

From: [Jamie Roberts](#)
To: [Strategy](#)
Subject: Tetlow-King Somerset West and Taunton Local Plan • Representations on behalf of Rentplus UK Ltd
Date: 16 March 2020 16:26:01
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
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Dear Sir / Madam,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the emerging Somerset West and Taunton Local Plan. Please find attached representations on behalf of **Rentplus UK Ltd**. Please let me know if you have any further queries.

With kind regards

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Date: 16 March 2020

Our Ref: JR M15/0715-320

By email only:

strategy@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: SOMERSET WEST AND TAUNTON: LOCAL PLAN ISSUES AND OPTIONS

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Issues and Options paper for the emerging Somerset West and Taunton Local Plan. We represent **Rentplus UK Ltd**, an innovative company providing **affordable rent-to-buy housing** for hard-working people aspiring to home ownership. Rentplus provides an accessible route to achieve their dream through the rent - save - own model. Households rent the property for a defined period at an affordable rent and then receive a gifted 10% deposit upon purchase. Rentplus has recently been recognised by the National Housing Awards as the Most Innovative Home Ownership Solution for 2019.

The first section of these representations introduces the Rentplus model and sets out recent developments which underline the importance of the rent-to-buy model. The second section provides specific comments on the emerging Plan.

Introducing Rentplus

The Rentplus model of affordable rent-to-buy aims to help those hard-working families and households unable to access ownership either through shared ownership, starter homes or homes on the open market, to overcome the mortgage 'gap'. This is achieved through a defined period of affordable Intermediate Rent at no more than 80% of local market value (including service charge) during which all Rentplus residents are able to save towards a deposit.

It is important to note that in 2018 the National Planning Policy Framework (the 'Framework') was revised to incorporate a wider definition of affordable housing, now providing four categories; rent-to-buy is included within category d) Other affordable routes to homeownership.

The revised Framework also expanded the scope of 'Affordable housing for rent' to include not just 'traditional' affordable and social rented housing, but any scheme which meets criteria where the rent is at least 20% below local market rents, where the landlord is a registered provider, and where any public subsidy is recycled for future provision. Rentplus (working with its partner Registered Providers) meets each of these criteria; it does not rely on public subsidy and therefore there is no requirement to recycle it.

In this context, the Rentplus model is a hybrid and falls within both categories of affordable housing, as either part of the 'affordable housing to rent' element, or as an 'affordable route to home ownership'.

This has also been recognised by several councils such as Plymouth, West Devon, South Hams, Mid Devon, Dorset, South Somerset, Sedgemoor, Cotswolds, Cherwell, Northampton, Wellingborough and Fenland Councils, all of whom Rentplus has worked with to deliver homes in recent years.

The Rentplus model offers the opportunity for the Council and Registered Providers (RPs) to diversify the local housing offer without further recourse to public subsidy. The affordable rented period provides families and households with security of tenure, with certainty of management and maintenance by a local partner RP, and critically the opportunity to save towards purchase. As affordable rent to buy meets needs for affordable rent (the only difference being marked by the expectation by all parties of purchase), it comes with a significant benefit of freeing up existing affordable rented homes for others in priority need, as demonstrated by Rentplus schemes across England. Rentplus works with a wide range of Registered Providers; this includes those on Somerset West and Taunton's preferred list and currently includes Willow Tree Housing (South West Housing Society and Tamar Housing) and Stonewater.

In diversifying the overall housing mix, Rentplus can help to create mixed and balanced communities. Rentplus tenants are on a clear path to homeownership, meaning they are more likely to remain in their property for the long-term and therefore better settle into their community. This helps to create a stronger sense of place in new developments in the long run.

Comments on the Issues and Options paper

As an observation, it is noted that the Issues and Options paper refers to 'intermediate' housing. The term 'intermediate' is no longer used, with the 2019 Framework replacing it with a series of four categories of affordable housing, set out in the Glossary at Annex 2. The emerging Local Plan should be prepared having regard to these forms of affordable tenure, including the 'other affordable routes to home ownership' which include rent to buy.

Issue 5.3.1 deals with affordable housing, noting that the Local Plan will set out the percentage requirement for affordable housing, with tenure split to be addressed in a Supplementary Planning Document. The difficulty with this approach is that the choice and proportion of affordable housing tenures has clear implications for development viability. As Issue 5.5 goes on to discuss, this means that certain priorities must be balanced to ensure that development is viable and can come forward.

In this context, it is **strongly recommended that the Council updates its Strategic Housing Market Assessment** to take into account the full range of affordable tenures listed within the definition of affordable housing at Annex 2 of the Framework. This will provide the Council with a firm evidence base upon which it can take Local Plan production forward, which can then be subject to testing at Examination.

Question 3e of the Issues and Options paper asks for comments on the Council's proposed policy approaches. As drafted, approach 3e/3 is somewhat negatively worded as it seeks to 'limit' delivery of tenures. The **approach 3e/3 should be reconsidered to be more positive** and to ensure that the Local Plan supports the full range of affordable tenures. A proposed form of words for policy approach 3e/3 is suggested below:

A tenure mix requirement which delivers a range of affordable housing tenures (as defined in the Framework), to be informed by relevant local evidence of needs such as the latest Strategic Housing Market Assessment and local Housing Needs Surveys, as well as consideration of development viability.

Summary and Conclusion

Rentplus can assist in meeting local need, allocating all of its residents through the Housing Allocation Scheme; by enabling real savings to be built while renting at an affordable rent the Council can help meet the needs of low and middle income households, providing greater choice and flexibility in the planning system.

We trust the above comments are of assistance to the Council. Should the Council wish to discuss how affordable housing delivery and rent-to-buy can best meet local needs in Somerset West and Taunton,

please get in touch. We would like to be notified of further consultations; please notify **Tetlow King Planning** as agents of Rentplus by email only to consultation@tetlow-king.co.uk.

Yours faithfully



JAMIE ROBERTS MPlan MRTPI
PRINCIPAL PLANNER
For and On Behalf Of
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