

HOUSING BOARD held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 10am on 7 JUNE 2016

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

Also present: Mrs Angela Hutton and Mr David Parish (Tenant Forums Representatives)

Officers in attendance: D Malins (Housing Development Manager), R Millership (Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services), A Rees (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer), J Snares (Housing and Health Manager), M Watts (Principal Environmental Health Officer) and S Wood (Housing and Planning Policy Manager).

HB1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ryles.

HB2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 MARCH 2016

The minutes were received and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HB3 MATTERS ARISING

(i) HB35 – Affordable Housing Update

Councillor Dean asked for an update on the scheme at Everett Road. In response, the Housing and Planning Policy Manager said that the Council had met with the County Council and a business case for the development would be put forward by September.

In reply to further questions by Councillor Dean, the Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said that she had written to the director of Hastoe Housing Association to ask for a meeting and this was still to be arranged. Less funding was now required for the Chrishall development due to an additional grant.

Finally Councillor Dean asked whether a list of actions points could be included at the foot of the minutes. Members agreed with this idea.

HB4 HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

The Housing Needs and Landlord Services presented her report which was taken as read. In response to questions by Councillor Dean, she said that the number of people receiving in-depth housing advice related to the number

coming into reception who asked for help. Although the total number of people had fallen, the cases had proven more challenging.

Finding private landlords who were willing to let properties to people on benefits was challenging as the level of rent in the area was normally greater than the level of Local Housing allowance. A number of London boroughs offered financial incentives to landlords to encourage letting out properties to people on LHA but it did not seem as though this approach would work within Uttlesford.

Discussions moved on to the Council's Rent Deposit Scheme. The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager said the Scheme was a three way legal agreement between the tenant, landlord and the Council.

Councillor Farthing said that demand for rented properties meant that it was difficult to see why a landlord would take a risk renting out a property to a tenant on LHA. LHA was paid to landlords one month in arrears which made renting out to council tenants unattractive. The main issue was that private sector rent prices in Uttlesford were unaffordable for people on LHA. The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager said that the Council was unable to change the way LHA was administered.

In response to a question by Councillor Farthing, the Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager explained that the Council always attempted to use its own stock before using B&Bs which normally cost around £40 per night. The Council did not rent out private accommodation on a permanent basis as this was not cost effective.

Councillor Dean suggested that three Members should form a group to discuss what could be done. Councillor Redfern said that discussions could take place without a group being formed.

The report was noted.

HB5

AFFORDABLE HOUSING UPDATE

The Housing and Planning Policy Manager presented her report. She explained that 115 affordable homes had been delivered in 2015/16. The Radwinter Road Independent living scheme was now being developed and the scheme at Smiths Farm, Great Dunmow was due to start in January 2017. The Home Farm Trust Autism scheme was being progressed with the aim of a planning application being made in September 2016.

Following a Court of Appeal decision, authorities could no longer seek affordable housing contributions for schemes with 10 dwellings or fewer. She explained that if a developer made a number of applications under that threshold at the same site then a contribution could be sought.

Councillor Redfern said that she was concerned by the decision. Councillor Dean echoed the comments made by Councillor Redfern and added that if

fewer affordable houses were built the district risked becoming an area exclusively for the middle class.

In response to questions by Members, the Housing and Planning Policy Manager said that she would contact West Berkshire District Council and Reading Borough District as they may decide to appeal the decision.

Councillor Mills noted that there were a lot of developments for which planning permission had been granted but work had not yet started. It was important to consider the balance between providing affordable housing and ensuring that a development was viable.

In response to Councillor Mills, Councillor Redfern said that if a developer conducted a viability assessment which showed that the development was not viable with the normal level of housing contribution it could ask to provide a smaller amount.

The report was noted.

HB6

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME UPDATE 2015-16

The Housing and Planning Policy Manager presented her report which showed the number of affordable homes delivered in the previous financial year. Members noted that for the majority of developments where affordable units were sought, the affordable units comprised at least 40% of the whole scheme.

In response to a question by Councillor Dean about starter homes, the Housing and Planning Policy Manager that the guidance on starter homes was being changed and the Council's policy could not be altered until the new guidance had been published. She would bring a report on the starter homes allocation policy to the next meeting.

The report was noted.

HB7

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME UPDATES (COUNCIL SITES)

(i) Mead Court – verbal update

The Housing Development Manager provided an update on the Mead Court development. He explained that the development had been delayed again as more asbestos had been found. The developer had to cover any costs associated with its removal. Due to the delay the final stage of the handover was now due to be on 15 August. The scheme was £2,500 over its budget of £4.25million. There had been some issues with drainage on the completed elements of the scheme and as a result he was pushing for the installation of a text based alarm system which would mean that any problems could be rectified more effectively.

The report was noted.

(ii) Catons Lane – verbal update

The Housing Development Manager said that handover of the scheme was due to take place on 16/17 June. The developer would repair any damage they had caused to the verges on the approach to the site.

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said that there would be opening ceremonies for the sites.

The report was noted.

(iii) Reynolds Court – verbal update

The Housing Development Manager explained that the initial estimate for the scheme was £7.14million and the final cost was £7.18million. However, the Council had managed to acquire a £912,000 grant instead of the £800,000 it had applied for which meant the cost of the scheme to the Council was lower. The final contract was due to be signed by the end of the week and would be a fixed price contract.

Members congratulated and thanked the Housing Development Manager for his work on this scheme.

The report was noted.

(iv) Sheds Lane

The Housing Development Manager presented his report. He explained that the sites currently comprised of 50 garages which were mainly in a poor condition and were too small for most modern cars.

The proposed housing included a three bedroom wheelchair compliant bungalow which would meet the needs of a specific family. Their current Council home could not be adapted to meet their needs. The cost of the development was £173,000 per dwelling which was higher than that of a standard development. This was because of the abnormal costs associated with the scheme. If the abnormal costs were removed the cost was £155,000 per dwelling, which was seen as reasonable.

In response to questions by Members, the Housing Development Manager explained garage stock was currently an impairment to the Council's accounts. The Council faced a number of restrictions on where it could build affordable housing and this meant that garage sites were often the only viable sites for the Council's housing developments.

Members discussed the impact of removing garage sites on on-street parking. It was noted that the majority of garage sites were used for storage and not for vehicles. Councillor Asker added that she had not noticed a large increase in vehicles parking on the street near Catons Lane following the development.

In response to Councillor Dean, the Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said that if parking was identified a possible issue, the Council looked to provide additional parking spaces on a development.

Mr Parish said that too many of the garages were used for storage instead of parking. The Tenant Forum supported both sites A and B.

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.

(v) Newton Grove

The Housing Development Manager said that there was a need for two bedroom housing in the district. The site had become available because the County Council no longer needed it to construct a Domestic Violence Refuge, so it was agreed that it would be developed for General Needs Council Housing.

In response to a question by Councillor Loughlin, the Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager said that the County Council had changed its policy on how it approached domestic violence refugees

It was recommended that option 1 was pursued as it provided two bedroom housing and was more user friendly than option 2.

AGREED to recommend to Cabinet that the site is progressed to the planning application stage.

(vi) Station Road

The Housing Development Manager presented his report. He informed Members that planning permission had been granted in February 2016 to construct a two bedroom bungalow on the site. Development of the site was not seen as financially viable but the site was close to Audley End Station so it was expected that it would generate a lot of interest as a development site for a private dwelling.

Any proceeds from the sale of the site would be ring-fenced within the Housing Revenue Account for the development of other financially viable council house schemes. If the site was sold it would have no impact on the garage site.

Councillor Dean asked that the recommendation was clarified so that it made it clearer that the site which would be sold was the area surrounded by red on the appendix to the report.

AGREED to recommend to Cabinet that the site (marked in red on the application drawings at the rear of no. 2 and 4) is sold on the open market by way of tender and/or sealed bids, with a guide price for offers as advised by the selling agent. The guide price will be set to maximise competitiveness and interest in the plot.

HB8

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING – PROGRESS REPORT

The Principal Environmental Health Officer explained that report aimed to provide an overview of the work carried out by the Environmental Health department over the last year. The report was taken as read.

He gave a presentation which highlighted the complaints which were dealt with, which included damp, trip hazards and hoarding. If one issue was drawn to the Council's attention it would inspect the entire property as it was almost always the case that there would be other issues with the property.

Environmental Health also administered use of the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) which was used to provide additional facilities for disabled people and the Home Repairs Assistance Grant (UHRA) which was used to prevent homes from falling into disrepair.

The department was looking to offer a broader range of services than it currently provided. There were a number of changes to the policies surrounding UHRAs and the Council was working with the Citizens Advice Bureau to provide advice on these changes.

Councillor Dean suggested that Environmental Health continued to engage with Members as they could provide the department with information about empty homes. There was a property on High Lane, Stansted which had been empty for over a decade and there had been some complaints from residents of vermin coming from the property.

In response to Councillor Dean, the Principal Environmental Health Officer said that information was collated from the GTS which highlighted the areas most at risk. Members would be able to see the highlighted areas and feed into the process.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer, in response to questions by Councillor Asker, explained that if a property was not occupied the Council would take action. The council are currently pursuing Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) for two properties.

HB9

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services gave an update on the Syrian Resettlement Programme. Authorities in the region have been asked to confirm how many properties they can offer over the next 3 to 6 months. The

council is working with Essex CC to identify suitably located accommodation to house up to 2 refugee families.

The meeting ended at 12.20pm.

ACTION POINTS

Minute HB3 Matters Arising	Include a list of action points at the end of the minutes for all future meetings.
Minute HB5 Affordable Housing Update	The Housing and Planning Policy Manager would contact West Berkshire District Council and Reading Borough District about the Court of Appeal case.
Minute HB6 Development Programme Update 2015-16	The Housing and Planning Policy Manager would bring a report on the starter homes allocation policy to the next meeting.