

NOTE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING MEETING HELD ON 23 AUGUST 2018

Present:

Chairman: Councillor Dean

Councillor Redfern

Stephanie Baxter, Ben Ferguson, Lee Heley, Sarah Nicholas, Simon Payne and Judith Snares.

1. Notes of Meeting on 14 June 2018

Members approved the note of the meeting held on 14 June 2018.

2. Case Study and Best Practice presentation – Approaches to developing new settlements

Lee Heley gave a presentation on various approaches to developing new settlements. The three case studies used were the eco-towns of Cranbrook, Cambourne and Graven Hill, all of which were similar in scale to the garden community developments proposed in Uttlesford.

The following findings were highlighted:

- **Local planning matters:** As a planning authority, UDC could shape the housing mix in the proposed communities through the master/local plan, outline permission and planning agreements. The percentage of affordable housing was the key metric used to determine the type of homes built.
- **Commercial factors drive the housing mix:** In a boom firms want to build private homes; in a recession, social homes.
- **Delivering social mix:** Pepper potting small numbers of social housing amongst private homes made communities better places to live. Potential residents should be told of the housing mix.
- **Demographics:** The demographics of new settlements have far more children and younger adults than the national average. Growing families need to move and enjoy the green space settlements offer. Most people who move to the new settlements do so from the local area.
- **Land ownership matters:** If the council owns the land, it has control of build out, delivery rate and design of the development. Graven Hill was developed with this approach and Lee Heley said this was the most important issue when it came down to the direction of development.

- **Quality issues with private developers:** Quality issues in Cranbrook and Cambourne were identified which had been delivered by volume house builders. Evaluations highlighted low quality build, homes smaller than social properties, and generic 'anytown' design. Graven Hill followed a custom-build model, with a different look, and was considered the most innovative of the three case studies.
- **Social infrastructure takes time:** Social infrastructure follows homes, which means some early residents feel isolated. Starting with a large number of vulnerable social tenants could increase this problem. Councillor Redfern said the proposed communities needed to address the needs of the elderly, as well as young families. She said there was very little suitable housing for the elderly in the villages, which meant they had to cut ties to their communities when they sought sheltered accommodation, which was only provided in the larger towns.
 - **Action Point** - The Chairman requested further information relating to Cherwell District Council's Local Plan and the Graven Hill development. Stephanie Baxter to ascertain how the council funded the procurement of the land from the MOD.
 - **Action Point** – To arrange a visit to the settlement of Cambourne.

It was agreed to circulate the PowerPoint presentation following the meeting.

3. Discussion Paper – Affordable Housing in the Garden Communities

Simon Payne presented a draft report that would provide the basis of the report to be taken to Scrutiny in September. The paper set out the key considerations in relation to providing affordable housing in the proposed garden communities and suggested the way forward in reviewing the Uttlesford Housing Strategy.

The following points were discussed:

- Regardless of what strategy was adopted by the Council, the outcomes had to be closely monitored to ensure affordable housing objectives were being met.
- The assessment of affordability adopted in the paper was the model of best practice suggested by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation – that housing costs reach no more than 35% of household income.
- Access to mortgages was a problem for local residents with the lowest priced properties in the District selling for over £300,000 in March 2018. A joint income of nearly £100,000 would be required to satisfy a mortgager.

- Stephanie Baxter informed the group of the St. Clements housing development in East London, whereby properties were being kept affordable in perpetuity via a land covenant and community land trust scheme.
- Homes were made available at a cost of 60% of the median income, and a land covenant would ensure they would do so in perpetuity. The Council would be able to decide an eligibility criteria for these properties e.g. local connection to the District.
- The barriers to such affordable housing schemes were identified as access to land and access to finance. As community land trusts were self-financing, the Council would not have a problem accessing finance.
- **Action Point** – Stephanie Baxter to seek further clarification from London CLT on their business case.
- Judith Snares said it was possible to create an appendix to the current allocations policy, which would allow different eligibility criteria to be applied for the proposed garden communities.
- A new 'intermediate' housing register was proposed for low and medium income households, which would accept applications from existing permanent employees working in Uttlesford, providing they can demonstrate that they cannot afford private rented housing within 35% (gross) of their total household income.
- Further criteria for the Intermediate Housing list would include the length of time an applicant had been on the list; and a focus on employees who worked in the immediate vicinity of the proposed garden communities (e.g. North Uttlesford and the Science parks).
- **Action Point** – The Chairman said it was not only future jobs that were of concern but also current employment figures within the District. He had spoken to MAG and was aware of a recent staff survey at Stansted Airport that would be of use; he requested that this staff survey was obtained from Jonathan Oates at MAG.
- Simon Payne said an equalisation agreement was in place with Braintree District Council whereby both authorities would be allocated a proportion of homes regardless of which side of the district border they had been developed.
- Braintree DC had a 30% affordable housing policy in place. With regards to the West of Braintree settlement, Councillor Redfern said the Council should request that this be brought up to 40% in line with UDC affordable housing policy.
- **Action Point** – The proposed North Uttlesford village would have an impact on South Cambridgeshire district and it was necessary to begin a dialogue to understand their housing strategy. Were there any elements of their strategy that would benefit Uttlesford?

- **Action point** – Simon Payne said he would produce a compatible note, comparing the housing strategies of adjacent authorities.
- It was agreed to have high aspirations for the proposed garden communities; not only was the 40% affordable policy to remain in place, but officers were committed to delivering high quality homes, infrastructure and sustainable local communities. Such targets could only be achieved if negotiations with developers were successful.

Councillor Redfern agreed to present the report to Scrutiny in September.

The meeting ended at 1.00pm.