

HOUSING BOARD held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 10am on 8 MARCH 2016

Present: Councillor M Felton (Chairman)
Councillors T Farthing, S Morris, A Mills, V Ranger, J Redfern and H Ryles

Also present: Mrs Angela Hutton and Mrs Carol Mandy (Tenant Forum representatives)

Officers in attendance: D Malins (Housing Development Manager), R Millership (Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services), M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), J Snares (Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager) and S Wood (Housing and Planning Policy Manager).

HB32 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Dean and J Loughlin.

HB33 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting on 9 December 2015 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HB34 INTRODUCTION

The Chairman introduced Angela Hutton, the new Chairman of the Tenant Forum and Carole Mandy a member of the Tenant Forum. Mrs Hutton said that the new forum was aiming to have better interaction with tenants and to find out what they wanted from the housing service. There had been many recent changes to legislation that affected housing and it was important that tenants were aware of these and were offered assistance if required.

HB35 AFFORDABLE HOUSING UPDATE

The Housing and Planning Policy Manager updated the Board on affordable housing schemes, rural exception sites, viability and potential home owner schemes.

She informed the group that there was now some doubt about the availability of the ECC grant for the developer led affordable scheme at Everett Road, Saffron Walden. The council was lobbying ECC and the local MP but it might need to look at alternative sources of funding. Cllr Redfern said this matter had been raised at the Locality Board and Cllr Barker was pursuing this with the County Council.

Under rural housing, it was noted that the HCA had withdrawn grant funding on all affordable rented schemes, which meant that some of the rural exception sites were no longer viable and the council would have to look at different forms of funding for future years. Members were informed that it was now 25 years since the 1st rural exception site had been built in Ashdon. Events were being planned around this, which would also provide an opportunity to highlight the impact of the recent Government changes.

The recent budget changes and in particular the reduction in rent levels had affected the viability of developments. As a result, for a number of schemes developers had requested a change to the housing mix to a larger percentage of shared ownership over affordable rent. Viability assessments had been requested, but this trend was concerning as the council needed to maintain the supply of affordable rented properties.

Members were informed about the Rent Plus model for the delivery of affordable housing. This was a new scheme, aimed at people in the district who worked and aspired to own their own property. Officers were concerned about how this scheme could work and also that it wouldn't meet the needs of residents on the waiting list, on low income or benefits. Details of the scheme would be circulated to Members.

It was understood that Hastoe Housing Association was proposing to sell properties in Saffron Walden on land that had originally been gifted from UDC. This was due to the 1% rent reduction, and the need to sell older properties in order to maintain its development programme. However, these were social rented properties, to which the council had nomination rights. Members were concerned at this situation, particularly as UDC had recently granted money to Hastoe to enable it to complete the rural exception site at Chrishall.

The Board agreed the following action

- To clarify the legal position with the HCA
- Establish the extent of the covenants on the land
- Arrange a meeting with Hastoe Housing Association

Cllr Redfern said that following an item at a recent Cabinet meeting, she was now in discussion about the level of contribution for off site affordable housing. She would report back the outcome to a future meeting.

HB36

DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

The Housing Development Manager gave a verbal update on current development schemes.

The Mead Court 2nd phase was progressing well and was expected to be completed by early June. The Board was pleased to note that the final overspend on this scheme was very small despite many issues with this site.

The Catons Lane development was scheduled to be completed at the end of May.

It was hoped that a fixed price for the scheme at Reynolds Court would be agreed by the end of April, in line with the timetable dictated by the HCA grant. The costs were expected to be higher than originally planned, due to the cost of subcontractors and to deal with asbestos that had been found on the site.

The schemes at Hatherley Court, Sheds Lane and Walden Place were in the early stages but progressing.

The twelve bungalows at The Mead, Little Dunmow had been found to have subsidence and were beyond economic repair. There was potential to redevelop this site for general needs accommodations once the units became void.

HB37

TRANSFER OF LAND AT NEWTON GROVE GREAT DUNMOW

The Board was informed that in 2013 the council had agreed to transfer land at Newton Grove, Great Dunmow to the domestic abuse charity, Safer Places for the provision of a domestic violence refuge. Safer Places had now informed the council that under its new model of working the site was no longer required. The site would now be considered for delivering affordable council housing funded by capital receipts.

It was RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the land proposed for the project at Newton Grove, Great Dunmow be used by the housing department to deliver new affordable housing.

HB38

SALE OF LAND AT STATION ROAD WENDENS AMBO

The Board considered the proposed sale of a development plot at Station Road Wendens Ambo. The site had been identified following garden reductions and had outline planning permission for a single 2 -bedroom bungalow. Officers felt that it would not be financially viable to develop this plot for affordable housing but due to its location it would be a good option to sell as a private dwelling and the proceeds to be ring fenced within the HRA.

Councillor Redfern was disappointed with the suggested guide price of £100k. She was advised that the property would be subject to a tender process, which was likely to increase interest, but if members were concerned it would be possible to put on a reserve price.

The Board discussed whether there were alternative options that could maximise the amount achieved from this asset. One suggestion was to look at the garage area and whether there was potential to achieve a larger site in the longer term. Officers said there were limitations in terms of access and existing rights on the site, but members asked if this could be explored further before a decision was made.

It was AGREED to defer this item to the next meeting to receive information about existing rights of way on the site and the potential for further development.

HB39

SALE OF PROPERTY AT ST JOHNS CLOSE SAFFRON WALDEN

Members considered the proposed sale of a void property at 19 St Johns Close, Saffron Walden. The property was in a poor state of repair, and officers considered that the extent of the work required to bring it back to a habitable state was not value for money. It had been hoped that the property could be demolished to give access to the development site at the rear but due to other right to buy dwellings this was no longer an option. It was suggested that the property should be sold on the open market, with the possibility of selling separately part of its large garden to maximise the sale.

Members discussed this proposal and put forward various suggestion on how to gain access to the potential development site. The Development Manager said that due to constraints the site would only be able accommodate four affordable houses and felt that there were other potential development projects in the district where it would be easier to achieve results.

Cllr Redfern suggested that the council should consider retaining the property so as not to lose an affordable dwelling for rent, and also to maintain an interest in the future development potential of the site.

It was AGREED to carry out a full survey of the property to establish the cost of repair and report to the next meeting.

HB40

HRA DEVELOPMENT TASK GROUP

The Board felt it would be useful for members to discuss potential development proposals in more detail with the Development Manager before they were considered at the quarterly Board meeting. This would avoid possible deferment and delays in the process

It was AGREED to set up a task and finish group in the following terms

HRA Development Task Group

Terms of reference: To consider the feasibility of development schemes concerning the council's assets and report any proposals to the Housing Board

Members: Cllrs Dean, Felton, Morris, Mills, Redfern, Ryles
Lead officer: Doug Malins

Time scale: To be reviewed by the end of March 2017

The meeting ended at 11.45am.