

HOUSING BOARD held at WALDEN PLACE SAFFRON WALDEN at 10am on 21 SEPTEMBER 2015

Present: Councillor M Felton (Chairman)
Councillors A Dean, T Farthing, J Loughlin, S Morris, V Ranger, J Redfern.

Also present: Mrs Daphne Cornell (Tenants' Forum Representative).

Officers in attendance: S Baxter (Housing Enabling Officer), R Harborough (Director of Public Services), R Millership (Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services), A Rees (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer), G Smith (Head of Environmental Health), J Snares (Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager), M Watts (Principal Environmental Health Officer) and S Wood (Housing and Planning Policy Manager).

HB13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Asker, Mills and Ryles and David Parish (Tenant Forum Representative).

HB14 BUSINESS ARISING

The Chairman reported that the recent extraordinary council meeting had considered the council's response to the refugee crisis and had appointed a working group to progress this matter in partnership with other agencies.

HB15 PRESENTATION - HEALTH AND HOUSING

Marcus Watts, Principal Environmental Health Officer gave a presentation explaining in more detail the work around housing stock modelling and Health Impact Assessments. This information would help to identify instances where poor housing condition could be linked to specific hazards and acted upon to improve wellbeing and demonstrate savings to the NHS. He explained that the model would produce a rating system which could target specific locations and enable the District Council to carry out proactive work, apply for grants and work alongside other agencies.

HB16 MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2015 as a correct record.

HB17 HOUSING STRATEGY 2016-2021

The Board received the draft Housing Strategy covering the period 2016-21. It updated the previous Strategy, published in 2012 and set out the priorities and future direction for housing in the district. The Strategy included four key aims and would be linked with the preparation of the new local plan. It also included a detailed action plan which would be updated every 6 months. The document was still in draft and would be informed by discussion at this and other meetings and from the outcomes from the upcoming housing conference.

Members mentioned the provision of elderly person's accommodation and whether there should be a change to the percentage requirement for bungalows/flats within new housing developments. It was explained that this would be considered through the evidence that came forward through the development of the Local Plan.

Members made comments on the content of the report and asked for the Board's concerns about the proposed Government housing changes to be reflected in the text. The document would continue to be kept under review due to the uncertainty around a number of proposed key policy changes.

It was NOTED that the Housing Strategy would be subject to a 6 week consultation period.

HB18 HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2016-2021

Members received the draft Homelessness Strategy. This was being produced alongside the Housing Strategy and reviewed the work in the homelessness area, what had been achieved and then set out the Strategy objectives for the next 5 years.

It was noted that at this stage there was no reference to the number of refugees that the council might need to accommodate as a result of the current crisis. This information would be added to the Strategy in due course.

It was NOTED that the Homelessness Strategy would be subject to a 6 week consultation period.

HB19 HRA BUSINESS PLAN 2015 - 2045

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services presented a report on the review of the HRA Business Plan

Since the approval of the plan in 2012 there had been several changes and more recently a number of major announcements in the July budget statement. These had potential to have a significant impact on the council's major investment plan. There was much that was still uncertain but the important proposals were as follows:

- 1) A reduction in social rents by 1% for the next 4 years. The Business Plan had been based on an increase of CPI + 1%, which meant that compared to the Business Plan assumptions this could have a cumulative impact of £1.8m by 2018/19 and £4.9 m for the lifetime of the plan. Members were advised that the Business Plan could still work on these assumptions but if the council wished to undertake further developments it would probably need to consider the refinancing of the loan.
- 2) The proposed Housing Bill introduced the right to buy provisions for tenants in housing association properties and the replacement housing would be funded from expensive local authority properties as they fell void. Under the proposed regional figures at least 45% of Uttlesford's housing, almost all of its general needs properties, would fall within this definition. These regional figures could still be adjusted and if so would be factored into the Business Plan. It was understood that the void figure would have to be declared to the Government as soon as a tenant gave notice on a property. Members were very concerned at this proposal and said the council should continue to lobby Government in the strongest terms.
- 3) There was a plan to introduce 'pay to stay' which would enforce market or near market rents on households with an income of above £30k. Members commented that this proposal gave no incentives for tenants to find work and would place a huge administrative burden on the council.
- 4) A further pressure on the Business Plan was the ECC proposal to cut funding for older peoples services over the next 2 years, which equated to a sum of £250k per annum. Officers were exploring options for the future provision of this service.

Mrs Cornell said the Tenants' Forum was concerned about the 1% decrease in rents. The recent 1% increase had been supported on the basis that this enabled a high level service to be maintained. A letter had been sent to Sir Alan Haselhurst MP highlighting how the new proposals would impact the residents on Uttlesford's housing waiting list.

In answer to a question it was confirmed that there was a sum in the Business Plan for estate regeneration and members were requested to forward details of any work required to enable a costed programme to be prepared between now and December. Other initiatives were already taking place around 'pride of where we live' and it was agreed to inform District Members about any events in their area.

Members noted the report but understood that changes might be required in the light of changing Government advice.

HB20

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME UPDATE

Members received the report on the number of affordable houses delivered under the 2014/2015 affordable housing programme. Compared to the council's target of 100, 80 affordable housing had been delivered during 2014/15. For 2015/16 173 units were expected to be completed.

The Housing Development Manager reported progress on the Council's ongoing development projects.

He explained the reason for the delay with the Mead Court development. The contractors were now on site and the 2nd phase of the work was expected to be completed in summer 2016. Work on the other sheltered schemes was continuing. In addition the council was looking at small garage sites and also other small sites where the aim was to obtain outline planning permission and sell on to developers.

Members discussed a potential joint venture for one of the council's sheltered schemes and AGREED that the Assistant Chief Executive – Housing and Environmental Services should start preliminary consultation with the residents.

HB21

CARNATION NUSERIES NEWPORT

The Housing Development Manager explained a request from the developer for a site at Carnation Nurseries, Newport. This was an approved scheme of 21 new homes and included a 40% affordable housing contribution of 8 units

The S106 agreement contained an option whereby the developer could gift the Council a number of affordable homes on the site, in lieu of transferring the 8 affordable units to a Housing Association. This would mean the delivery of a smaller number of units on site. The S106 had been written to allow this option to be considered by Members, but if rejected, would revert to the 40 % affordable housing delivery via a Housing Association.

The proposal from the developer was to gift three affordable housing units, plus a cash payment of £99,247. The other 5 affordable housing plots would revert to being private sale.

It was explained that the offer had been calculated on the basis of the land value, build costs and sales values. The 40% affordable housing scheme would provide accommodation for 26 people whereas the gifted unit scheme would only house 9 people. The three gifted units would be let on affordable rents and would provide the Council with additional rental

income of £22,000 per annum. This extra income could be used to fund the development of new council homes through the council's own development programme.

Members commented on the proposal. There was a view that the council had fought hard for its affordable housing policy and it should be adhered to wherever possible and given the pressure on the waiting list the council should be aiming to house as many people as it could. There was a contrary opinion that the offer should be accepted as it was still unclear whether the 40% affordable housing would be offered due to the recent Government announcements. However, the majority view was that at the present time the situation was too uncertain for an informed decision to be made but this option should not be ruled out in the future.

AGREED that the Housing Board recommends to Cabinet that

- 1 The Council does not accept the offer of gifted units on the terms laid out in this report.
- 2 The Council will consider future opportunities in relation to the gifted unit option.

HB8

OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman reminded members of the Annual Housing Conference which would be held on 14 October 2015.

The meeting ended at 1.10 pm.