

HOUSING BOARD held at COMMITTEE ROOM - UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL, COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, ESSEX CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 2017 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor M Felton (Chairman)
Councillors A Dean, T Farthing, A Gerard, P Lees, J Loughlin and J Redfern

Also present: C Mandy and S Trimmell (Tenant Forum Representatives), E Rogers (Tenant Regulatory Panel Representative)

Officers in attendance: S Baxter (Housing Enabling Officer), B Ferguson (Democratic Services Officer), R Millership (Assistant Director – Housing & Environmental Services) and J Snares (Housing Strategy and Operations Manager)

HB1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Freeman, Mills and Ranger.

HB2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2017 were received and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

HB31 – MINUTES

‘Councillor Foley said this was a great result’ - ‘Foley’ to be replaced with ‘Felton’.

Additionally, the minute numbering from HB36 onwards was out of sequence and required correction.

HB3 AFFORDABLE HOUSING UPDATE - QUARTER 2 2017-18

The Housing Enabling Officer presented the Development Programme update for 2017/18. She said 50 affordable new homes were expected to be delivered by Christmas, and 170 were expected by March 2018 if the good weather continued. Members were made aware of the Community Led Housing Fund, which provided technical support for community groups who wish to deliver affordable housing schemes. Community and information events would take place during the autumn and winter of 2017/18, and further information on the scheme would be available at the next Housing Board meeting.

Councillor Redfern said 100 new affordable homes had been the initial target for 2017/18, so to build 170 was fantastic news. She added that it would be worth

re-evaluating this target as UDC annually exceeded its initial aims. The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager agreed and said the target would be revised for 2018/19.

Councillor Dean said the numbers put before Members were encouraging, although it told him little with regards to the overall demand for Housing within the District. The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said a report would be brought to Members, explaining the relationship between the Council's allocation policy and the demand for affordable housing in Uttlesford.

Councillor Redfern told Members she had been to a Community Led Housing fund presentation and felt it provided an opportunity to do something different, particularly in relation to the ongoing Local Plan process. Councillor Dean, who had also been attending a number of Housing information events, said the issue of affordable and social housing was complex, and further information and discussion was required. The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said a workshop would be organised to brief Members on the potential of Community Led housing projects, as well as discussing the intricacies of affordable and social housing.

Councillor Gerard said the Steering Group for neighbourhood plans had carried out surveys across the District and had found overwhelming support in favour of affordable housing schemes. He said the surveys across different neighbourhoods (Saffron Walden, Thaxted, Newport) could be used to ascertain demand, and it would be useful for Members if such information was collated and evaluated.

HB4 DEVELOPMENT UPDATE - WALDEN PLACE

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager updated Members on the proposed redevelopment of the existing sheltered housing scheme at Walden Place, Saffron Walden.

The existing sheltered housing was composed of two buildings; a Grade II listed building and an extension that had been built in the 1980s. The Grade II listed building was of considerable cost to the Housing Revenue Account and, as only one tenant now resided there, it would be expedient to detach the 1980s part of the shelter. The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager proposed a joint venture with a commercial developer to progress the redevelopment project, as to minimise risk to the Council, as well as maximising the return of a valuable asset. To do so, the HRA would contract Savills to ascertain the market demand for such a project and the conclusion of such findings would be reported back to the Housing Board before further action was taken.

Councillor Gerard asked why Savills had been chosen to carry out this research. In response, the Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said they had been in discussion with Savills and were confident they possessed the necessary expertise to take the project forward. She reminded Members that they would only be contracted to carry out market research at this stage, to ascertain the general appetite for a joint venture.

Councillor Farthing asked why a joint venture was being considered when it could be more profitable for the Council to complete the project alone. The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said the risk involved in redeveloping a listed building would be substantial and expensive, and the building could not be sold as it was attached to the 1980s housing shelter. She said it was a difficult situation and officers felt this was the best option available to them.

It was AGREED to recommend to Cabinet that the marketing strategy for the redevelopment project was progressed in partnership with Savills in order to ascertain the preferred disposal and development strategy for the scheme.

HB5

DEVELOPMENT UPDATE - REYNOLDS COURT (VERBAL REPORT)

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager updated Members on developments occurring across the District.

Reynolds Court, Newport

The demolition phase was now underway, although there had been problems with UK Power and asbestos had been found. The completion of phase two was forecast for October 2018.

Hatherley Court, Saffron Walden

Work had been going ahead despite the need to move a water main, which had prevented the building of two flats during phase one. Phase one was due for completion in January 2018, phase two was due in September 2018.

Sheds Lane, Saffron Walden

Work would commence on site on the 2nd October for a bungalow and two 2 bed houses. The predicted build time was 36 weeks.

Frambury Lane, Newport

The application had been submitted and The Housing Strategy manager had met with the parish council. Councillor Gerard said the parish council had an issue with a row of trees that hindered access to a footpath on the site and would like them removed. There was uncertainty regarding the species of tree and the Chairman said further research would be required before a decision could be made.

Newton Grove, Dunmow

Planning permission had been granted and contract procurement was underway.

The Moors, Little Dunmow

The site had now been emptied and pre planning advice had been taken. The planning application would be submitted by the end of October and early demolition of the properties was being considered to mitigate council tax liability. Japanese knotweed had also been discovered on the site.

Station Road, Wendens Ambo

The plot had been sold for £125,000 and the sale was now with the solicitors.

Hilltop Lane, Saffron Walden

Plans had been submitted for outline planning permission for a 2 bed bungalow on the plot.

Walden Road, Radwinter

Eight properties have been purchased with Right to Buy receipts at a cost of £1,250,000. The sales process would begin shortly and advertising would begin in a few weeks. Councillor Redfern said the opportunity had been so immediate that there had been no time to discuss the purchase with the Housing Board. She added that she was in correspondence with Kemi Badenoch MP, in regards to the constraints and problems UDC faced with the Right to Buy receipt process.

HB6 HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager updated Members on the latest homelessness figures in the District and on the latest developments regarding the Homelessness Reduction Act.

Councillor Dean asked if the Act would change the way in which homelessness would be assessed. The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said the rudiments of the Act were known, but housing officers were still waiting on official guidance from Government. The emphasis would be placed on preventing homelessness in the first place, which in practice would not differ greatly from the current procedure. She added that local authorities would not be obliged to house everyone and a criterion of need would still have to be fulfilled.

Councillor Farthing asked how homelessness was prevented in the cases and figures outlined in the report. The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said officers spoke to landlords, parents and tenants to help people stay in or find accommodation before homelessness had taken place.

HB7 HRA BUSINESS PLAN ACTION PLAN

The Assistant Director – Housing and Environmental Health said changes to the Government's housing policy had affected the HRA Business Plan, for both the short term and in future years. The imposition of a 1% annual rent cut had impacted on resources and the Plan would run into deficit by 2020 if action was

not taken. She said the refinancing of loans was being considered and she would report back her findings to the Board in December when a course of action would be decided.

Members were informed that the tenancy sustainment team had been put in place and had carried out their work successfully. The service had been nominated for a Partnership Working Award in this year's 'You Make the difference in Essex Awards.'

The deliver Sheltered scheme redevelopment programme was ongoing and the Assistant Director – Housing and Environmental Health said the next meeting should be held in Hatherley Court so Members could familiarise themselves with the development.

Councillor Dean said he would like the Board to give serious thought to the regeneration of existing housing estates, so that they too would reflect the aspirational values of garden communities, as outlined in the Local Plan. Councillor Redfern urged Members to be realistic with their expectations and said a public campaign could be established so members of the community could get involved in taking pride in their area.

HB8 ALLOCATIONS POLICY (VERBAL REPORT)

Members were asked to consider the allocation of affordable housing in the District, specifically with regards to who was defined as a 'key worker' and therefore prioritised on the housing register.

Councillor Lees said the average cost of a house in the District was beyond the reach of a worker on an average salary. Councillor Loughlin expressed her dislike of the term key worker as all people who worked in the District deserved an affordable place to live.

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said a report would be brought to a future meeting to consider UDCs allocation policy.

HB9 UNIVERSAL CREDIT (VERBAL REPORT)

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager presented a verbal report on the rollout of Universal Credit in the District, which would be rolled-out to new claimants from October 2017. There were a number of issues with the new system including a substantial rise in arrears in places where it had already been put into effect. This was mainly attributed to the longer processing time for claims which could take between six to twelve weeks. Other changes included the restriction to single room rent for single people under 35; the necessity of having documents verified by the job centre; and no housing benefit for people aged 18 to 22 years old from the end of October. She added that a Welfare Officer had been employed by the housing benefits department to assist the public with their claims.

HB10 TENANT REGULATORY PANEL (TRP) UPDATE (VERBAL REPORT)

Mrs Rogers presented the TRP review that had been completed in 2016. She told Members that 100 tenants had been interviewed and recommendations had been proposed to the Council based on these findings. She added that the review would be carried out again to assess the effectiveness of the changes implemented.

In terms of the TRPs Void Review, Mrs Rogers said work was still required in terms of the accessibility of information, although some improvements had been made and information was now being shared more widely. She said the process had been complicated by the high turnover of staff throughout the department.

Councillor Dean asked Mrs Rogers if she was satisfied with the Council's response to the TRPs reviews. She said she was, and that the TRP worked closely with the Housing department and had frequent dialogue.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Rogers and the TRP for a professional and thorough report.

HB11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 7 DECEMBER 2017

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 7 December 2017 at 10:00am and would be held in Hatherley court.

The meeting ended at 12:00pm.