

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

AFFORDABLE HOUSING TASK & FINISH GROUP

Held on Wednesday, 20 May 2009 at 2.00 pm in

Peddars Way, The Board Room, Michael Chaplin House, Station Road, Dereham

PRESENT

Mrs J. Ball

Mr A.P. Joel

Mr B. Rose

Mr M. Spencer

In Attendance

Mark Broughton

Anita Brennan

Sam Hubbard

Darryl Smith

- Member Development and Scrutiny Officer

- Strategic Housing Manager

- Planning Policy Officer

- Principal Housing Officer (Strategy and Enabling)

1/09 CHAIRMAN

In the absence of the Chairman, it was

RESOLVED that Mr. B. Rose be appointed Chairman for the purposes of the meeting.

2/09 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Mr. A. Stasiak.

3/09 VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that Mr. B. Rose be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Task and Force Group for the ensuing year.

4/09 TERMS OF REFERENCE (AGENDA ITEM 5)

The Principal Housing Officer (Strategy & Enabling) outlined a proposed set of terms of reference for the Group which were intended to underpin the Group's role and approach to the issue of affordable housing.

RESOLVED that the Terms of Reference be approved as follows:

Aim: To develop an affordable housing policy which will be the delivery tool for the policies adopted in the Local Development Framework for the provision of affordable housing. The Policy will have a range of objectives to ensure that high quality design in a mixed sustainable community is achieved, whilst meeting other Council agendas, such as the Environment Strategy, Community Safety aims, etc.

1. Consider the requirements of a range of partners such as developers, landowners and housing associations to the

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implementation of the affordable housing policy through an invitation to the task and finish group.

2. Have regard to the policies which the council has already adopted such as the Local Development Framework in reviewing this policy to avoid conflicting advice to the public.
3. Use the policy to promote other priorities for the Council such as the Environment strategy by setting out the green issues relating to house building.
4. Consider the resource implications in the implementation of the policy in particular the capital resources required to deliver affordable housing.
5. In working to deliver the aim the group will have regard to the supporting information to the delivery of an acceptable policy
 - The evidence base for Housing Need and the trends in delivery against current policy decisions.
 - Initiatives to address the market conditions prevailing at different times.
 - An Understanding of partners constraints with our expectations
 - Consideration of the resources required to deliver expectations

5/09 OVERVIEW OF EXISTING POLICIES RELATING TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING (AGENDA ITEM 6)

The Principal Housing Officer (Strategy & Enabling) referred to the Council's existing affordable housing policy and highlighted the present policy. It was important that the Group considered a number of elements within a new policy such as a definition of affordable housing, relevant targets, thresholds, the use of subsidies to support affordable housing development and how it can best be delivered.

Planning Policies DC 4 and 5 cross referenced affordable housing with the Local Development Framework (LDF) and showed areas of housing need and shortfall in 2007. It was explained that the net annual need for affordable units totalled 964 but whilst there was no chance of being able to meet this figure it was incumbent on the Council to seek to achieve the best figure it could on delivering affordable housing.

The Strategic Housing Manager stated that whatever policy emerged needed to be deliverable, reflecting workable mechanisms to facilitate and maximise affordable housing. The Principal Housing Officer indicated that it was important to stress the Group's role in driving policy development and review and to provide steer and direction in shaping an effective new policy.

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6/09 PROPOSED PARTNERS FOR THE GROUP TO SCRUTINISE (AGENDA ITEM 7)

The Principal Housing Officer (Strategy & Enabling) indicated that the optimum approach the Group could take would include the questioning of partners and expert witnesses who would be invited to attend future meetings of the Group. In response to a question on how many Housing Associations were operating within the District, she listed some 11 RSL organisations. It was important not to concentrate only on the biggest organisations, such as Peddars Way, but to engage with a cross section of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) who would operate in different ways and thus provide members with information on the differing approaches made to provide social housing.

In answer to a question on the status of these organisations the Principal Housing Officer clarified that all 11 RSLs were “not for profit” organisations.

A member suggested asking private housing providers such as Hays to attend future meetings. However, whilst this was fine in principle, there was presently some uncertainty about the viability of the firm. The Chairman referred to a scheme in Mattishall in which Hays had been involved in converting former school accommodation to 12 housing units in a joint scheme with the parish council.

The Principal Housing Officer emphasised that the Group should be receptive to hearing from a wide range of stakeholders including also the Community Land Trust, land agents such as Bidwells, and other organisations who were playing a part in driving affordable housing delivery, such as the Norfolk Rural Community Council.

A member referred to examples of unorthodox development styles and materials use and suggested that an invite be extended to such organisations also as it was pertinent to take a wider approach to the whole subject of affordable housing delivery.

The Principal Housing Officer had some prior involvement with such housing providers within the county and highlighted the importance of considering both interior as well as exterior design elements in affordable housing schemes. The Council had published a design guide some years previously and members felt it would be useful to reconsider this as part of the review of affordable housing.

RESOLVED that representatives be invited to attend future meetings of the Group from the Homes and Communities Agency regional office, Registered Social Landlords, private developers, land agents, the Community Land Trust, architects, and the Council’s lead planning officer on design (Nick Moys).

7/09 POLICY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTION FROM THE GROUP (AGENDA ITEM 8)

A member referred to the number of empty dwellings within the district and how this impacted on the availability of affordable housing during a period of economic downturn.

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Whilst acknowledging this as a pertinent issue, the Principal Housing Officer (Strategy & Enabling) suggested that the top priority presently was in meeting affordable housing. Flexibility was key to achieving the best possible outcome in the current economic climate when dealing with both private developers and registered social landlords (RSLs). Consideration needed to be given as to how to provide affordable housing effectively whilst recognising wider impacts.

A member asked whether the Council was actually building new homes itself and it was confirmed that presently a steer was being sought on whether this was a road the Council should go down; however this issue was outside the scope of the Group's remit.

A member referred to the issue of design and it was important that affordable housing blended-in appropriately with other existing housing. In response it was reiterated that design would form an integral part of the consideration of a new affordable housing policy.

8/09 WORK PROGRAMME (AGENDA ITEM 9)

The Member Development & Scrutiny Officer reminded members of the overall reporting timeline impinging on the Group which envisaged that a new policy was expected to be presented to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission at its meeting in September 2009. In delivering this new policy, the Group was expected to work flexibly and engage with the partners and other expert witnesses identified earlier in the meeting. Bearing in mind the August recess, it was proposed and agreed that the Group agree two future meetings following which a draft document would be produced at the end of July for members' perusal. A further meeting could then be held to fine tune and agree the substantive policy to take forward to the OSC in September 2009.

9/09 NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that future meetings of the Group be held as follows (venues to be arranged):

- Wednesday, 24 June at 2.00 p.m.
- Wednesday, 8 July at 2.00 p.m.

The meeting closed at 3.30 pm

CHAIRMAN