

**HOUSING INITIATIVE TASK GROUP held in the COMMON ROOM at
HOLLOWAY CRESCENT LEADEN RODING at 10.30 am on 10 DECEMBER
2007**

Present: Councillor R H Chamberlain – Chairman
Councillors E L Bellingham-Smith, J E Hudson and J E Menell

Tenant Forum representative: Mr S Sproul

Officers present: S Clarke, R Goodey, H Joy, R Millership, L Petrie,
J Snares and P Snow

HTG18 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E W Hicks and D J Morson, and from Mrs D Cornell, tenant forum representative.

HTG19 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2007 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

The Chairman outlined the arrangements for this meeting. It would incorporate a public consultation session at approximately 11.30 am, organised by Councillor Barker. At that stage the meeting would be adjourned and would then resume allowing for further discussion of the preferred option for the redevelopment of Holloway Crescent.

HTG20 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute HTG 16 (iii) – Negative Housing Subsidy

The Head of Housing Management confirmed that a separate newsletter would be sent to tenants in January about the impact of negative housing subsidy. This would draw attention to the online petition although it might prove feasible to create a separate petition on the Uttlesford website instead.

Sufficient information had now been received from the Government to enable the rent setting arrangements to be put in place. Accordingly, no letter of representation had been sent as agreed at the last meeting. The Chairman said that, if there was found to be a significant difference between the provisional and final figures, the matter could be raised at that time.

(ii) Minute HTG 16 (iv) – Remodelling Sheltered Accommodation

The Task Group had originally agreed to meet at Mead Court in Stansted, to consider options for that site, before travelling to Leaden Roding. This intention had been abandoned partly due to time constraints but also because Mead Court was now fully occupied and it would be difficult to view the accommodation there as a consequence.

The redevelopment of Mead Court was still urgent and would have to be addressed in the near future. The units there consisted largely of bed-sit accommodation and were very small and unsuitable. There was no prospect that they could be adapted to meet the decent homes standard. In particular, the lack of communal corridors meant that it was not possible to install stair lifts. The incorporation of corridors was considered an unduly expensive option.

Members agreed that it would be helpful to visit Mead Court sooner rather than later to examine options. A complete redevelopment of the site would provide greater flexibility as there may be the opportunity to provide a capital receipt. It was noted that a valuation of the site had not yet been sought.

(iii) Housing Strategy Action Plan update

The Senior Housing Officer reported that the Council's homelessness grant had been increased from £40,000 to £60,000 and the increase would be earmarked for specific uses within the homelessness budget.

HTG21 HRA BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE

The Head of Housing Management tabled a draft report for the HRA Business Plan for Members' consideration. It had been prepared by Cascade Consulting.

The revised plan indicated that the Housing Revenue Account would fall into deficit in 2011/12, unless action was taken to reduce both management and day to day maintenance costs to sustain a balanced position for the medium term. The accompanying tables indicated that a sum of £4.2 million needed to be spent on the housing stock to maintain the present position. It was noted that a new stock condition survey was due next year and that figures in the report had been adjusted from information taken from the last survey in 2003.

It was clear that it might become necessary in due course to investigate the option of stock transferral. To enable Members to make a proper assessment, a further stock options appraisal was needed. It was agreed to recommend that the Council should budget to bring forward the options appraisal to be funded from the HRA in 2008/09.

There was some discussion about the change that had resulted in the depot being transferred into the HRA from the General Fund. This was on the basis that the depot was predominantly a HRA function. It was expected that the effects of this transfer would balance out next year as more HRA related work would be moved to the depot. It was noted that other services utilising the depot would continue to be recharged through the internal accounting system.

In spite of all the difficulties, the HRA was on target in the current year and the Chairman said that this position reflected great credit on the officers. It was agreed to record the thanks of the Task Group for the efforts made by officers in relation to the HRA function.

RECOMMENDED to the Community Committee that a stock options appraisal be funded from the HRA during 2008/09.

HTG22 INITIATIVES FOR HOLLOWAY CRESCENT

Before meeting with local residents and representatives of the parish council, members discussed the options that appeared to be available to the Council in redeveloping the sheltered accommodation at Holloway Crescent.

A report was circulated setting out a brief history of the site and suggesting possible development plans for the area containing the sheltered block. This consisted of 12 flats together with five adjoining bungalows, all of which were warden supported. The flats were all presently empty. The adjoining area contained a block consisting of eight flats. These were used for general needs housing although four of the flats had been sold. There was also a separate area containing eight bungalows used for elderly persons, one of which had been sold.

It had always been difficult to let the sheltered flats. One of the main difficulties in letting these units appeared to be the relatively isolated location of Leaden Roding. The area under consideration was the sheltered block, together with the adjoining five bungalows, the parking area (now cleared of all garage structures except one), and the area of open green.

The options for redevelopment were identified as follows:

- Disposal of the whole site.
- The provision of an updated sheltered scheme.
- The provision of an extra care facility for the elderly.
- A specialist use such as provision for the homeless.
- General needs housing.

It was agreed that doing nothing was not an option and that, if at all possible, the open space area should be preserved. The Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager said that she had examined the feasibility of providing extra care facilities as part of a sheltered scheme. Housing associations had expressed a reluctance to pursue this type of development at this location. Councillor Menell said that the provision of extra care was unrealistic in such a sparsely populated area and that general needs housing was a better option.

The Head of Housing Management commented that the ideal option would be for the Council to seek to develop the site itself but this would require the sale of another site to provide the funding. The Holloway Crescent site was not a straightforward proposition because of the existence of the occupied bungalows attached to the sheltered block. In the circumstances, it might be advisable to pursue a joint venture scheme.

The Chairman said that it was important to listen to the views and concerns of local residents and then adjourned the meeting to allow for a public consultation meeting to take place. The meeting adjourned at 11.20am.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Barker, ward member for The Rodings ward, Mr D Clayden, Chairman of Leaden Roding Parish Council and a number of residents of Holloway Crescent. He then explained the options for

redeveloping the site and invited the guests to express their views and concerns.

The meeting reconvened at 12.15 pm.

The Chairman summarised the views of residents and of the Parish Council and said that he thought the exercise had proved worthwhile.

The main concerns expressed had centred around retention of the open green area for the benefit of children living on the estate, the lack of parking facilities, and problems with public transport and school provision. Generally speaking, residents had expressed a preference for elderly persons' housing as part of any refurbishment scheme.

Members then reconsidered the options presented in the light of what they had heard. It was agreed to rule out those options relating to a new sheltered scheme, an extra care facility, and a special needs unit such as for homeless people.

The following two options were agreed for further investigation and for recommendation to the Community Committee:

- Utilise the sheltered block and the garage area to create a mixed site for general needs use and elderly accommodation – the preferred option.
- Dispose of the site to raise a capital receipt, to include the garage area but not the green (to be retained as an open space), and obtain a valuation from the District Valuer's office to give some indication of the implications of pursuing the different options being examined.

However, Members recognised that there were other possible options available within those listed above, including working in partnership with a housing association or a private developer and it was agreed that these should be fully investigated. It might be helpful to consider the future use of Mead Court as part of these discussions to provide the extra flexibility needed to redevelop that site as well. In doing so, it was essential to safeguard the Council's financial position so as to avoid any funding having to be paid to the Government.

The position of the eight bungalows at Holloway Close would have to be taken into account in any redevelopment scheme. It was acknowledged that part of the open space area might have to be sacrificed.

During the public consultation meeting, local residents had been promised the opportunity to comment on the Council's proposals. Members agreed that a formal consultation process should begin after the Community Committee had considered the Task Group's recommendations.

RECOMMENDED to the Community Committee that:

- 1 the options identified above should be adopted for the purposes of further investigation, and that this should include the principal of redeveloping Mead Court at Stansted, with the first preference remaining the redevelopment of the sheltered block and garage area

at Holloway Crescent for general needs housing, in conjunction with a housing association and/or a private developer;

- 2 residents at Holloway Crescent be given the opportunity to comment upon the options under consideration.

The meeting ended at 12.55 pm.