

Appendix 1

BME Housing Design Protocol

October 2007

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1. INTRODUCTION

In light of the BME Housing Strategy 2006/07 Refresh, this protocol has been produced to represent an agreed approach to the design development process for delivering housing, which is flexible in design to meet the needs of BME households.

Whilst there is no legislative framework which requires housing developers to deliver housing suitable for BME households, the Council recognises the need to meet the housing needs of all its communities. In the first instance, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council will start to meet these needs through affordable housing provision.

The protocol will facilitate the delivery of Strategic Objective 1 of the BME Housing Strategy 2006/07, which states that 'housing service is fully accessible to all BME communities'.

The Council's Community Strategy strongly supports the provision of equality of opportunity and choice through creating diverse, cohesive and sustainable communities. By ensuring the development of new housing is not indirectly prejudicing BME communities, the Council can deliver on its Proud, Sustainability and Fairness themes and meet the needs of BME communities in Rotherham.

The Housing Corporation sets out guidance for meeting BME objectives in 'The Big Picture, Meeting the needs of black and minority ethnic communities, 2001'. Some of these have been adopted in this protocol as follows:

- Develop locally based housing strategies that meet BME housing needs
- Consult, empower and promote the participation of BME communities to deliver appropriate and effective housing services
- Act to prevent discrimination against BME communities when designing and delivering services
- Consider the significance for BME households of the size and type of properties planned, and ways of making services more culturally sensitive

RMBC supports these objectives and will integrate these into the delivery programme and agree clear actions to achieve these objectives in delivering housing suitable for BME needs and aspirations.

There is extensive experience amongst housing developers in delivering schemes to specifically meet the needs of BME communities. However the aim of this protocol is to ensure a consistent approach.

This protocol can be used in the design process to:

- Produce design briefs for new schemes
- Consult and feedback with residents
- Evaluate the suitability of designs for proposed schemes

2. ROTHERHAM'S DIVERSE COMMUNITY

Rotherham has a diverse community with people from many different racial backgrounds. As well as established communities there are newly forming communities of people who have recently settled in Rotherham.

With such a diverse community comes a variety of needs, languages and cultures, which must be considered in plans to create new housing in neighbourhoods to meet local needs.

This protocol sets down guidance to meet BME housing needs through design excellence and explains how the Council can work in partnership with housing developers to deliver flexibly designed houses.

3. UNDERSTANDING LOCAL ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES' NEEDS

Rotherham is made up of communities each of which has its own unique identity, population and needs. Housing developers must be informed and fully equipped with information about the area they are working in. Information can be found from various sources such as the Census or the Council's web site which gives area profiles and statistics.

3.1 Consumer led development

To provide suitable housing for BME communities, the process must be led by consumers and based on their needs. The following actions should be undertaken by housing developers together with the Council:

- Designs must be sensitive to the BME Housing Design Protocol
- Housing developers to consult with Housing Market Renewal's Urban Designer during the design process
- The Council must share knowledge of its communities with housing developers and inform them of wider partners who can also inform the design process
- Appropriate consultation must be undertaken with specific BME focus groups to identify area/neighbourhood specific needs

Although there are many similarities amongst BME communities living in different areas of Rotherham, it is important to undertake this scoping exercise to highlight the area's needs. Each site will be unique and specifics will need to be understood on a site by site basis. Demographically, communities can vary widely and therefore research and common themes must be validated for each area.

The key consideration of this protocol is to ensure the development of properties which are flexibly designed as multi ethnic developments. There are extensive case studies of schemes aimed specifically at individual groups, however many have found that over time communities and needs change therefore rendering the schemes obsolete whilst also excluding other groups.

This protocol is not attempting to create a 'one size fits all' but instead incorporate design elements which meet the needs of BME groups into standard housing requirements. Added to this is the ability to introduce adaptations which ensures long term sustainability in these developments.

3.2 Proportion of BME housing across ADFs

It is necessary to proportion the delivery of housing suitable for BME households to meet the needs of the larger BME communities currently in Rotherham. However, this should not restrict the choice of housing offered to BME households outside of these areas. Therefore there must be an element of flexibly designed housing across all of Rotherham's ADF areas.

The proportion of BME flexible housing should initially be greater in areas where there are a larger proportion of BME communities, to provide for their needs in their current communities.

The 2007 Housing Market Assessment's findings clearly show a need for developing a more suitable housing offer for BME communities with a significant number currently living in unsuitable housing, as stated below:

"Non-White households are more likely to be larger than white households, more likely to be private renters, more likely to contain children, more likely to live in unsuitable housing and less likely to contain a special needs member." (HMA 2007)

The HMA indicates current BME needs across Rotherham. Where these are particularly focused is a good indicator of how to proportion the delivery of flexibly designed housing to meet need.

3.3 Accessibility

A key objective of the BME Housing Strategy is to ensure that BME residents have access to a decent home. Housing developers must ensure they are not directly or indirectly creating barriers to any of Rotherham's communities. To enable access to new housing offers housing developers must advertise and inform communities of new developments by:

- Targeting promotional material to specific BME communities
- Developing promotional material which will appeal to and be accessible to BME communities
- Providing translated versions of promotional material

To develop housing to suit the needs of BME communities housing developers must also ensure that service delivery models are sensitive to BME needs in accessing and maintaining housing.

4.0 DESIGN GUIDANCE

There is extensive guidance documentation and standards that are available for developers to ensure high quality sustainable properties are built however, much of this guidance does not focus on the specific needs of individual community groups, particularly the culturally sensitive needs of BME communities.

This section of the protocol sets down guidance for the delivery of new housing in order to specifically meet BME needs through design excellence. This should be used to complement general design principles, which should be underpinned by the common objective set down by the Housing Corporation:

“Housing providers should produce well-designed, good quality housing to meet identified needs in places where people want to live.”
(Housing Corporation, Design and Quality Standards, 2007)

4.1 Adaptability & Inclusive design

A well-designed home will need to take account of changing demands and lifestyles of the future by providing flexible internal layouts and allowing for cost-effective alterations. Housing should be able to respond to changing social, technological and economic conditions.

Some options which help to create more flexible homes include the potential to extend back or upwards, or to open up between rooms to allow open-plan living, along with garden space and the space to allow a conservatory to be added. (See building for Life standards – Section 15)

Inclusive design is about enabling everyone - regardless of age, gender, ethnicity or ability - to participate confidently and independently in everyday activities. Inclusive design benefits everyone - when you have small children, for instance, or are struggling with heavy luggage, or getting older.

Seven principles by which inclusive design should follow are:

- ***Equitable use*** – the design is useful and marketable to people with diverse disabilities and avoids stigmatising users.
- ***Flexibility in use*** – the design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
- ***Simple and intuitive use*** – the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user’s experience, knowledge, language skills or current concentration level.
- ***Perceptible information*** – the design communicates necessary information effectively to the user regardless of ambient conditions of the user’s sensory abilities.
- ***Tolerance for error*** – the design minimises hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

- **Low physical effort** – the design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.
- **Size and space for approach and use** – appropriate size and space is provided for approach, manipulation and use regardless of the user's body size, posture or mobility.

(Principles of universal design - The Centre for Universal Design, 1997)

4.2 Design: Consultation

BME communities must be engaged in the design process to establish their design needs. This process begins at the outset with understanding the make up of the community in each area. During the design stages, consultation must take place to ensure success of the future development in meeting community needs. Housing developers should consult on:

- Where the gaps are in existing provision
- Housing type, size, family and emerging family housing, elderly and special needs
- Location of new developments or refurbishments
- Required support services
- Level of affordability
- Internal environment
- External environment

Consultation exercises of this nature that focus on cultural factors and which result in placing minority ethnic groups into a category, means making generalisations which are often very broad. This must be used with caution particularly as many categories are made up of many countries and even more cultures for example the term 'African'.

In using guidance such as this, users must be aware that processes to design housing must be flexible to allow for changing attitudes and perceptions and not to reinforce stereotypes. Therefore, this process must be very fluid and consumer led. There are a number of examples sited in this guidance for information to suggest how design can be adapted to suit cultural rituals, traditions and needs. These examples must be used with caution, as guidance, rather than as the rule.

The characteristics of any scheme will greatly rely on consultation to identify the specific recommendations and considerations to meet the needs of Rotherham's local BME communities. To aid in consultation exercises the design features sited in this protocol have been brought together in a table of BME Housing Design Features. This table grades each feature as required in delivering homes to meet the needs of BME households (Appendix 1).

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

4.3 Design: Location, mix and layout

Location

The right location is a key consideration when developing housing which appeals to minority ethnic groups. These are identified by:

- Nearby appropriate facilities and resources
- Ensuring kinship networks and family structures are supported
- Existing and established community
- Avoiding areas known for racial harassment

Although it is common for BME households to stay near kinship networks this does not necessarily translate to all BME households. Whilst it is important to ensure there is suitable provision in existing communities this protocol is clear in the need to offer BME households the choice of moving out of areas traditionally associated with BME groups. This further supports the flexible design approach rather than the culture specific approach.

The choice offered in each area is addressed in section 3.2. Some provision must be made to allow BME communities the choice to move out of traditional areas rather than limiting the housing offer.

Locational strategies

Kinship ties can be sustained through creative approaches to location and housing offer. By understanding the local BME community, appropriate solutions can be developed to meet current and changing needs. For example, although large family accommodation is important to ethnic minority groups, it may be more appropriate to provide a younger family accommodation which is near to older relatives. Those schemes which are not located near culturally appropriate facilities may need to consider incorporating shared facilities such as communal lounges. These can be used as a meeting and congregation point and provide the sense of community that such a scheme's location may lack. These types of facilities may only be suited to larger schemes and will require consultation with community members.

Mix and layout

A suitable mix and layout of a scheme can satisfy kinship, security, safety and sense of community needs. These vary according to a number of factors. Specific requirements will be evident from the consultation exercises and can be tailored to meet local needs.

The 'courtyard' form is one example of a successful layout which can be varied to suit individual schemes. This form places dwellings around a central space, overlooking each other's entrances and environs. This can be varied to situate the central space at the back which can be divided into gardens, paths and communal spaces. Households where there is separation of the sexes can benefit, particularly women who can communicate with neighbours via their private gardens.

Security

This is a primary concern for minority ethnic groups and layout and mix can contribute to reducing vulnerability to crime. Security is not specific to designing houses for BME groups however these groups are more at risk of crime, so designing schemes which are Secure by Design is a high priority. Some considerations could include:

- Letter boxes should not be installed in front doors due to racial attacks. Instead steel letter boxes should be installed in the wall with a lockable cover
- Door viewers are recommended and should be mounted at 1200-1800mm

4.4 Design: Aesthetics and appearance

This aspect of the design process must be approached with caution and researched thoroughly before implementation. Schemes can be given an identity by incorporating motifs and features which relate to individual cultures or religious beliefs.

It seems that this particular aspect of design has opposing view points. Many of the older generations and those working with minority ethnic groups believe that homes should not stand out particularly due to the risk of racial attacks and creating segregation.

However, there are those people who wish to assert their identity to reflect the diverse people and cultures living in the UK today. This can be achieved for example, through the use of preferred colours, motifs and window shapes.

The purpose of this protocol is to develop housing which is 'flexible in design' and therefore, design should be effective and functional, as such features can change with time as cultural attitudes and preferences alter. Properties that are clearly designed to suit a specific group can also reduce functionality and flexibility over the long term. Therefore, Rotherham's housing will be flexible in design and not restrictive.

4.5 Design: Gardens

Gardens are considered to be an essential part of a property and are used for a variety of uses such as:

- Children's play area
- For Greek Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot and Turkish people the barbecue is a regular social ritual
- For some Vietnamese people the pond is an important symbolic element
- Orthodox Jewish households are prohibited from carrying any object out of the boundaries of the home on the Sabbath and require fences and gates

Notably, front gardens are less important if there is the provision of an adequate rear garden. Space at the front of a property will only be required either for a car or set back for better security and privacy.

INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

4.6 Design: Home

Layout

Although mainstream layouts for rooms are satisfactory and accepted by minority ethnic groups the following are specifications to suit generic BME needs of all groups:

- Large kitchen – more as a social space and where people gather to cook the family meal
- Consideration for two separate living spaces – taking into account families whose preference is for social separation of men and women such as in Muslim, some Rastafarian, Jewish, Sikh and Hindu households, particularly when guests are present

One living space is kept immaculate for guests and the other as a family room, options include:

- Separate but adjacent dining/family room
- Separate living/reception room
- Interconnected rooms for smaller dwellings

Preference is for kitchens to be at the rear of the house and living and reception room at the front (entrance side).

Although these requirements are generally only possible in larger houses, where properties are smaller this is overcome by combining the kitchen and dining room and having a separate living room.

Muslim groups particularly require the property to include a staircase that allows women to move freely round the house without encountering any male guests in the front room.

Another requirement is for a connecting door between the living and reception rooms to separate or allow a bigger space for gatherings, particularly during religious or cultural events/ceremonies such as, the Hindu 'haven' which is centred around a holy fire. The particular type of doors or arrangement should be discussed in consultation with the local BME community and its preferences.

It is preferable for cooking smells to be kept out of the living/reception room and so the kitchen will require good ventilation, particularly in the case of connecting doors.

In dwellings with more than three bedrooms it might be worth considering including a bedroom on the ground floor and a larger WC to take a shower, which allows greater independence to an elderly person or someone who has difficulty with stairs.

Plan shapes

When designing for larger households housing developers must ensure there is enough floor space to make comfortable living for the potential number of people. Many 3 and 4 bed homes actually do not provide adequate floor space and can be too small continuing the overcrowding trends seen in many BME communities.

Mainstream housing is generally rectangular. The L shape maybe more suited to the traditional layout of properties in some countries of origin which provide a courtyard. This provides further flexibility for households to use the courtyard for children, socialising and transition from home to garden. Generally, medium to wide fronted units are best suited to BME needs by allowing circulations space and privacy.

There are examples of new developments which have incorporated BME housing design principles through extensive community consultation. One particular example is the Selwyn Street, Oldham development which won a Building for Life Gold Standard award. (<http://www.buildingforlife.org>)

The scheme offers larger units due to demographic changes and uses wide fronted design with front doors, car ports and large windows. Floor layouts carefully maximise privacy between rooms and bedrooms permit varied furniture arrangements and non –load bearing internal partitions allow for later adaptations.

This protocol does not wish to restrict design and development of schemes by setting a measurement for floor space. Rather, to highlight the importance of layout and adequate floor space as a key factor to be considered in the design process.

4.7 Design: Circulation Space

Appropriately designed circulation space is essential in most minority ethnic households for privacy and ease of movement between different parts of a dwelling. This space also offers double function uses for example as a study area, seat or storage.

BME households, no matter the size of the dwelling, mostly favour a suitable entrance hall that allows multi functional use such as welcoming guests and removing coats and shoes. This space if designed to suit BME needs can have a real sense of place.

Where stairs are positioned will help privacy of circulation between the rear and upper parts of the dwelling. Examples include:

- Dog leg stair – positioned in the middle of the plan

- Reverse stair – single flight rising up from the middle of plan rather than from just inside the entrance

The arrangement of stairs and hallway space can also contribute to providing a further space on the upper floors with a further possibility of double function use.

4.8 Design: Kitchen

The kitchen is the part of a dwelling which has the most specific design requirements from all groups. These have been identified through the National Housing Federations research into designing for a multicultural society and have been set down below:

Storage

Sufficient storage for bulk buying food which applies to both large and smaller families of all groups for example:

- Large fridge freezer
- Space for large bins of flour, sacks of vegetables
- Space for storing large amounts of cutlery
- A cool pantry or larder
- 2msq of accessible kitchen storage floor space in houses up to 3 bedrooms (3msq in larger houses)

The accessibility and efficiency of the storage space needs careful design attention to meet needs.

Cooking

Cooking for the family or for guests is a significant part of most BME households, for example:

- Bangladeshi, Caribbean, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Tamil and Vietnamese cooking frequently involves use of oil
- Greek and Turkish Cypriot cooking uses charcoal grills
- Chinese cooking involves simmering and stir frying
- Jewish households are not able to cook on the Sabbath so food is prepared on Saturday and kept warm under a low flame

This results in an air change rate requirement higher than average Building Regulations. The following considerations should be incorporated where possible:

- Gas cooking is preferable
- Ventilation system extract rate of up to 60 litres per second via a cooker hood to the outside (Building Regulations figure: 30 l/sec)
- Cooker hoods must have a grease filter which is easily serviced by the user
- Consider including a heat recovery system to re-use the high quantity of heat that would otherwise be lost in the extracted air

Sinks and taps

Most BME groups consider running water is essential for proper cleanliness. A lot of food is cooked in large pots/pans. The following are important recommendations to meet these needs:

- Mixer taps to provide running water at controlled temperatures and for placing larger pans underneath
- Deeper than average sink to allow a 400mm diameter and 400mm high pot or bucket to be placed underneath
- Grease traps

Surfaces

The following recommendations are important to allow for long term maintenance and ease during cooking practises:

- Surfaces should resist high levels of moisture over lengthy periods
- Easily cleaned floor finishes to allow some preparation and cooking such as chopping vegetables or rolling pastry on wooden blocks placed on the floor
- White worktops should be avoided to prevent stains from cooking with oil and spices

4.9 Design: Living/Family/Dining Rooms

The main requirement for this part of the house is for more space from all groups. The usage varies slightly between the living room and family room such as:

- Orthodox Muslim households use the living room as a separate men's area particularly for guests
- Somali, Eritrean and Ethiopian households use the living room as a strong social area for many guests
- Jewish households use the living room as a children's study space
- Many Asian and Afro-Caribbean households the living room is kept spotless for visitors

With these spaces there should be discussion with the BME groups to determine their needs and space requirements, for example whether there will have to be a compromise between separate or interconnected rooms to provide sufficient space for varying uses. The primary goal should be to allow flexibility of use.

See also Design: Home, Layout

4.10 Design: Bedrooms

The main requirement here is for more space. Overcrowding, children and extended family visiting direct the use and layout of bedrooms. The use of bedrooms seems to be the lowest priority of all the spaces. Generally the conventional arrangements are accepted with the following specifications:

- Mix of single and double bedrooms, with more of the latter to allow flexibility in providing for children of different sexes
- Storage and fitted wardrobes or loose should be discussed with the BME community
- Workspace in children's rooms
- Space for a double bed in single rooms is preferable as children often sleep together
- In Muslim households the beds should be orientated so feet face away from Mecca. Sockets and doors should be designed carefully to allow the optimum position for beds

In larger households rooms can be designed to allow flexibility of use as either a bedroom or living room.

4.11 Design: Bathroom & WC

The preference is for running water and the bathroom as a place for relaxation or medicinal use. Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indian, some Chinese and Vietnamese, Tamil and many African households require higher specification for water resistant surfaces and details. This cost should be considered in terms of the longer term maintenance costs. Tiling or a single sheet type of flooring is best, although tiling has been known to be carpeted over for warmth. The following specifications should be incorporated:

- Shower fitting
- In larger houses a separate shower room is preferable, acceptable on the ground floor
- Mixer taps
- Finishes which will resist water over the long term
- Floor covering is folded up a couple of inches on the walls to prevent water damage

Space considerations for children and elderly persons who may need help should be incorporated in family households. For example, a shower and WC on the ground floor with the bathroom on the first floor will facilitate ritual washing and distribute wash places. This will also help those who have difficulty using stairs and fulfil a key aim of Lifetime Homes.

Ritual Washing

This is a significant requirement for some groups' particularly Jewish and Muslim households. For ease of washing a low level mixer tap at a wash place on the ground floor should be included, for example in the WC or a utility area. This could be a fireclay sink, or a vinyl or tiled floor with a welded or grouted gully.

Some groups, particularly Asian and Muslims, often wash after using the toilet. This can be served by:

- Taps suitable for filling a pot with a spout

- A low level tap nearer the floor where the pot can be left
- A bidet
- A low level shower handset

Muslim groups also require the toilet to be positioned away from the direction of Mecca (approximately 250' or E20'S in Britain). It is best to position the toilet at a right angle to this.

5. DESIGN OVERALL

Through out the design process, housing developers must achieve the key aim to provide housing which is flexible in design to meet the needs of all community groups as far as possible. There will often be a need to trade certain benefits or design features over others and priorities will need to be consulted on and agreed with specific area community groups.

The majority of the recommendations outlined in this protocol may seem specific to certain BME groups however, these specifications are flexible in use to also benefit most groups and not restrict usage.

The key to delivering flexible design is consultation with the target groups and with some imagination and creativity suitable housing to meet general and BME needs can be achieved. Particular thought can be given to religious practises which can indicate the necessary needs of BME groups. Therefore, developing homes that are flexible to fulfil a variety of room uses, supporting 'multi-generational' occupancy and catering for cultural differences.

5.1 General Design Guidance

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council set out standards of design that we wish to achieve in all new developments, although currently not mandatory these requirements are:

- ***The Building for Life standard***

Building for Life (BfL) is committed to the quality of new housing development. It is an initiative which promotes design excellence and celebrates best practice in the house building industry. It provides a national benchmark for well-designed housing and neighbourhoods in England. Rotherham HMR aspires to these standards and evaluates design proposals according to the 20 criteria set out by BfL. In order to meet these demands a minimum of 70% of the criteria must be met positively to achieve the Silver Standard award by BfL. This allows us to treat all proposals as fairly as possible when comparison is required.

(For more information please visit <http://www.buildingforlife.org/>)

- ***Lifetime Homes***

Lifetime Homes have sixteen design features that ensure a new house or flat will meet the needs of most households. This does not mean that every family is surrounded by things that they do not need. The accent is on accessibility and design features that make the home flexible enough to meet whatever comes along in life: a teenager with a broken leg, a family member with serious illness, or parents carrying in heavy shopping and dealing with a pushchair.

Because Lifetime Homes will be suitable for older people (whose numbers are increasing rapidly) and for the vast majority of disabled people, as well as the non-disabled person, they will have a wider market of potential buyers and residents, probably increasing their value and the ease with which they can be re-sold.

Rotherham HMR looks to receive full compliance with the Lifetime Homes standards and, this is seen as essential to produce adaptable and widely desirable properties.

(For further information please visit <http://www.lifetimehomes.org.uk>)

- ***Code for Sustainable Homes***

The Code for Sustainable Homes has been developed using and supersedes British Research Establishments (BRE) Eco Homes system, and will become the single national standard for sustainable homes, used by home designers and builders as a guide to development, and by home-buyers to assist in their choice of home.

The Code builds upon Eco Homes by introducing minimum standards for energy and water efficiency for all levels of the code, by making the system more simple and easy to understand when awarding points (whereas EcoHomes had over complex weightings) and by including other areas of sustainability such as points for Lifetime Homes provision and the inclusion of composting facilities.

As part of Rotherham's efforts to promote low carbon developments we will look to achieve Code level 3 or above in new housing schemes however this standard is at present aspirational and isn't mandatory.

(For further information please visit

<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/england/professionals/en/1115314116927.html>)

5.2 Cost

Generally designing housing to meet specific local needs does not have to mean additional costs to a scheme. Where there will be extra expense will be clear at the outset when designing to meet BME housing needs. This issue must be considered on a site by site basis where costs will have to be justified by the benefits gained.

However other priorities can override the development of housing design such as number of units, reducing costs and lack of control over the design process. These variables will have to be considered and agreed in terms of this protocol and the elements that each housing developer will be able to deliver on each scheme.

6. CONCLUSION

This protocol is a guide and starting point and should be supported by community consultation. It must be remembered that designing to meet specific needs is not limiting and constraining but can bring innovative and creative ideas in design and development. The key points in the process are outlined below:

- **Understand the local BME communities – research and share knowledge**
- **Undertake consultation**
- **Establish priorities**
- **Establish specific BME group needs**
- **Undertake scheme feasibility studies**
- **Gather feedback**