Strategic & Local Plan
Cheltenham, Gloucester & Tewkesbury

Cheltenham Borough, Gloucester City and Tewkesbury Borough councils' Strategic and Local Plan (SLP)

Housing Density Topic Paper

October 2025

CHELTENHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL
Gloucester City Council Transforming Your City
Tewkesbury Borough Council

Contents

1.0 Introduction and purpose

1.1 The Strategic and Local Plan (SLP) areas consist of Cheltenham Council, Gloucester Council and Tewkesbury Council boundaries. The three areas have a distinct character and urban development, but are inter-linked socially, economically and physically. The SLP areas, like many areas in the UK, face challenges of finite land, a growing population, and increased unaffordability of housing.

1.2 The importance of using land effectively has been recognised for many years as a tool to help address this housing crisis, and has been strengthened by Government planning policy which emphasises effective use of land. It is recognised optimised densities may be required to:

- Ensure land is being used effectively to address the housing crisis
- Support provision of public transport and infrastructure
- Increasing need to address housing crisis (homelessness and affordability which are expensive to the economy, environment, and social)
- Desire to protect undeveloped land of environmental and landscape value

1.3 Equally important is the need for quality homes which reflect local character and conditions, and a well-designed appropriate density is an important tool in achieving this.

1.4 This Topic Paper sets out the importance of securing optimum residential densities across the SLP area to deliver good quality placemaking in line with national government policies, guidance and housing targets.

2.0 National Planning Policy

2.1 Housing Targets

2.1.1 National Government has set mandatory targets to increase the delivery of residential dwellings across England, and in December 2024 these targets were revised to deliver a total of 370,000 homes a year. The annual impact of this for the SLP area, and wider Gloucestershire is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Housing Targets: Standard Method Numbers (as of May 2025).

	New annual	New 20 year
Cheltenham	821	16,420
Gloucester	700	14,000
Tewkesbury	630	12,600
Stroud	*846*	*16,920*
Forest of Dean	*604*	*12,080*
Cotswold	*1,056*	*21,120*
Gloucestershire	*4,657*	*91,580*
SLP Area	**2,151**	**43,020**

2.1.2 The Prime Minister highlighted that while local plans serve as the foundation for achieving housing targets, the Government is prepared to step in and accelerate development if those plans prove ineffective.

2.1.3 The government has set a target of building 370,000 new homes annually in England, aiming to deliver 1.5 million homes over the next five years. To meet this goal, local authorities are being urged to approve development proposals, as millions struggle to access suitable housing, with 1.3 million households on social housing waiting lists and a record number, including 160,000 children living in temporary accommodation[1].

2.1.4 The Strategic Local Plan (SLP) seeks to strike a careful balance, ensuring that housing growth is delivered in a way that respects environmental considerations and promotes a well-integrated mix of development.

2.2 National Planning Policy Framework

2.2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides a framework within which locally-prepared plans can provide for housing and other development in a sustainable manner. It was updated Dec. 2024.

2.2.2 The NPPF outlines that Plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of their area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment; mitigate climate change (including by making effective use of land in urban areas) and adapt to its effects.

[1] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cdx9gypeqdpo

2.2.3 Strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places. It places emphasis on delivering a sufficient supply of homes. The overall aim should be to meet an area's identified housing need, including with an appropriate mix of housing types for the local community.

2.2.4 Para. 124 of the NPPF states: *"Planning policies and decisions should* ***promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses****, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions."*[2]

2.2.5 In recognition of the importance of density the NPPF has a section called 'Achieving appropriate densities'.

Para 130 of the NPPF states: "*Where there is an existing or anticipated shortage of land for meeting identified housing needs,* ***it is especially important that planning policies and decisions avoid homes being built at low densities, and ensure that developments make optimal use of the potential of each site****. In these circumstances:*

a) ***plans should contain policies to optimise the use of land in their area and meet as much of the identified need for housing as possible****. This will be tested robustly at examination, and should include the use of minimum density standards for city and town centres and other locations that are well served by public transport.* ***These standards should seek a significant uplift in the average density of residential development within these areas****, unless it can be shown that there are strong reasons why this would be inappropriate;*

*b) the use of minimum density standards should also be considered for other parts of the plan area****. It may be appropriate to set out a range of densities that reflect the accessibility and potential of different areas, rather than one broad density range****; and*

c) ***local planning authorities should refuse applications which they consider fail to make efficient use of land****, taking into account the policies in this Framework. In this context, when considering applications for housing, authorities should take a flexible approach in applying policies or guidance relating to daylight and sunlight, where they would otherwise inhibit making efficient use of a site (as long as the resulting scheme would provide acceptable living standards)."*

(N.B. The bolding is the SLP emphasis, not the NPPF)

[2] National Planning Policy Framework - Guidance - GOV.UK

2.2.6 A key principle of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is the efficient use of land, which discourages unnecessarily low-density development and promotes more effective spatial planning to meet housing and sustainability goals.

2.2.7 Para. 129 of the NPPF states: *"Planning policies and decisions should **support development that makes efficient use of land**, taking into account:*

*a) the identified need for **different types of housing** and other forms of development, and the availability of land suitable for accommodating it;*

b) local market conditions and viability;

*c) the availability and capacity of infrastructure and services – both existing and proposed – as well as their potential for further improvement and the **scope to promote sustainable travel** modes that limit future car use;*

d) the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting (including residential gardens), or of promoting regeneration and change; and

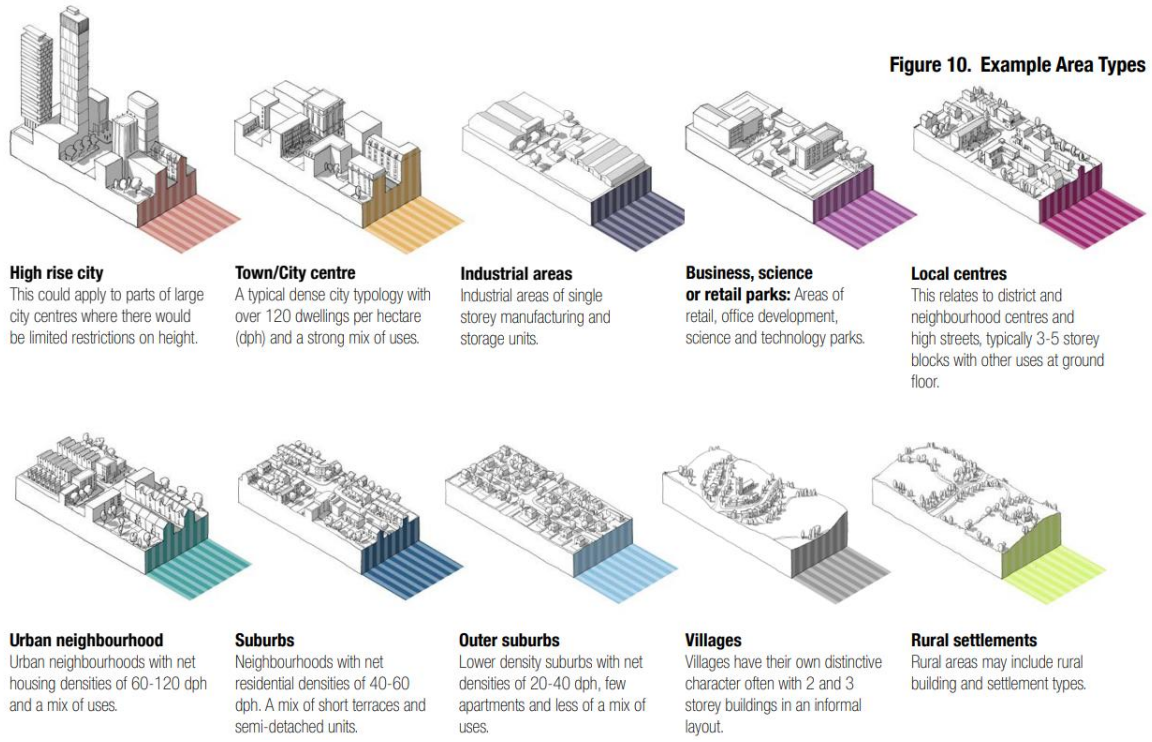
*e) the importance of securing **well-designed, attractive and healthy places**."*

2.2.8 The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) reinforces the need to make more efficient use of land, encouraging a diverse range of well-designed housing types. Crucially, it highlights the opportunity for higher-density development to support and enable viable public transport options, helping to create more sustainable and connected communities.

2.3 National Model Design Code

2.3.1 The National Model Design Code (NMDC) was published in 2021 with the aim to raise design quality, recognising the positive contribution a well-designed environment can have on the overall wellbeing of a community. The NMDC has suggested a range of area types with associated densities that apply to various types of areas such as rural, suburban, urban and city centre.

Figure 2: Example Area Types (NMDC) 3



2.3.2 These area types provide a useful reference point, and whilst not all are applicable to the SLP areas - they do give an indication of current thinking on density and resulting built form/place considerations related to each area type. The broad categories have been used to align different density recommendations for the SLP areas.

2.3.3 It is worth noting that it is expected the National Model Design Code will be updated in Spring 2026. The exact date is unknown at the time of completing this Density Topic Paper.

3.0 SLP Areas Planning Context

3.1 SLP Areas: HELAA Methodology and Study

3.1.1 The Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) is a technical study that determines the suitability, availability and achievability of land for housing and economic development. As part of the HELAA methodology it outlines density assumptions for the SLP areas. In 2024 it stated:

[3] National Model Design Code - GOV.UK

"Site capacities are assigned based on evidence from promoters of sites, urban design principles and other local information. Where evidence is unavailable, the following density assumptions have been applied for each local authority:

- *Cheltenham – 40 dwellings per hectare (dph) for sites within the main built-up area and 30 dph for areas outside of this;*
- *Gloucester City - 40-50dph is used for the main built-up area and 30-40dph for areas outside of this; and,*
- *Tewkesbury – 30dph for all areas."*

3.1.2 The 2024 SLP density assumptions were currently lower than the NMDC, particularly for an urban context. It was recognised that in order to use land effectively the SLP densities would need to be reviewed. If the 2024 HELAA densities were followed this would require more greenfield land to be used for development – and potentially some greenbelt land.

3.1.3 In recognition of this the HELAA densities were reviewed in 2025 and are now:

Figure 3: 2025 HELAA Densities

NMDC Category	Cheltenham	Gloucester	Tewkesbury
City/Town (120+ dph)	Limited locations, only possible subject to site constraints	Limited locations but encouraged esp. in the City Centre, subject to site constraints.	Not applicable
Urban Neighbourhoods (60-120 dph)	Examples include, Pittville, Lansdown, St Pauls, Fairview, St Peters, All Saints, Golden Valley	Examples include, Westgate, Kingsholm & Wotton, Matson, Robinswood and White City and Barton & Tredworth.	Apply to areas within 400m of transit rail

Suburbs (40-60 dph)	Examples include, Hatherley, Leckhampton & Warden Hill, Benhall, Charlton Kings, Hesters Way, Oakley	Some locations/wards	Several locations – growth area – Tewkesbury Garden Community
Outer Suburbs (20-40 dph)	Not applicable	Historically there are some at this density but not applicable for most recent planning applications.	Very limited locations

3.1.4 The density figures presented in the table represent minimum thresholds, with higher densities actively encouraged where they are appropriate to the local character and site-specific conditions. This Topic Paper sets out the justification for the higher density assumptions adopted in the 2025 Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) Methodology, reflecting both national policy direction and best practice in sustainable planning.

3.2 Similar Local Authority Examples

3.2.1 Other local authorities approach to density was examined, with many local authorities favouring a range of densities. Examples include:

3.2.2 Essex Design Guide (2018) which specifies a range of densities for sites, inc.:

- Compact Urban (75 dph)
- Garden Community (65 dph)
  "The location of substantial residential and business uses within easy walking distance of an urban or neighbourhood centre is the principal platform for sustainable development. This catchment (at least 5000 homes for a typical, sustainable neighbourhood) can support a bus route and a variety of shops and services and can attract other commercial investment. It requires an average neighbourhood density of around 65 dwellings per hectare with higher density towards the centre of the neighbourhood (or town centre,

transport corridor etc.). This allows for lower densities towards the margins of the neighbourhood towards the rural edges.[4]"

3.2.3 South Gloucestershire Design Checklist SPD[5] (2007)*:

- Up to 50-75 dph within 400 metres of town centres
- Up to 40-60 dph within 800 metres of town centres
- Up to 30-50 dph within 400 metres of local centres
- Up to 30-40 dph over 400 metres/800 metres from a centre which may have potential to be developed

**Currently being reviewed as part of the Local Plan (likely to be higher density)*

3.2.4 Applying a range of density levels across different areas allows for the distinct character of each locality within the authority to be respected and reflected in placemaking. This approach also supports the prioritisation of public transport accessibility, with higher densities focused in locations where sustainable travel options can be maximised.

3.3 Density Examples - Cheltenham

3.3.1 Cheltenham is celebrated as one of the UK's most distinguished Regency towns, with its historic core designated as a Conservation Area. This status brings important planning controls, particularly on building heights to ensure that new development does not detract from the town's unique character and architectural heritage. Protecting and enhancing the special qualities of this area is vital to preserving Cheltenham's identity and sense of place.

3.3.2 Recent residential developments within the more central area of the town have demonstrated that higher-density, compact urban forms can be successfully integrated within this relatively confined built form envelope. These developments have been sensitively designed to complement, rather than compete with, the town's historic character - showing that well-considered intensification is possible without compromising Cheltenham's distinctive qualities.

3.3.3 Outer Cheltenham features a broader mix of densities, often typified by suburban development, with opportunities for some of the major schemes coming forward to deliver higher densities towards optimum 'neighbourhood' densities as set out by the National Model Design Code.

[4] Appropriate densities | Essex Design Guide
[5] untitled

3.3.4 Recent examples where high-quality design has been achieved at higher density include:

- **Golden Valley SPD**: promotes a range of density types, and contains a useful visual representation of what different densities would look like. Aligns with 2 NMDC categories - Urban Neighbourhoods, and Suburbs.

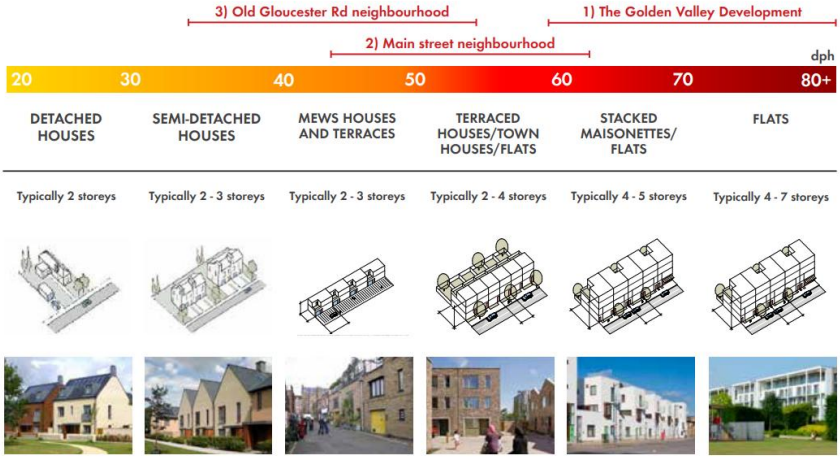


Figure 34 **Density and typology spectrum**
This spectrum illustrates the range of housing typologies and their likely densities which should be promoted within each of the neighbourhoods within The Golden Valley Development (Allies and Morrison)

Figure 4: Golden Valley SPD Density Examples

- **Cheltenham North Place**: 147 units on a site area of 1.35 Ha, with a density of 106 dph. Aligns with the NMDC Urban Neighbourhood

Figure 5: Cheltenham North Place

- **Lansdown Road**: 1.06 Ha site has been transformed into 67 quality new family homes of a high specification, with a density of 63 dph. Aligns with NMDC Urban Neighbourhood

Figure 6: Lansdown Road

- **John Dower House, 24 Crescent Place:** 68 dwellings on a 0.36 hectare site, with a density of 188dph. The development consists of 68 later living apartments including a mix of 20 one-bed, 40 two-bed and 8 three-bed apartments. This optimum density aligns well with the site's town centre location and the NMDC town centre area type. The proposal also illustrates a sensitive response in scale and mass within the Conservation Area and to the adjacent John Dower House and St Matthews Church – both Grade II Listed buildings.

Figure 7:24 Crescent Place

3.3.5 The Cheltenham examples highlight that higher densities are already being developed successfully in Cheltenham and indicates there is greater scope for similar optimised densities in more locations. Cheltenham is also quite geographically constrained and increasing density where possible would relieve pressure off other land.

3.3.6 The HELAA recommends 60-120 dph in urban neighbourhoods, and 40-60 dph in suburbs. However, higher densities are encouraged where it responds to the local context and character.

3.4 Density Examples - Gloucester

3.4.1 Gloucester's status as a city is anchored by its historic cathedral, a defining landmark that has shaped the city's development over centuries. The cathedral and its surrounding Conservation Area form a vital part of Gloucester's identity, and planning controls, especially those relating to building heights. These controls are in place to ensure that new development does not compromise the integrity of the historic core. Protecting and enhancing the special characteristics of this area is essential to maintaining the city's cultural and architectural heritage.

3.4.2 Beyond the central area, Gloucester features a diverse mix of residential densities, with outer neighbourhoods typically characterised by suburban development. This contrast between the historic centre and the surrounding suburbs highlights the need for context-sensitive planning and design that respects the city's unique form and historic evolution.

3.4.3 Recent examples where high-quality design has been achieved at higher density include:

- **103 Northgate Street**: 0.56 Ha site. Included demolition of existing structures, and erection of 95 residential units & retail units. Height: 2-5 storeys. Density of 169 dph. Aligns with NMDC Town/City Centre

Figure 8: 103 Northgate Street

- **Great Western Road Sidings**: 3.1 Ha site. 315 dwellings over 3-4 storeys. Density of 101 dph. Aligns with NMDC Urban Neighbourhood

Figure 9: Great Western Road Sidings

3.4.4 The Gloucester examples highlight that higher densities are already being developed successfully in Gloucester and indicates there is greater scope for higher densities in more locations. Gloucester is also quite geographically constrained and increasing density would relieve pressure of other land.

3.4.5 The HELAA recommends 60-120 dph in urban neighbourhoods, and 40-60 dph in suburbs. However, higher densities are encouraged where development responds to the local context and character.

3.5 Density Examples - Tewkesbury

3.5.1 Tewkesbury covers a traditionally rural area with a small town, and rural service centres. It is developing a garden community which is served by Ashchurch rail station.

3.5.2 Ashchurch Garden Community is planned to have around 4,000 dwellings built out at an average density of 35-40dph. It has two distinct areas:

- Area 1: Average 37 dph, higher mixed-use employment-led density around the rail station, average 40dph
- Area 2: Lower density across the area as a whole - average 35 dph with limited higher density along the Central Street and in the local centre
- Aligns with NMDC Category Outer Suburbs density of 20-40 dph. The lowest density category.

Figure 10: Computer Image of Ashchurch Garden Community

3.5.3 The densities for the Ashchurch garden community, and other new development are typically low density. This low density has resulted in many of the newer development being increasingly car-reliant, and requiring more land for development than higher densities would. However, older buildings in Tewkesbury are built at much higher densities in comparison. To help protect the countryside and ensure people are well served by public transport it will be necessary to increase densities – in the most appropriate locations such as around railway stations, local and district centres where a high mix of uses and access to public transport is expected.

3.5.4 To reflect the need to optimise land more efficiently, and the traditional architectural character of the area, the HELAA recommends 60-120 dph in urban neighbourhoods (inc. within 400m of a rail station), and 40-60 dph in suburbs. Higher densities are encouraged where development responds sensitively to the local context and character.

4.0 National Research Context

4.1 The importance of optimising residential densities is well-established, supported by a substantial evidence base that advocates for higher-density development when it is thoughtfully designed and tailored to local character. Such approaches demonstrate that increased density can be achieved without compromising the distinct identity of a place. The following research supports this approach:

4.2 CABE (2004) Better Neighbourhoods

4.2.1 The CABE 2004 Better Neighbourhoods publications outlined how higher densities can work and included many examples of well-planned and successful areas which have higher densities.

Figure 11: CABE Density Examples

Density Type of Area	Units/Ha	Persons/ Ha
Low density detached (Hertfordshire)	5	20
Milton Keynes average 1990	17	68
Private Sector 1980/90s (Hertfordshire)	30	120
Ebeneezer Howard Garden City 1898	45	180
Min. density tram service	60	240
Abercrombie – low density	62	247
Abercrombie – medium density	84	336
Abercrombie – high density	124	494
Average net density Islington - 1965	185	740
Singapore planned densities 1970s	250	1,000
An average dwelling size of 4 bedrooms was assumed by CABE, although it is noted that this is higher than the average		

4.2.2 The SLP are not advocating for high-rise development, but instead for densities which reflect the local character and optimise the use of land.

4.3 CPRE – The Countryside Charity

4.3.1 The CPRE campaign on having a "*countryside and green spaces that are accessible to all, rich in nature and playing a crucial role in responding to the climate emergency*". The charity advocate for higher density and highlight that

the founder of the garden city movement advocated for much higher densities than are often used in the garden villages of today:

"It's worth remembering that the 1898 vision of Sir Ebenezer Howard, founder of the garden city movement, was of compact communities of 30,000 people on a site of 1,000 acres, with 'the furthest removed inhabitant being within 600 yards' of the edge of the centre. With today's smaller households, that sort of concentration of people would require a housing density of around 80 dwellings per hectare – four times that generally proposed in the garden villages of today, but the same as our green and desirable Georgian squares.[6]"

4.3.2 Understanding the historical context is important, as lower-density suburban development has only become commonplace relatively recently. Traditionally, local character was shaped by more compact, higher-density urban forms, and recognising this helps inform more context-sensitive approaches to future development and growth.

4.4 New Economics Foundation (2024) Trapped Behind the Wheel

4.4.1 This 2024 publication analysed how new builds often have lower density development with lower public transport provision, exacerbating car dependency. Increased density is an important tool for increased service provision and Active Travel.

"The experience of the past 15 years shows us that, without substantial changes, there is a major risk of locking in increased car dependency for decades to come. These changes are vital if the government is to deliver on other priorities, such as bringing the cost of living down to more manageable levels, reducing spatial inequality, and responding adequately to the climate emergency[7]"

4.4.2 The publication highlights that low-density, car-dependent development has negative social, economic and environmental impacts.

4.5 Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission (2020)

4.5.1 Research conducted in 2020 by the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission revealed that poorer communities were up to ten times more likely to experience poor-quality design. Additionally, low-density suburban developments were disproportionately associated with substandard design outcomes.

[6] Garden cities for the 21st century - CPRE
[7] Trapped behind the wheel | New Economics Foundation

4.6 Research Findings

4.6.1 All the research findings highlight the importance of a density able to support public transport. It is illuminating that the original concept of garden communities as developed by Sir Ebeneezer Howard was for garden communities at around 80 dph, much higher than what is often used today. A redress of the densities in the SLP areas is required to ensure the SLP is well supported by public transport and other infrastructure.

5.0 Infrastructure and Community Facilities

5.1 All the densities presented in this Topic Paper have been 'gross' – this means that they have not taken into account the full extent of the infrastructure and community facilities. The land area for infrastructure and community facilities remains broadly the same for the same number of houses. The land area for housing changes with density. Higher density does not automatically translate to less open space and infrastructure.

5.2 To account for a proportion of the site that will be taken up by infrastructure and landscaping, a density multiplier is applied to achieve a net developable area.

5.3 The below figure shows Density Multiplier Assumptions which were used in the 2024 HELAA Methodology. The larger the site, the greater need to provide on-site facilities.

Figure 12: 2024 HELAA Density Multipliers

Site Size (ha)	Discounted site area	Area for housing
0 - 0.4	10%	90%
0.4 - 2	17%	83%
2+	37%	63%

5.4 The HELAA methodology applies gross density figures to its multipliers to help ensure that the scale of development is matched by the appropriate provision of infrastructure and community facilities. This approach supports more accurate planning and delivery aligned with local needs.

6.0 Density Conclusions

6.1 This Topic Paper has set out the case for increasing residential densities across the Strategic Local Plan (SLP) area. The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) reinforces the imperative to use land more efficiently, aligning with a broad body of research that demonstrates how well-designed, higher-density development, when responsive to local character and context can support sustainable placemaking. Higher densities are also shown to enhance the viability of public transport networks, contributing to more connected and resilient communities.

6.2 The 2025 HELAA densities used are still conservative, and reflect the minimum density standards. They are repeated in table below:

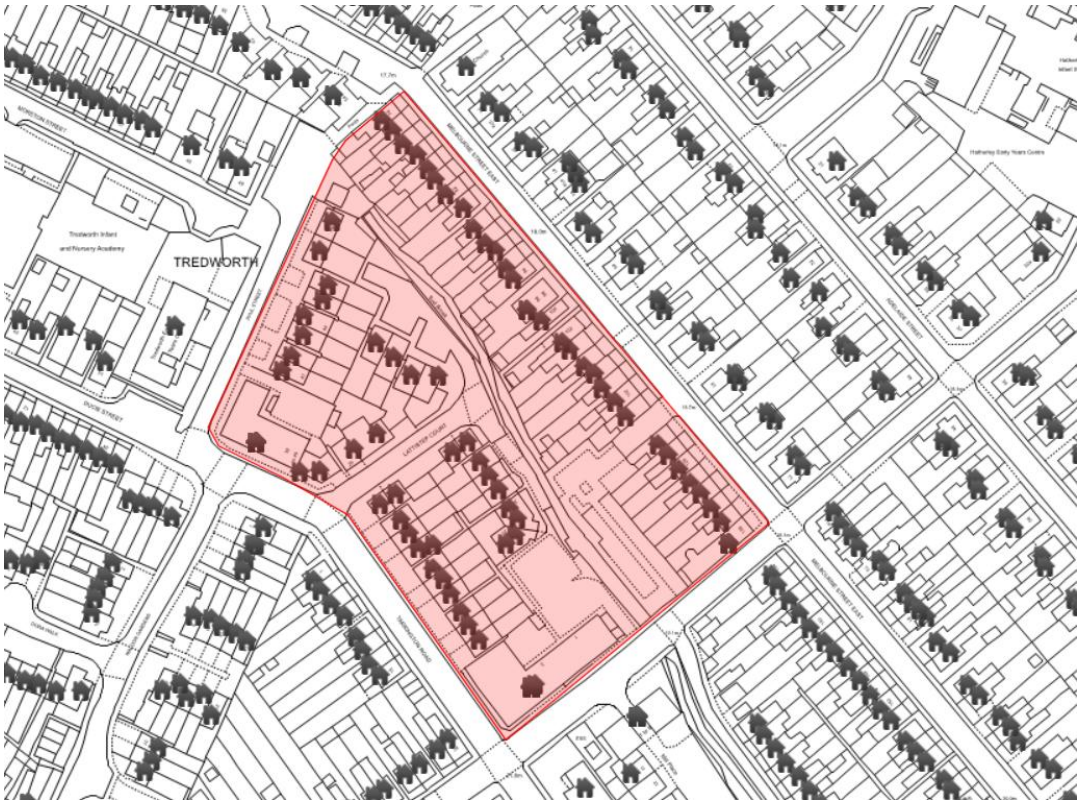
Figure 13: 2025 HELAA Densities

NMDC Category	Cheltenham	Gloucester	Tewkesbury
City/Town (120+ dph)	Limited locations, only possible subject to site constraints	Limited locations but encouraged esp. in the City Centre, subject to site constraints.	Not applicable
Urban Neighbourhoods (60-120 dph)	Examples include, Pittville, Lansdown, St Pauls, Fairview, St Peters, All Saints, Golden Valley	Examples include, Westgate, Kingsholm & Wotton, Matson, Robinswood and White City and Barton & Tredworth.	Apply to areas within 400m of transit rail and around district centres in new urban extensions
Suburbs (40-60 dph)	Examples include, Hatherley, Leckhampton & Warden Hill, Benhall, Charlton Kings, Hesters Way, Oakley	Some locations/wards	Several locations such as outer edges of Garden Community development.

Outer Suburbs (20-40 dph)	Not applicable	Historically there are some at this density but not applicable for most recent planning applications.	Very limited locations

Appendix 1: Existing housing examples in Gloucester

Barton & Tredworth Ward



- Late Victorian or Edwardian small terraces and converted former factory
- Off Tarrington Road, Lattistep Court, Hatherley Road, Melbourne Street East
- Area selected = 1.4 ha
- 79 dwellings
- **56 dph**

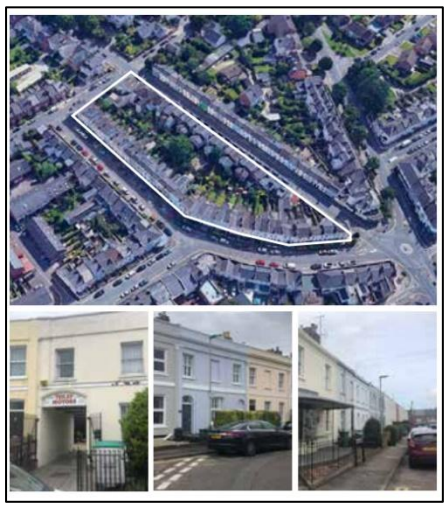
Barton & Tredworth Ward

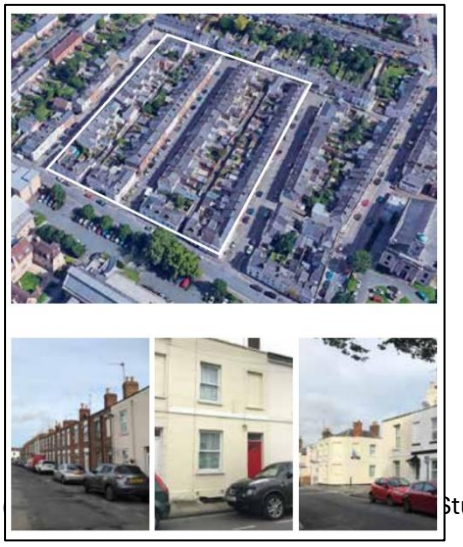
- Mix of Victorian terraces and modern flats and houses
- Off Dora Walk, Massey Parade, Victory Road, Ducie Street, Maldon Gardens
- Area selected = 1.74 ha
- 164 dwellings
- **94 dph**

Westgate Ward

- Likely 1960s or 1970s flats (4 and 5 storey)
- The Dukeries, off Lower Westgate Street
- Area selected = 1.10 ha
- 168 dwellings
- **152 dph**

Appendix 2: Existing housing examples in Cheltenham





(Top to bottom)

Three existing Cheltenham-based examples for historic development built during the Georgian/Regency period at relatively high residential densities – in these 3 examples ranging from mid 70dph to 125dph. All of these examples illustrate a compact built form with linear development blocks, and mostly of terraced typologies.

- **Royal Crescent** (125dph),
- **Victoria Place** (74dph),
- **Albert Street** (99dph)

tudy, April 2025