

HOUSING BOARD held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 10am on 6 OCTOBER 2016

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

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), N
Brown (Development Manager), C Cardross Grant (Housing
Renewals and Improvement officer) M Cox (Democratic Services
Officer), H Hayden (Planning Policy Officer), J O'Boyle (District
Environmental Health Officer), J Snares (Housing and
Communities Manager), M Watts (Principal Environmental Health
Officer).

HB10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Asker, Dean and Ryles.

HB11 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2016 were received and signed by
the Chairman as a correct record.

HB12 MATTERS ARISING

(i) HB5 – Affordable Housing Update

The Development Manager updated members on the latest position on the
policy to seek an affordable housing contribution for developments of less than
10 houses. He said the Government's decision to remove this clause had been
challenged by two authorities but although the case had been accepted, this
was in relation to how the policy had been implemented rather than in relation
to the policy itself.

He said the council could consider having a policy for smaller developments in
the new Local Plan, but this was risky as being contrary to Government policy, it
might raise a soundness issue. There was also evidence that the Inspector had
disregarded this policy at other local plan examinations.

The Board was reminded that the Council's existing development management
policies in relation to affordable housing were 40% for developments over 14
houses and 20% for developments of 10 -14 houses.

The Board asked for information on the amount of affordable housing that would be lost as a result of this policy.

Councillor Redfern said the clause had been removed to ease the financial burden on developers. She agreed that it wasn't appropriate to require a contribution for developments of less than 5 houses, but it would be viable above this number. The removal of the clause appeared to be a one size fits all approach and she said that UDC should continue to lobby the Government on this issue.

HB13

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Housing Development Manager gave a verbal update on the progress of developments on council owned sites.

(i) Mead Court Stansted

There had been some delays, mainly due to the timing of works by the statutory undertakers but it was expected that the scheme would be completed by the end of October.

(ii) Catons Lane , Saffron Walden

The handover of the scheme had taken place in June and tenants had moved into their new homes.

(iii) Reynolds Court – Newport

The scheme was progressing well.

(iv) Sheds Lane, Newport

The planning application for this scheme would be considered at the Planning Committee on 19 October.

(v) Newton Grove, Great Dunmow

Consultation around this development site had revealed some concern about the potential loss of parking from the residents of the flats. Officers had sympathy with these concerns and were looking at possible options for extending the site. The Town Council was supportive of the scheme.

(vi) St Johns Close, Saffron Walden

Councillor Mills, together with officers had been looking at a potential scheme for this empty property. The next suggested action was to look at the cost of bringing the property back into use for rent. If this was not economically viable a report would be brought to Cabinet to recommend the disposal of the asset.

HB14

DEVELOPMENT UPDATE- FRAMBURY LANE

The Board was advised of progress with developing the former garage site to provide council owned homes. A scheme had been designed for 5 -2 bed houses and a pre-application discussion had agreed the best layout. The construction costs were relatively high at around £860k, due to abnormal costs associated with the length of the estate roadway and site clearance. A 10% contingency had also been added due to early stage of the scheme.

The council's SPV, Aspire had considered the option of developing this site for private sector rented homes. This would require the transfer of the site to Aspire, with the HRA being compensated the market value of the site. This option has been considered, but had been found to be commercially unviable.

The next stage would be to submit the planning application and to hold meeting with the Parish Council and residents.

The Board had also considered other options for this site, to sell a percentage of the properties on the open market to reinvest elsewhere in the district or to progress the planning application and sell the whole of the site. These options would continue to be explored and reported back to the Board.

It was AGREED to recommend to Cabinet that the site is progressed through the planning application stage, having regard to the estimated costs associated with this work, as detailed in the report.

HB15

DRAFT PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY

The Principal Environmental Health Officer presented a report on a proposed strategy for private sector housing. This had followed a recommendation from the stock condition survey to deliver a strategy for the private sector to complement the wider housing functions of the council. This formed part of the council's health and wellbeing agenda and would be proactive work focused on raising standards in the private sector for the most vulnerable in society. The key priorities were as follows:

1. Raise standards in the private sector by encouragement and support to owner occupiers to maintain safe homes, free from category 1 hazards
2. Encourage, support and regulate private landlords and agents to provide safe and well managed properties, free from category 1 hazards
3. Helping older and vulnerable people remain in their own homes
4. Maximise use of the existing private sector housing stock
Enable more sustainable homes by increasing energy efficiency and reducing fuel poverty.

The strategy included a list of actions to be taken for each priority area.

In answer to a question from Angela Hutton, officers said the Papworth Trust handyman service would continue but the council would be exploring bringing the Disabled Facilities Grants back in house.

Councillor Loughlin asked if the improvement work would be means tested. The Principal Environmental Health Officer said there was a program to determine the level of contribution but elderly residents were often asset rich but cash poor and the council was looking at different methods of funding, for example, linking a grant to the value of the property.

Members were asked to consider the draft PSH strategy and send in any comments, which would be included in the report for the next meeting of the group.

AGREED that the Housing Board considers the draft PSH Strategy and feedback any comments by the end of November 2016.

HB16

HOUSING RENEWAL ASSISTANCE POLICY

The Principal Environmental Health Officer presented a report which suggested changes to the existing Housing Renewal Assistance Policy. This followed the presentation to the Housing Board on the condition of the housing stock within the district, which found a range of housing problems in the private sector.

The council recognised the link between poor housing and poor health and the report suggested measures and assistance to help those most disadvantaged in society. This report had been updated to deliver some of the outcomes identified in the draft PSH Strategy and hoped to target private sector residents in poor quality housing.

Members were asked to put forward any ideas, before the report was brought back to the next meeting.

It was AGREED that the Housing Board supports a review of the existing Housing Renewal Assistance Policy.

HB17

EMPTY HOMES - CPO UPDATE

Members received a presentation from the District Environmental Health Officer and the Housing Renewal and Improvements Officer on the compulsory purchase of 1 Holly cottages Widdington. This had been a long terms empty property since 1993, and was in a poor state of repair. It had not been possible to bring it voluntarily back into use, so it was agreed to compulsory purchase the property in June 2014.

Officer explained the process which had been both technically challenging and time consuming. The order had been finally approved by the Secretary of State

and vested to UDC on 6 September 2016. The land and property would be disposed of on the open market.

It was explained that there had been limited financial implications for the council. All costs except for officer time were met through the PLACE scheme. However, having an understanding of the effort involved, Members asked why the council would embark on this process. Officers replied that a CPO would only be pursued when all other avenues had been explored. This process had enabled the property to be returned to residential use and improve the environment for neighbouring properties.

The Board thanked the officers for their presentation and noted the report.

HB18

DRAFT TENANCY SUSTAINMENT STRATEGY

The Board received the draft Tenancy Sustainability Strategy. This set out how the council would work with tenants and their families to help sustain their tenancies and address the needs of vulnerable people, to the benefit of both the council and the tenants. The document was currently in draft form but the action plan would later be populated with costs and timescales. Members were asked to submit any comments and an updated version of the strategy would be brought back to the next meeting.

AGREED that the Housing Board consider the draft Tenancy Sustainment Strategy and feeds back any comments to the Housing and Communities Manager by the end of November 2016.

HB19

DECANT AND DOWNSIZING POLICY REVIEW

The Housing and Communities Manager presented a report on the Decant and Downsizing Policy. This had been implemented in 2013 and set out the levels of compensation to be paid when it was necessary to re-house a tenant to allow major repairs to be undertaken or where a property was to be disposed of or demolished. It also detailed the payments made to tenants who decided to downsize from a property that was larger than their needs.

The review suggested two minor changes to the wording to the policy: to clarify that in some cases home loss payment and disturbance allowance could be made to the same tenant, and to make it clear that it was the giving up of bedrooms that made the tenant eligible for a grant, not just moving from general need to elderly persons accommodation.

Members were informed that the scheme was generally working well. There had been around 20 grants given when the scheme was first introduced, falling to around 10 in subsequent years. The introduction of the spare room subsidy had made it more important for the council to make best use of its stock.

In relation to compensation payments officers said they were looking to see if there was capacity to introduce enhancements to support older tenants to downside.

AGREED that the Housing Board notes the report and agrees amended wording for clarification at points 18.3 and 18.4 of the policy.

HB20

WELFARE GARDEN AND REDORATION SCHEME REVIEW

The Board were reminded that the Welfare Garden and Redecoration Policy had been amended in 2014 to ensure that the services were going to those most in need of the service and didn't have an alternative option for looking after their garden or decorating their homes. The report considered how the policy had been working since its implementation.

In relation to the Welfare Garden Scheme, after the paid for service had been introduced, the number of visits had reduced by a third. The number of households having a room decorated had also reduced which allowed the work to be done in a more timely manner.

Officers felt the balance within the service was now correct and was being provided to those most in need. There had been no complaints about overgrown hedges or gardens. There were no further revisions required but it was suggested that the charges for gardening and one of clearances should be raised in line with inflation annually.

In answer to Members questions, it was explained that the charge for the gardening work was just to cover the cost of the service. The service was only open to those receiving benefit. There was some concern about the strict criteria for decorating and how a judgement was made on the need for redecoration.

AGREED to raise the charges for gardening and one of clearances in line with inflation annually from the next financial year.

The meeting ended at 11.40am.

ACTION POINTS

<p>Minute HB3 Affordable Housing Update</p>	<p>To provide information on the amount of affordable housing that would be lost as a result of the removal of the clause to require a contribution from developments of less than 10 houses.</p> <p>To continue to lobby the Government on this issue.</p>
<p>Minute HB14 Development update - Frambury Lane</p>	<p>To consider alternative options for developing this site.</p> <p>To seek Cabinet approval for the submission of the Planning application.</p>