



<u>Committee and Date</u>
Council
18 th July 2013

<u>Item</u>
8
<u>Public</u>

Councillor Mal Price
Portfolio Holder for Built Environment: Strategic Planning,
Planning, Housing – Local Commissioner

1.0 Recommendations

That Council approves the Portfolio Holder Statement.

REPORT

Planning Services

- 3.0** This year the focus has been on delivering flexible and agile solutions to service delivery and prepare the planning service for the challenges arising from continuing funding pressures for the public sector.
- 3.1** The aim is to maximise choice and deliver a flexible approach to work while reducing overheads and cost to the Council. The Development Management performance measures are aligned to corporate performance goals but underpinning all objectives is an approach to make our service straightforward and functional – It should be simple, it should work.
- 3.2** Development Management is a key statutory and front line service that seeks to promote and facilitate the wider economic, social and environmental well-being of Shropshire and help deliver major investment decisions by individuals, businesses and public sector organisations. It is a positive approach to shaping, considering and delivering sustainable development proposals. It is undertaken in the spirit of partnership and inclusiveness, and supports the delivery of key priorities and outcomes.
- 3.3** Development Management administers time sensitive processes with a large number of customer groups. It is dependent on the functionality of an integrated IT system, the accessibility of data and records and the confirmation and understanding of business processes both for staff

and customers. The regulatory planning service in Shropshire is the second largest within the region, only Birmingham deals with more applications each year. Unlike Birmingham the challenge in Shropshire is delivering this service efficiently across a large rural county and this has underpinned the move towards agile and flexible working practices. In 2012/13 the team processed 3024 planning applications and a significant number of other formal applications for amendments, discharge of condition applications and proposals for pre-application advice.

- 3.4** The fragility of the economy and particularly pressures on public sector funding were key to the shape of a transforming Development Management service throughout 2010/11. Further funding pressure across the council is anticipated in 13/14 and 14/15 and it is for this reason that understanding and controlling cost is important to shaping future service delivery.
- 3.5** There are different drivers for change across the service including cost reduction and asset management, providing flexible agile solutions and a choice for teams wherever possible to work from multiple locations whilst reducing our overall office accommodation requirements, providing the resources to support agile working including data migration project and behavioural change to ensure that we measure outcomes and customer satisfaction.
- 3.6** The Development Management Approach is aligned to the Councils Operating Model Principles, we help customers to help themselves evidenced through new streamlined web pages, we should not provide services that others can do cheaper/better than we can, deliver locally and provide a focus around business growth & prosperity. For clarity delivering locally does not mean a permanent physical presence in area offices (our current position) – it does mean providing support when it is required across the county – a meeting at a customer service point or on site, a committee meeting or support to Parish/Town Councils.
- 3.7** Previously performance has been focused on achieving targets which have not always provide an indicator of the quality, customer satisfaction or value for money of the service. It is therefore important that Development Management develops a suite of indicators, linked to corporate priorities, which provide a more accurate measure of the service provided to our customers.
- 3.8** Demonstrating value for money, in the current economic climate, whilst providing choice together with outcomes that are meaningful to customers is essential to the resilience of the service moving forward. Planning teams have significantly reduced their accommodation requirements in 12/13 as a result of new ways of working and consequently the team could realise accommodation savings of 40-50%.

- 3.9** The value of fee income which just exceeded target at £1.666M indicating a potential reduction in the downturn. Government declined to progress the local determination of planning fees instead providing a national increase of 15% in November following a three year freeze which will have affected the overall outcome.
- 3.10** The key corporate performance measure for planning is the percentage of planning applications that are determined over the prescribed 8 or 13 week target date that have been agreed with the applicant. Often the planning consultation process will raise issues that require negotiations to take place prior to a decision being taken. To allow this an extension of time over the target period needs to be agreed with the applicant. In Shropshire 96% of these applications are agreed with the applicant.
- 3.11** In Shropshire there are high levels of delegation (94.3%) and high levels of approval (96%) because our approach is outcome focussed.

4.0 Building Control

- 4.1** For Building Control this year has been one of responding to the joint pressures of continuing economic pressure in the construction industry and operating in an increasingly competitive environment. This has resulted in the need for a second restructure to reduce costs following a broader redesign in 2011. For 12/13 the number of applications was down from 1925 to 1705, a fall of 11% on the previous year. Concurrently there has been increased competition with a 24% increase in activity compared with the previous year.
- 4.2** The Building Regulations (fees and charges) Regulations 2010 requires a councils building regulation service to breakeven and not be a burden on the council tax payer.
- 4.3** CIPFA's Principles of Building Control accounting guidance clarifies the rules. Includes how the services operating costs are to be split between the 3 cost centres – allocated on a true cost basis.
- 4.4** Building Control is currently in deficit by £61,059 (already owed to the council). If predicted decline in income continues there would be a 5 % reduction on 2012/13 income equivalent to £58,042 deficit for this financial year resulting in a potential deficit of £119101 in deficit by end of 2013/14.

The restructure is currently under consultation and seeks to:-

- Control the financial consequences of further loss of income and accrued deficits

- Consolidate the service so that it can start to pay back the deficit, further reduce the cost to the council – non fee earning activities
- Generate a positive financial position in order to have a sound platform to build from for the future

4.5 Despite the tough economic conditions Building Control has embraced mobile and flexible working practices and is at the forefront implementing technology and lync telephony to support this. The operational redesign towards mobile and greater flexible working is now starting to be realised with fewer staff being reliant upon fixed accommodation.

5.0 Land Charges

5.1 The Land Charges team also operates in a competitive environment and generates fee income on a cost recovery basis for the processing of land and property searches. For 12/13 the team achieved its income target which suggests that the property transaction market is not in decline.

5.2 Notwithstanding this there is strong competition from the private sector and the resilience of the team has been stretched throughout the year. Plans have been implemented to provide additional support to the land charges team from the planning validation team. Additional training has been providing allowing the teams to support one another.

5.3 In 2013/13 Land charges processed 4813 searches of which 943 were personal searches, the balance being Shropshire Council searches.

6.0 Local Planning

6.1 During 2013 planning policy work has again focussed on the preparation, consultation and analysis of the SAMDev document. The Revised Preferred Options consultation document to be published in July will seek views on any changes or revisions to last years consultation proposed as a result of responses received or new evidence that has been brought forward.

6.2 We have already this year consulted on the draft Development Management policies for SAMDev. The Final version of SAMDev will pull together both the settlement specific and policy elements of SAMDev into one single Plan document for submission to government for examination by the Planning Inspectorate.

6.3 The Community Led Planning process is well and truly underway. Following the success of the Kinnerley Parish Plan last year we now

have Albrighton, Broseley and Oswestry bringing their plans forward for adoption by the Council. Much Wenlock have also made significant progress with their formal Neighbourhood Plan and following examination and referendum could have their Plan in place later this year.

6.4 Now in their second annual review, one of the key roles of the Place Plans is to provide local evidence with which to agree the use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds resulting from new development, and in doing so supporting the sustainable growth of settlements. In line with agreed practice, each Parish and Town Council was encouraged to respond to the annual review process between October 2012 and April 2013. Alongside this, there has been on-going engagement with strategic infrastructure providers and internal council departments to clarify the long-term infrastructure needs for Shropshire as a result of settlement growth strategies.

7.0 CIL and Developer Contributions Update

7.1 Reflecting Shropshire Councils' commitment to localism, there is a strong focus on ensuring a direct link between new development and the delivery of local community infrastructure needs. This means Shropshire is in a unique position nationally in ensuring that most of the CIL revenue will be spent within the 'Place Plan' area within which development takes place.

7.2 This approach has now been reflected nationally through the introduction of the Neighbourhood Fund on the 25th April 2013. This requires CIL Charging Authorities to provide an element of the CIL revenue collected within an area direct to the Town or Parish Council within which the development takes place.

This means that within Shropshire, CIL is distributed as follows:

CIL Fund	Proportion of total funds	Responsible party	Area for spend
Administrative fee	5%	Shropshire Council	To cover administrative expenses incurred during the implementation and enforcement of CIL.
Neighbourhood Fund (introduced on the 25 th April 2013).	25% (where there is a Neighbourhood Plan) 15% (where there is not a Neighbourhood Plan - capped at £100 per council tax dwelling)	Town and Parish Councils	Provided directly to the local Town/Parish Council to fund locally identified infrastructure projects.

Of the remainder:

Strategic Infrastructure Funding	10%	Shropshire Council with infrastructure providers	To use on strategic infrastructure priorities across Shropshire.
Local Infrastructure Funding	90%	Shropshire Council with Town/Parish Councils	Available to fund local infrastructure priorities nominated by Parish and Town, in the 'settlement' in which development takes place.

7.3 CIL has applied to around 300 development applications between January 2012 and May 2013, although around a third of these did not result in any charge being made because they involved the deduction of existing floor space from the demolition or conversion of existing buildings.

7.4 From the CIL liable development on which construction has started, we have collected around £200,000, whilst instalment payments of a further £450,000 are expected over the next year. A further £1.4 million of potential income is associated with development which has not yet commenced, however this is only payable if the development commences. All CIL collected so far has been banked and allocated against the relevant Town or Parish Council. We anticipate that the delivery of the first infrastructure projects funded by CIL will commence later this year.

7.5 As a result of the unique experience which Shropshire Council has gained during the operation of CIL, we were invited by the LGA to participate in a short but intensive review of national CIL guidance and regulations. Working alongside senior representatives from the property industry and Government as the only Local Authority represented on the working group, we were able to share our operational experience to directly influence national guidance on CIL on behalf of all Local Authorities. We have also provided advice and guidance to many of the Local Authorities across the Country that are proceeding with the development of a CIL Charging Schedule, both through presentations at planning events and direct discussions with individual Authorities.

7.6 We have continued to improve our operational procedures in light of practical experience and provide free advice to local developers through our website, local events and individual contact in order to build local knowledge of the operation of CIL in practice.

7.7 Planning obligations, or Section 106 legal agreements, continue to play a key role in helping to deliver local infrastructure in Shropshire, albeit

gradually replaced by CIL in many ways. The Council inherited a large number of planning legal agreements (Section 106) from predecessor councils and continues to use such agreements in appropriate circumstances. The total value of monies in hand currently amounts to £4.7 million. These contributions will, amongst other things, be spent on highway improvements, play and recreation provision and maintenance, education provision and affordable housing.

8.0 Housing Policy & Delivery

- 8.1** The Shropshire Core Strategy gives a commitment to regularly review the viability study that underpins the affordable housing target rate across Shropshire. The 2013 review suggests that the target rate should be lowered in the weaker housing markets in Shropshire, and raised by different degrees in the stronger housing market areas. From our own knowledge confirmed by the comprehensive viability information we have received from development sites all over Shropshire, it is clear that there are several prevailing housing markets with differing pressures. A report was submitted to Cabinet in May detailing our response to this complex issue and Members' approval was sought to change the prevailing single target rate of 13% to three target rates (10%, 15% & 20%), geographically targeted to reflect the relative strengths and weaknesses of the housing markets identified in the 2013 viability study.
- 8.2** Communication with Town & Parish Councils and the wider community regarding housing delivery has been assisted by a number of seminars/training workshops aimed at Parish council members. These were well attended by Parishes from all over Shropshire and contributed to their greater understanding of affordability issues, funding regimes, exception site, single plot policies and Community led housing.
- 8.3** Progress towards Shropshire's annual statement on housing land supply reported in February 2013 that Shropshire did not have a five year supply of deliverable housing sites at that time (the Council has continued to monitor and review the supply issues). The Council's Site Allocations and Management of Development DPD is proposing the allocation of a large quantity of housing land which will provide the required supply and in the Council's view, the majority of preferred sites in the emerging SAMDev Plan that have survived the process to the third round of consultation (to be agreed by Cabinet on 26th June) can be considered to be deliverable and capable of contributing to the five year supply figures given Shropshire's proactive and positive approach to delivery.
- 8.4** Subject to Cabinet approval, it is considered that sufficient "deliverable" sites can now be reasonably identified through the SAMDev Plan and

2013 SHLAA update for the Council to demonstrate a five year supply of land for the purposes of decision taking.

9.0 Enabling and Development

9.1 Since late 2007, the economic climate has meant that the delivery of all housing continues to be extremely challenging, with the consequential impact on affordable housing delivery. Falling house prices and lender reluctance are having a profound effect on developers being able to bring sites forward as often existing planning permissions and obligations make the site unviable. The Council recognises the wider economic benefits of helping stalled or unviable sites to come forward and has had a proactive and pragmatic approach to these issues.

9.2 Through policy, the Council introduced an annually adjusted affordable housing target rate, a rate that not only reflects current economic difficulties for developers and landowners, but one that responds to the housing markets movement, whether that be either up or down. This has meant far fewer viability appraisals have been submitted to the Council, as the adjusted rate accurately reflects the current difficult development environment.

9.3 Shropshire continues to respond to the market positively through a range of initiatives that has meant although annual housing completions are down on pre 2008 figures, we have still consistently delivered high open market and affordable housing completions when compared nationally and in the current local context. Developers consider Shropshire a good place to develop and that is excellent news for the wider local economy and for the Council because of the New Homes Bonus.

9.4 As well as monitoring and continuing dialogue with developers, landowners, RP's and other building professionals relating to nearly 400 sites, the Enabling team also administer the highly popular and nationally acclaimed single plot exception site policy that seeks to offer a housing and sustainability solution to people in housing need in rural communities.

10.0 Affordable Housing Contributions

10.1 Since April 2010, Shropshire Council requires that all new build planning permissions contribute to affordable housing through provision on site or the generation of a capital receipt. Though this may seem to be a counter intuitive policy in the midst of severe economic times, it was acknowledged by developers as a positive move because it distributed the affordable housing provision on all new build permissions not just on a minority of developments carried out by a few developers and landowners as previously.

10.2 To date this policy requirement has accumulated an affordable housing capital pot of over £4.3m to be used on local affordable housing projects. There is a time lag before these sums are received and available for use by the Council, as it is only payable by the developer after work has begun on site, these permissions are beginning to be implemented and sums deposited.

11.0 Housing Capital Schemes

11.1 Since the LGR, Shropshire Council has been proactive in using land, capital and developer contributions collected through historic and current Affordable Housing Contributions (AHC) s106 agreements to fund Registered Providers and the private sector to develop affordable housing schemes. A number of very successful schemes have been completed. There are currently (April 13) 4 development schemes on site and 2 new capital appraisals being considered that in total will utilise £1.40m of Shropshire Council affordable housing funding that has enabled and brought forward 94 local affordable homes. It is also important to note that the construction value of these schemes amounts to more than £9.3m of much needed investment into the local economy as well as the wider economic stimulus construction sites generate. The business sector claims that for every £1 pound directly spent on construction, a further £4 to £7 pounds is brought into the local economy.

11.2 Since 2010, under these schemes, the Council will have used £2.86m of affordable housing contributions on contracts worth £17.25m to bring forward 154 affordable homes.

12.0 Community Led Housing

12.1 The Government's recent announcements relating to community-led housing aim to empower communities of all shapes and sizes, living in towns and villages alike, to have the chance to develop their own plans for the future of their neighbourhoods and even build their own homes to meet local needs.

12.2 In Sept 2012, Shropshire Council in partnership with the Marches umbrella community land trust was awarded £1.3m from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to develop 68 homes on 5 sites across the Marches. Three of these sites are in Shropshire and will deliver 46 local homes.

12.3 In order to further support and encourage this initiative and future schemes Shropshire Council has developed new financial support to landlords helping to nurture and develop new community-led housing and to Parish Councils who actively support and participate in the

process of helping shape such schemes from conception to completion.

- 12.4** The Shropshire Community-Led Housing Providers Grant recognises the additional project costs that providers of affordable housing may experience when partnering on Community-Led schemes. Developing schemes in a genuinely collaborative and engaging way is simply more time consuming than more traditional developer led approaches. The Council is also of the view that rural schemes generally cost more to deliver in terms of high-quality design, materials, service infrastructure and a lack of economy of scale and as such specific additional financial assistance is proposed for schemes demonstrating true community-led credentials.
- 12.5** The Shropshire Community-Led Housing Parish Grant acknowledges the fact that because the new Community Infrastructure Levy applies only to open market housing there is no financial “reward” to communities that have actively supported new community-led housing. Plainly the principal benefit is affordable housing to meet housing need within their community, but the introduction of this innovative new grant which is financed from the annual New Homes Bonus provides some financial reward to these communities for promoting and actively engaging with “Community-Led” affordable housing schemes in their area.
- 12.6** This initial funding is for 2012 – 13 and 2013 – 14, and schemes for 98 homes on 7 sites utilising nearly £1.3m of New Homes Bonus are in the planning process.

13.0 Empty Property

- 13.1** For the period 2012/13, Market Drayton was identified in the Council’s Empty Homes Strategy as the Empty Homes Action Zone for the Shropshire area. This reflects the particular concerns expressed by the local community at the high number of empty homes and other premises in the area and the commitment to jointly working to tackle this issue.
- 13.2** The Council’s response included working with local partners, including local Members, the Market Drayton Town Partnership and Shropshire Housing Alliance to identify particular properties in the area which had been empty for a significant period of time and were having a detrimental effect on the town in order to prioritise these properties.
- 13.3** As part of this process, Shropshire Council committed £300,000 of New Homes Bonus funding, which was supported by funding through from the Town Council. This enabled a successful bid by Shropshire Housing Alliance to Government for £114,000 to purchase 16 High Street, Market Drayton to convert to 6 apartments at affordable rent

levels in perpetuity. These properties will be let through a local allocations policy targeted at local people in work or training.

13.4 The property is a large prominent building that has been empty for 13 years and is recognised by Shropshire Council and by the local community as having a significant negative impact on the wider area and that the refurbishment of this property will have a positive catalyst effect on efforts to revitalise the town centre.

13.5 This project will contribute to the revitalisation of the wider area and provide a range of community benefits including the provision of local jobs and apprenticeships; providing linkages to Green Deal; tackling local housing need and contributing to tackling anti-social behaviour locally. Shropshire Housing Alliance will work closely with the recently formed Market Drayton Community Partnership in order ensure that opportunities to maximise community benefits are realised; local priorities are reflected and to build their capacity to work with the local community to bring long term empty properties back in to use.

13.6 The project at 16 High Street is progressing well and Shropshire Housing Alliance will go to tender for the work on 9th July.

13.7 Building on this work, the Shropshire area has recently been extremely successful in gaining £625,000 to tackle empty properties in Oswestry and Ludlow. Through this funding round, the Shropshire area has received the third largest allocation (behind Stoke and Birmingham), for tackling empty properties, in the region.

13.8 In Ludlow, The Wrekin Housing Trust has gained £400,000 to identify and bring back into use 10 long term empty properties in the area. This will link to apprenticeships and local jobs.

13.9 In Oswestry (the Council's Empty Homes Action Zone for 2013/14), the Council and Oswestry Joint Economic Board has provided resource and financial support to tackle long term empty properties at 5-13 Cross Street. As in Market Drayton, these premises have been empty for a significant period of time. The £225,000 of Government funding combined with an allocation from the Council's New Homes Bonus and in principle funding from the Oswestry Joint Economic Board, will provide 9 affordable homes. As per the Market Drayton, the project will link to apprenticeships and local job opportunities.

14.0 Self Build

14.1 Work is progressing on this exciting opportunity to bring forward an identified piece of Council land owned land in Shrewsbury to be developed for up to 47 self build homes.

14.2 The Government is very keen to increase this sector as it promotes sustainability, community cohesion and cost savings and the Planning

Minister came to view this proposal. Shropshire Council will seek to develop the explore these opportunities. A working group, with backing from New Homes Bonus is now working with Shropshire Constructing Excellence and the local building sector more generally to explore how we can make the most of this scheme, looking to provide the necessary infrastructure and then sell the plots to self builders. There is a great deal to consider in such a scheme but there are very exciting opportunities to develop this innovative market.

Environment and Sustainability

15.0 Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan review

15.1 A draft of the third statutory Management Plan for the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will be launched for public consultation by July 2013. The Plan has been prepared by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership on behalf of the constituent local authorities - Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council.

15.2 The AONB designation covers 23% of Shropshire with the principal purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty. Following public consultation, a revised draft will be sent for formal observations by Natural England.

15.3 The final Plan will then be endorsed by the AONB Partnership and formally approved by the two Councils in early 2014. The draft Management Plan defines the following strategic themes:

- **Conserving and enhancing our outstanding landscape**
Wildlife, heritage, tranquillity, appropriate development
- **Helping our local communities thrive in a more sustainable way**
Farming and land management, prosperity and wellbeing, low carbon
- **Promoting personal enjoyment, understanding and participation**
For local people and visitors, sense of place and belonging, doing and taking part
- **Maintaining and enriching the natural services on which we all depend**
Ecosystem services (air, water, food, climate, etc) and wider benefits to society

16.0 Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme

- 16.1** The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has confirmed a grant of £1.35 million to the Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme.
- 16.2** The Scheme, which will cover an area of just under 200sq km defined by a rich industrial heritage as well as earlier prehistoric and medieval history, aims to conserve and restore historic and wildlife sites, help communities take part and learn about the landscape and its heritage, and improve access and training opportunities in local heritage skills.
- 16.3** The Scheme covers an area bounded by the settlements of Churchstoke, Chirbury, Minsterley, Pontesbury, Bridges, Wentnor and Norbury. The varied geology underlies an impressive landscape of hills and vales that crosses the Welsh English border between the Shropshire Hills and Montgomeryshire.
- 16.4** Its character reflects the way in which the natural environment is no respecter of man-made boundaries.
- 16.5** The Scheme will create five new jobs and bring together local people, groups and organisations from both sides of the border. The Scheme will be managed by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership. Funding and support has also come from Shropshire Council, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Powys County Council, Natural England, Natural Resources Wales and the Jean Jackson Trust, and a total of £2.2 million will be spent locally over the five year life span of the Scheme.

For details of the four programmes and 15 projects, and for further information see www.stiperstonesandcorndon.co.uk.

17.0 Community Wildlife Groups

- 17.1** A LEADER grant enabled the Natural Environment Team to set up and train Community Wildlife Groups in 13 parishes in north Shropshire. The aim of the project was to enable residents to help record, monitor and conserve the natural environment in their local area. They are collecting valuable information, particularly regarding Shropshire's habitats, which is informing policy CS17 by improving the resolution of Shropshire's environmental network and identifying opportunities to strengthen it. The groups have identified what they value about the natural environment in their local area and how this can be improved. Part of the grant funding was spent on practical projects on sites chosen by the groups.
- 17.2** Once set up and trained, the groups run themselves. They are free to join and open to all ages and abilities; therefore, they bring

communities together and encourage physical activity, thus leading to wider social and health benefits.

17.3 The project resulted in over 300 people participating, who contributed over 1800 volunteer hours to survey 10,000 ha of habitat and collect over 500 wildlife records. Over 5,000 residents benefitted from physical improvements to local green space, enhanced for both biodiversity and people. Over the course of the project £40,000 of work was provided to local businesses. The success of the project has resulted in continuation funding being secured from LEADER. This will be used to set up two new groups, develop the skills of young ecologists in Shropshire improving employment opportunities and promote the health & wellbeing benefits of conservation volunteering.

18.0 Local Nature Partnership

18.1 Local Nature Partnerships (LNP's) were a key commitment of the Natural Environment White Paper, seen as vital to delivering the Government's ambitions for the natural environment at the local level. The aim is for a high level cross-sector partnership, working strategically to protect and enhance the natural environment and the vital economic and social benefits it provides. LNP's should add value to important decisions, including on local planning matters and strategic plans around local economic growth and the health of local people. This is reflected in a duty to cooperate with LNP's in the National Planning Policy Framework.

18.2 After a period of development work, the Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin LNP successfully achieved formal LNP status in July 2012, one of 48 such partnerships nationally. Since then the LNP has been developing its priorities and objectives, focusing on addressing key economic and health issues that are linked to the natural environment or could benefit from more joined-up working. The Government expects LNP's to sit at an equivalent level to Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP's) and Health and Wellbeing boards, forming close working relationships with both bodies. Progress has been positive on both fronts, with contributions made to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and the LEP growth strategy.

18.3 The LNP is currently developing projects for the EU Structural Investment Fund. This will assist the LEP to produce their investment strategy, proposing action to tackle key economic priorities through action related to the natural environment.

Flax Mill Malting Update

19.0 Huge progress has been made on bringing the Flax Mill Malting project forward in the last 12 months.

- In May 2012 the project received a Stage One Pass from the Heritage Lottery Fund with development funding of £435,000
- This has enabled the design team have taken designs from RIBA Stage D, required for planning permission, to RIBA Stage F, detailed specifications and drawings that can be used to tender prices. Many other detailed reports to support the HLF Stage 2 submission also completed and a suite of legal documents and agreements have been compiled to enable transfer of land and authority from English Heritage to Shropshire Council.
- From July onwards demolitions took place on the Shropshire Council areas of the site - Midlands Red, the bus depot and Rexel Senate.
- In September a Friends Manager was appointed and under her guidance the Friends have made rapid progress, increased their capacity and delivered some outstanding events. In October the Project Manager was appointed to coordinate the HLF bid and develop detailed business plans for the Phase One project. In addition a dynamic team of officers and partners has been drawn together to work on the project.
- In November invitations to tender were received for the main contractor. Wates was selected and employed under a Pre-Contract Agreement to secure a tender price at 90% certainty.
- Bids have been submitted to ERDF for £6,644,000, English Heritage for £3,550,000 and in April to Heritage Lottery Fund for £12.8m was submitted. On 23 July HLF will announced whether our Stage 2 has been successful. This will complete the funding pot as we will have heard about the other bids the week before. Once decision made work cannot start until Permission to Start has been received which it is anticipated will take about 6 weeks to process.
- In addition to the Phase One project the Homes and Community Agency has funded £600,000 of works on the wider site, including the demolition of the North Silo and they have recently promised a further £1m for the wider site to be spent by April 2014.

Community Housing Services

20.0 Community Housing Services is comprised of the Housing Options Team, dealing with housing options, homelessness prevention, homelessness and has the strategic and commissioning role with respect to the Council's Affordable Housing Allocation Scheme (Shropshire HomePoint); Private Sector Housing, which deals with property condition, affordable warmth/fuel poverty and energy efficiency, Disabled Facilities Grants, Housing Assistance, and empty properties; and Housing Support Services.

21.0 Housing Options Services:

21.1 During 2012/13, the Housing Options Team received:

- 2349 advice enquiries
- 1011 homelessness prevention cases

Of these

- 938 homelessness applications were made
- 770 homelessness decisions were made on the above
- 238 accepted as having Full Duty

The number of households in temporary accommodation does vary month to month, but a "snapshot" of the number of households accommodated in temporary accommodation on the last day of each quarter 2012/13 was as follows:

- Q1 70
- Q2 64
- Q3 58
- Q4 61

22.2 The Housing Options Team is currently undertaking more detailed work to better understand how those people who contact the service but are not rehoused through the homelessness route meet their accommodation needs. This will inform a review of the advice and assistance currently offered by the Service.

22.3 The Housing Options is currently the 'host' authority for sub-regional funding (£500,000) for DCLG Funding available under the 'No Second Night Out' initiative. The sub-regional partnership involves Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and Staffordshire Local Authorities.

This project has recently commissioned:

- A 6-month Pilot Outreach Service for Rough Sleepers which commenced 1st May and will run till October.
- A 12 month scheme to enhance access to private sector housing for people who would be deemed ' non-priority homeless'

The project is also currently exploring a Prison Intervention scheme in order to deliver housing advice/pre-tenancy training to serving prisoners ahead of release

23.0 Private Sector Housing

23.1 During 2012/13, the Private Sector Housing Team dealt with 688 service requests, ranging from over-crowding and poor property condition to the licencing of houses in multiple occupation (HMO's). During this period over 100 homes were made free from Category 1 Hazards.

23.2 The service is seeing a significant increase in reports of **hoarding** where hoarding is a significant contributor to poor and hazardous home environments. Housing is working closely with Health and Social Care services to address this issue through partnered approaches. Work is beginning to better record and quantify this emerging area of service demand

23.3 The Department of Health **Warm Homes Healthy People** fund was launched by the in October 2011 in conjunction with the National Cold Weather Plan for England.. The aim of the fund is to "support local authorities in the coming winter to reduce the levels of deaths and morbidity in their local authority that are due to vulnerable people living in cold housing". For the 2012/13 winter period, £114,000 was allocated to Shropshire Council and has been used to provide emergency heating solutions to vulnerable people, 'warm packs', salt buckets and direct assistance with emergency heating costs. Community engagement has been a central strand for this area of service development, working with Parish Councils, church and community groups.

23.4 **Shropshire HeatSavers** has been developed as a partnership with between Shropshire Council's Private Sector Housing Team, Health, Age UK and Mears plc, to identify and respond to fuel poverty and poor heating amongst vulnerable people. The Private Sector Housing team act as the referral hub in Shropshire HeatSavers. HeatSavers receives in the region of 20 referrals a month, with the number increasing during periods of cold weather.

23.5 In collaboration with Telford and Wrekin and Herefordshire Councils, and Marches Energy Agency, the Council's Private Sector Housing Team successfully bid funding under the DECC Green Deal Pioneer Places scheme, successfully securing a share of £450,639 funding.

In-addition the same project group supported a national bid Cheaper Energy Together to assist householders with utility switching and secured £178,400 of funding. This funding is being used to develop a number of 'Green Deal' show houses in the County, to support local to have Green Deal Assessments carried out, and also to support community-based tariff-switching.

24.0 Disabled Adaptations

- 24.1** During 2012/13, the total number of DFG recommendations received by Private Sector Housing from OT's was 237. The total number of approvals was 157. Also during the same year, 198 DFG- funded works were completed. The total expenditure was £1,531,587
- 24.2** During the period 1st April 2013 and 30th June 2013, the total number of DFG recommendations received by Private Sector Housing from OT's was 65. The total number of approvals was 28. Also during the same period, 23 DFG- funded works were completed. The total budget for DFG's for 2013/14 is £1,520,889.
- 24.3** The provision and funding of adaptations is currently being reviewed by the Council, to improve service delivery methods and improve outcomes for vulnerable people. In August 2012, a Priority Pointing scheme was introduced to target resources towards those in most urgent need. This scheme will be reviewed and evaluated in August this year.

25.0 Empty Properties

- 25.1** The Council's Empty Homes Strategy introduced community-based 'Empty Homes Actions Zones' to better engage with local residents and businesses with regard to bringing empty homes back into use and generating employment and training opportunities for local people. Using this approach, the Private Sector Housing team has been responsible for the delivery of £300,000 New Homes Bonus incentive grant funding in Market Drayton during 2012/13. During 2013/14 the team will also be responsible for the delivery of £200,000 New Homes Bonus incentive grant funding in the Oswestry area.
- 25.2** More recently the Council has supported successful bids for the following schemes aimed at returning empty properties back into use:
- Shropshire Housing Alliance (SHA) has been successful in securing £225,000 of Government funding towards creating a total of 9 affordable homes in Oswestry.

- The Wrekin Housing Trust put in a successful bid to convert 10 unspecified empty properties in Ludlow to affordable homes and received £400k funding.

25.3 During 2012/13, the Private Sector Housing Team directly facilitated bringing 74 empty properties into use for housing.

26.0 Housing Support Services

26.1 Community Housing Services commissions 29 services countywide plus three services for Transport Solutions. Housing Support provided by two Consortia comprising of a total of 17 Housing Support Providers (nationwide RSL's, Shropshire RSL's and more localised support providers).

26.2 The total Preventative Outcomes for FY 2012/3 for all services across (excluding the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) and Transport Solutions) recorded through planned support, group work and drop ins is given in the Table below:

	Need Identified**	Need Met**	%
Housing Situation			
Tenancy failure or losing accommodation	9138	8920	97.61
Becoming homeless	4600	4515	98.15
Health and Wellbeing			
Risk of increased domiciliary care or home care	2970	2937	98.89
Risk of needing residential or nursing care	1595	1563	97.99
Presentation to Accident & Emergency services	3187	3159	99.12
Unplanned hospital admissions	4654	4594	98.71
Staying Safe			
Risk of domestic abuse	832	813	97.71
Risk of harm from others	2600	2565	98.65
Risk of self-harm	2529	2472	97.75
Risk of offending	1734	1683	97.06
Economic Wellbeing			
Deteriorating financial position	8066	7913	98.103
Risk of long-term worklessness ****	4194	4011	95.63

The Housing support services provide a valuable and effective means of supporting vulnerable people to live independently at home, while also ensuring they have the opportunity to be part of their local community

27.0 Community Housing Services Review

- 27.1** At its' meeting on 13th March 2013, Cabinet considered an initial proposal with respect to undertaking a review of Community Housing Services, to develop a commissioning framework for Community Housing Services to achieve corporate strategic outcomes, and develop a new service model for delivery of these services.
- 27.2** To develop and test commissioning options, Community Housing is playing a lead role with respect to a range of prototypes, pilots and trial service models, in partnership with Children's' and Adult Social Care services, Public Health, the CCG and voluntary sector agencies. These prototypes and pilots focus on 'live cases' and are being funded from within existing budgets, and involve using the existing resources of the respective partners to jointly support and achieve shared outcomes.
- 27.3** At the end of May 2013, a Stakeholder Questionnaire (Survey Monkey) was sent to approximately 250 stakeholders, including statutory agencies, social and voluntary sector agencies, service user, advocacy and customer engagement groups. Questions focussed on the range of housing issues facing people and communities in Shropshire, whether it was anticipated housing pressures would increase or decrease over the next 4-5 years, what stakeholders want from Community Housing Services and how they would prefer to access these services. A total of 76 responses have been received to date.
- 27.4** The top three housing concerns for stakeholder respondents were: access to affordable housing; the need for housing support; and poor heating/fuel poverty. With respect to housing pressures, 93% thought the risk of homelessness would increase, and 87% respectively thought fuel poverty/ poor heating and the need for housing support would increase. The issues most stakeholders thought would decrease were: access to affordable housing (15%) and under-occupation (12%).
- 27.5** With respect to service design and access to services, 88.2% of respondents thought housing issues can be complex with housing needs being better met through a joined up approach, with 76.1% saying they would prefer a single contact point for Community Housing Services.

27.6 With respect to approaches to commissioning, 13.1% of respondents thought Community Housing Services would be better if separately commissioned, while 71.1% thought they would be more effective if joined together as an integrated service.

27.7 This feedback will be integrated into the review of Community Housing Services, as the review progresses.

28.0 ALMO

28.1 The ALMO, Shropshire Towns and Rural Housing is managing Council homes from 1st April. It is managed by the Board and tenants and local councillors are now running the organisation ... The focus has been on developing the strategic vision of the company in the early days. The 3 year business plan for the new company has been developed that outlines the strategic objectives for the company and approved along with a comprehensive action plan for the first year of operation. The focus in the first year include the development of tenant engagement and communication, implementing plans to develop new Council housing, achieving the decent homes standard, implementing improvements in service including mobile working and identifying new business opportunities.

Emergency Planning

29.0 Flood and Water Management

29.1 Flooding and its effects on the county are high on the risk register of all the agencies engaged in planning to prevent or respond to major incidents that would disrupt the lives of local communities. Alongside the police and fire and rescue services, the council regularly reviews the risk of the county's rivers flooding and potential for flash floods. Part of this planning process is to review each agency's proposed response each type of flooding in order to develop a multi-agency response. The council has continued to lobby central government for additional resources so that can strengthen the county's flood defences.

29.2 2012/13 was the wettest English year on record. Shropshire, like other parts of the UK, suffered severe flooding with some areas being affected more than once. The Flood and Water Management Team, as a result, undertook two formal flood investigations under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. Many other, non-formal, investigations were also undertaken.

29.3 As a result of the flooding experienced, funding applications were prepared for flood alleviation schemes in Minsterley, East Church

Stretton and Bomere Heath and a number of smaller bids were entered for individual properties. These were recently put forward, and endorsed, at the Severn and Wye Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC) meeting.

- 29.4** Opportunities for joint working with both Staffordshire County and Cheshire West and Chester Councils were explored. These joint commissioning roles will be formalised in the near future, with savings through procurement and sharing of resources being one of the drivers.
- 29.5** Shropshire's Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, a legislative requirement, was commenced. Being undertaken in partnership with Staffordshire County Council, it will set out the future of local flood risk management in Shropshire.
- 29.6** Work on flood alleviation schemes continued in both Much Wenlock and Church Stretton, with construction scheduled for 2013. Funding for these schemes, totalling around £800,000, has come from Flood Defence Grant in Aid and Local Levy.
- 29.7** The team continued to act as a consultee to the planning process, checking between ten and fifteen planning applications per day. This ensures not only that new development is not placed in an area at risk of flooding, but also that flood risk does not increase as a result of new development. This process is now firmly established and Shropshire is seen as exemplary in this regard.
- 29.8** In April 2012 Shropshire Council, as Lead Local Flood Authority, took on the role of consenting works affecting ordinary watercourses. Experience as a consultee to the planning process, meant this additional role could be easily absorbed.
- 29.9** A programme of education continued throughout the year, with landowners being told about their rights and responsibilities for the management of watercourses. Assistance to homeowners on the types of action that can be taken to protect property from flooding was also given.