential growth in the number of people who will need such accommodation in order to live as independently as possible for as long as possible.

Chapter 11 Infrastructure and Connectivity

Travel and transport

We commend the ambition to improve health and reduce air pollution by encouraging cycling and walking and greater bus use, outlined in greater detail in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

We note that the Local Plan suggests cycle and pedestrian routes within future housing development. Many Rutland connecting routes are across rural lanes (B or unclassified roads) with sunken verges, pot holes and no pavements or cycle lanes. Cycling and walking on these roads is therefore often dangerous – more so with speeding traffic. Moving from village to village or village to town therefore

becomes dependent on motorised transport. This means village residents may incur inequalities in access to healthcare and wellbeing support and opportunities for exercise. We would like to see the plan demonstrate ambition to improve this situation.

The proposed improvements to bus services is welcome. However, we note that the proposals do not include a Sunday service. This precludes people residing outside of Oakham, and without access to private transport, from accessing urgent care services either at Rutland Memorial Hospital or other out-of-county centres such as Corby or Grantham unless they can afford a taxi. Similarly, we remain concerned that any public transport service for villages must link into ongoing transport to the major cities of Leicester, Peterborough or Nottingham for secondary health care.

Policy INF 4 Health care infrastructure

This states:

‘Healthcare infrastructure will be provided as part of existing communities and strategic sites at an appropriate scale in the form of expanded or new facilities including primary and acute care; pharmacies; dental surgeries; opticians and supporting community services. This policy aims to ensure that the provision of healthcare facilities keeps pace with population growth and changes in healthcare needs. By adopting a proactive and integrated approach, the policy seeks to deliver high-quality, accessible, and sustainable healthcare services that contribute to the overall well-being of the community.’

The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) Integrated Care Board is responsible for commissioning primary care (i.e. General Practice, pharmacies, opticians, and NHS dentists) and oversees General Practice provision and estates. Local Authority Public Health oversee the Pharmacy Needs Assessment and so oversees the provision of pharmacies in Rutland. It is not clear what organisation, if any, oversees the estate and buildings associated with NHS dental practices or opticians who offer NHS eye care.

That said, from the Local Plan statement above, Rutland County Council seems to assume some responsibility or oversight of NHS dentistry infrastructure/estate. For several years, access to NHS dentistry in Rutland has been below the LLR and England average. We would welcome some mention of this within the Local Plan and clear leadership from the council in ensuring adequate provision of

community facilities with multifunctional use to include the provision of better access for Rutland residents to NHS dentistry and other health related activities.

ⁱ Accessed 28/11/2024 at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-older-peoples-housing-taskforce-report/our-future-homes-housing-that-promotes-wellbeing-and-community-for-an-ageing-population#incentivise-a-wide-range-of-ophllh-options>