

The Architect's Column

Nick Belderbos, Chartered RIBA Architect and Director of Heswall based architects-direct.com, answers your questions and offers advice.

New Housing Requirements

In August this year the Leader of Wirral Council wrote to all residents advising of the need for the local authority to produce a Local Plan.

Part of the Local Plan is a requirement for the council to identify a supply of land to meet housing needs. The Government has set a target for Wirral to identify enough land available for at least 12,000 new homes to be built by 2035.

The Council have been advised that if there is insufficient brownfield land available to meet the housing needs then they will have to look at the Greenbelt. The Council recognises that erosion of the greenbelt is not popular however if they do not review their greenbelt the Government will step in and review it for them. This could result in unsuitable areas of greenbelt being developed.

In 2003 Wirral set in place a Moratorium which essentially restricted any new residential development other than in designated regeneration areas. Our column in December 2012 announced the lifting of the Moratorium in October of that year.

The lifting of the Moratorium opened the door for development and many clients approached us with a view to obtaining Planning Permission for plots in their gardens. As a region we should remain conscious that garden plots do not become overdeveloped, as they did prior to the Moratorium coming into force, however there are many garden plots of suitable size across Wirral that could be sensitively developed without detriment to the local environment.

The Council has recently written to architects-direct.com asking if we have obtained planning permission for any such garden plots. They are keen to establish if these sites are due to be developed and if we require any help implementing the approved permissions. By developing suitably sized garden plots pressure can be taken off the councils' requirements to consider development within the greenbelt.

The development of garden plots can inevitably cause concern, particularly to other residents nearby. This is understandable and we always suggest that anyone proposing to submit a planning application for works on their property, or in their curtilage, contact their neighbours and discuss the proposals with them.

In 1897 the population of Heswall was only 398. By the time of the 2011 census this had risen to 13,401 (ukcensusdata.com). As Heswall has grown over the years open spaces have been developed with many new houses being built in the 1930's, 50's and 70's.

The requirement for some continued development is inevitable. This should not be seen in a negative light, after all many of us are the beneficiaries of historic development. The key is to ensure that development is carried out in a responsible and sensitive manner. Good design is essential to maintain the character of the environment we live in and a well-designed development can have the ability to enhance an area.

For more advice: Looking to the future, our Office is now 100% mobile ensuring you have better contact with us. Call or Text us on our new Office phone line: 07925519799

Pre-Planning Enquiries

For anyone looking to develop a garden plot we would advise that the Planning Department is approached at an early stage to establish the likelihood 'in principle' of obtaining a permission.

This initial approach takes the form of a **Pre-Planning Enquiry** and will be based on the basic principles of developing the plot.

The planning department have a fee for the enquiry (currently £165 for minor development). This will include a meeting on site and a written response advising on the policies that will be considered and the chances of the Planning Department supporting your application.

Following this initial enquiry there are two approaches to applying:

- **Outline Planning Submission**
- **Full Planning Submission**

The choice of application will be based on your aspirations for the site:

- Do you want to build property for yourselves to move into? This is being considered by many people looking to downsize.
- Do you want to sell the plot?

Outline Planning Applications

This enables the applicant to submit for Planning Approval without the costs associated with fully designing the building.

The level of information submitted is limited and will be specific to the site. It should be noted that the Planners are requesting increasing levels of information. This was covered in our column of Feb 2018. (www.heswallmagazine.co.uk)

An Outline Planning Approval secures planning permission on the site for a property of the proportions detailed in the application. If you are proposing to sell the plot with the benefit of Outline Approval you must consider that the developer of the site may wish to submit a further application, possibly increasing the property size to maximise the profit on the site. Once sold you will not have any control over planning decisions. It would therefore be prudent to put covenants in place to maintain control. You should seek legal advice in this regard.

Full Planning Applications

A full planning application will require the design of the property to be completed at the time of submission. As a result the design stage is longer and the professional fees will be higher.

Once approved the construction must commence within 3 years for the application to remain valid.

In some circumstances the planners will recommend submission of a full planning application so they can fully understand how the property will fit on the site and relate to neighbouring properties.

Plot size

The plot will need to have enough space for the new property to sit comfortably on the site. This is not to say that a large plot of land is required for development. Small sites can accommodate modest dwellings providing the design of the property relates well to its site and surroundings.