

**HOLLOWAY CRESCENT TASK GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 1pm on 30 NOVEMBER 2010**

Present: Councillor J A Redfern – Chairman.
Councillors R H Chamberlain, E J Godwin and J E Hudson.

Officers in attendance: J Burnham (Development Enabling Officer), M Ling (Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager (Interim)), R Millership (Head of Housing and Environment Services), R Procter (Democratic Services Officer) and M Stocks (Surveyor).

HC1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Liz Petrie and Helen Harvey.

HC2 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 April 2010 were received and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to amendment to reflect the time the meeting ended, which was 12.05pm.

HC3 MATTERS ARISING

(i) Minute HC8 – Holloway Crescent New Build Bungalows

The Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager (Interim) queried the reference to East Thames, rather than East Herts, as one of the neighbouring authorities from which information about a new type of contract was to be sought. The Head of Housing and Environment Services gave a brief update on the negotiation of the contract for the development of the bungalows at Holloway Crescent. She said this had been a complex process, although it had ultimately been successful.

(ii) Minute HC9 – Parking Provision

The Head of Housing and Environment Services gave a brief update on the parking provision at the site. She said monitoring had been taking place for some time, and she was pleased to report there were no problems. The parking area which the Council had built was being used, but there seemed to be spare capacity.

HC4 HOLLOWAY CRESCENT UPDATE ON NEW BUILD

The Surveyor gave an update on the new build bungalows, providing Members with a report showing progress and setting out a timetable for the construction period. He said completion was due to take place in April 2011, and currently work was three and a half weeks ahead of schedule. Liaison between the contractor and residents seemed good, and no problems had been reported.

Members were pleased to hear that this was the case and expressed approval at the progress shown in photographs of the construction work which were supplied with the report.

HC5

OPTIONS FOR SHELTERED SITE

A proposal from Flagship, in the form of a plan, had been made available for Members to consider prior to the meeting. In response to a question from the Chairman, the Development Enabling Officer confirmed this was the only proposal which had been received. The Chairman asked about the type of housing envisaged under the proposal, and queried the funding situation. The Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager (Interim) said Flagship had prepared a revised plan as Members had felt the previous plan encroached on the open space.

The Chairman asked for an update on the valuation of the sheltered housing site. The Development Enabling Officer reported on the valuation given by the District Valuer.

Members expressed surprise at the level of the valuation figures, and were reluctant to accept disposal of the land for such a sum. Councillor Godwin contrasted the valuation with recent indications in the press that property prices in this area had increased.

The Task Group then discussed in some detail various options for dealing with the site, suggestions being made as follows:

- Demolish the sheltered housing block, and 'land bank' it until a better sale price could be obtained;
- obtain planning permission, market the land and develop another site using the proceeds of sale;
- develop the site using a housing association, or using in-house ability.

The Chairman asked officers what their ideal solution would be. The Head of Housing and Environment Services said ideally the site would be developed in-house if there was available funding for such a project. The Council had experience of building some good schemes and possessed the necessary skills in-house. However, uncertainty surrounding funding might not make this a viable option.

Councillor Godwin said the government was trying to encourage councils to take on such initiatives themselves. She agreed with the suggestion to bank the site pending more information becoming available from the government.

The Head of Housing and Environment Services said Members needed to be aware that there was a cost to demolition, as this involved extensive enabling works to cut off utility connections.

The Chairman said she would like to maximise the potential of the site.

The Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager (Interim) explained the funding position. He said the government had announced £4.5bn through the

HCA, although the areas had been re-drawn, so that Uttlesford now came within the East and South East office. Funding distribution was yet to be determined.

The Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager (Interim) said the government expected housing associations to move towards the new flexible tenure and to focus on affordable rent at 80% of market rent. It was possible that this might also apply to councils in the future but no firm decision had been made yet. He therefore advised that key decisions for the Council regarding this site should address the type of tenure, the rent level and the provider. Either the Council itself or a housing association could undertake the development but the exact funding position regarding grant was still unclear. He said modelling on the various options could be carried out.

The Chairman said she felt the Council should do as much as possible itself.

Councillor Chamberlain said originally there had been discussion around using the capital receipt from disposal of this land on other schemes elsewhere in the district, and asked about potential alternatives for which a capital receipt could be used.

The Head of Housing and Environment Services said there were many potential projects on which such funds could in theory be spent, but such an approach would mean spending in a piecemeal way. She reminded Members of the current uncertainty over use of capital receipts as the government was currently proposing to take 100% of such receipts.

Members felt it was not possible to make a recommendation until the outcome of the consultation on social housing reform and the HCA's funding priorities were known, towards the end of January. Members noted there were costs involved in shutting down and demolishing the block; but that on the other hand, by demolishing it the accommodation would be removed from the subsidy system, and the Council would not be liable for continued payment of heating the block. It was not possible to refurbish the sheltered housing block.

The Chairman summed up the discussion. She said Members wanted to use the site for housing, whether Council or housing association owned; but it was necessary to wait for further government announcements before making a recommendation to Community and Housing Committee. The Chairman said further information was needed on costs for an appropriate mix of housing. Members noted that whilst the SHMAA had indicated the need for 3 bedroom low cost housing, the housing waiting list showed 2 bedroom dwellings as most oversubscribed. Referring to previous minutes of the Task Group, it was noted the Task Group had previously considered the site appropriate for 2 bedroom properties and/or single accommodation maisonettes. The Chairman said in her view officers knew the housing need, and were best placed to prepare models based on the type of accommodation which would best meet that need. Members wished to have a recommendation ready to go forward to the March meeting of the policy committee.

The Chairman asked that officers:

- prepare an analysis of the costs of demolition;
- prepare models showing costs for the mix of accommodation which officers considered would be most needed.

HC6

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting would be Monday 31 January 2011 at 2pm.

The meeting ended at 1.45pm.