

HOUSING ENABLING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The West Housing Market Area

Achievements

- The West Housing Market Area is operational within the sub region but is currently under review in terms of regional membership (Telford).
- Shropshire Housing Strategy adopted by Council in February following much collaborative work.
- The West Housing Market Area Strategy Review is to be reported to Cabinet in May 2010 and rewrite as sub regional strategy with Herefordshire by April 2011.
- The West Housing Market standing conference and Executive meetings are active, meeting twice and quarterly respectively.

Affordable Housing Guidance and Information

Achievements

- Single unified interim policy adopted in July 2009 relating to exception sites, single plot exception sites and standard s106 conditions.
- Produced the “Build your own home” information pack for single plot exception site applicants.
- Produced quarterly “Developing Times” information guide to local needs affordable housing development sites throughout Shropshire.
- Held first of programmed Affordable Homes for Shropshire People event at the Pro Star stadium to introduce and explain exception site and single plot policies to stakeholders. The Guidance has wide, regional and national recognition.
- Attended Parish and Community events as part of programme of community consultation and exception site development.

Key Issues

- Fully develop and expand a rolling programme of community engagement events.
- Ensure consistency of approach and application of single plot policy through data analysis and briefings between Housing Enabling & Implementation and Development Management teams.

Affordable Housing Targets

- Helped secure (Feb 2010) over £13.79m of HCA funding to deliver in excess of 300 local needs affordable homes.
- Saw the commencement on site of 76 homes and the completion of 174 homes.
- Developed with Registered Housing Provider partners a development programme pipeline highlighting over 230 sites with the potential to deliver over 2300 local needs affordable homes in the medium term.
- Introduced an active Registered Housing Provider sub group meeting to look at national, regional and particularly local development issues.
- Hold regular development (weekly – fortnightly) meetings with individual RHP development managers to develop the pipeline schemes and address issues.
- Supported and secured through the “Kickstart” funding stream £1.79m of additional HCA funding to bring forward the stalled Spring Gardens site. Undertook work on development viability and instructed consultant to renegotiate other stalled strategic development site section 106 agreements and instruct on site viability issues – on going.
- Strategic Overview to the Local Investment Plan – part of the “single conversation” with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) currently in preparation.
- Hold regular liaison meetings with the HCA to promote and fully develop affordable housing development opportunities in Shropshire.
- Developing a one stop comprehensive s106 database of outstanding and current developer contributions.
- Develop a s106 affordable housing capital programme to fully utilise resources within binding timeframe and location that add value to local needs affordable housing.

- Using Shropshire Council capital and land (£0.55m), completed a new build of 6 x 2bed apartments, 2 units used by SC and the remaining 4 homes to be leased to a local RHP.
- Contributed to the regeneration of Moston Rd (with Growth Point) with the construction of a shop unit with flat accommodation above (completion May 2010 at £0.21m).
- Transferred at nil or District Valuer valuation, small pockets of SC land (7) to Registered Housing Provider's to enable and bring forward with HCA funding local needs affordable housing developments for 58 homes.

Key Issues

- Ensure s106 data base is comprehensive and developer contributions are fully utilised by the Council and not returned to the developer.
- Affordable housing capital programme is fully developed and considered by Cabinet.
- Through regular engagement with the RHP's and the HCA, through the Single Conversation and beyond, Shropshire Council maximises all funding opportunities.

Rural Housing Project

- Strong rural delivery programme meant Shropshire was asked to present papers to the half year review of this project to spread best practice.
- Shropshire has participated in a Practitioners Group following the Matthew Taylor Review tasked with producing guidance to local authorities to incentivise landowners to release additional land for exception site development.
- The "Oswestry pilot" scheme is aimed at identifying and bringing forward sites ready to be taken forward by partner social landlords. Nearly 170 potential sites have been appraised by the Implementation team in over 30 Parishes. Over 40 suitable sites identified for up to 215 homes. Work is on going with Landowners and communities to bring forward.
- A Shropshire exception site was nominated as the most sustainable housing scheme in a recent national award ceremony.
- Work is underway to develop an exemplar scheme for 14 sustainable low energy modular built local needs affordable homes.

- We have secured funding from the HCA and committed Shropshire Council resources to help develop and deliver 2 local needs affordable homes through the Bishops Castle Community Land Trust. This will be the first Community Land Trust scheme in the West Midlands.
- Working with a regional Building Society to develop a unique mortgage product suitable for single plot exception schemes.

Key Issues

- Issues concerning lender caution are being addressed and alternatives explored.
- Work is underway to identify a suitable site for a small development of homes to code level 6 that will explore the latest low carbon sustainable technologies, the impacts on construction costs and effects on affordable housing. In association with a local partners and subject to a television programme.
- LDF Core Strategy and Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Documents in preparation and on target.

SHREWSBURY GROWTH POINT

The Shrewsbury Growth Point provides supplementary funding for:-

- New Housing, new employment opportunities, transport infrastructure, education skills and health and wellbeing

The Shrewsbury Growth Point is currently focusing on 4 key projects:-

The Northern Corridor

- Sites include:-
 - Spring Gardens – now underway as one of the first “Kickstart” projects
 - Land West of Ellesmere Road
 - Timber Yard
 - Arlington Way – to be marketed or potentially put forward as a HCA Public Land Initiative site
 - Harlescott

Ditherington Flax Mill

- Landmark set of listed buildings on key northern gateway to Shrewsbury town centre

Shrewsbury Vision

- Exploring opportunities to development of the County Town over the next 20+ years

Affordable Housing

- 134 units currently onsite
- 248 in the pipeline.

Key Issues

- Looking to develop a Code 6 exemplar development. Will need to identify and secure site and Cabinet support to develop project management strategy and funding arrangements.
- Further site investigation work at Underdale Road has found bedrock at around 20 metres. This means that development is possible with Bromford Housing keen to develop an exemplar affordable housing scheme.
- Shrewsbury Vision contract has been awarded to Broadway Malyan who are developing a regeneration framework for Shrewsbury including Riverside, West End, Castle Foregate and Abbey Foregate. Public

consultation will take place during May/June where Members will be involved.

- Flax Mill funding strategy continuing to be developed. This includes a bid to the Heritage Lottery fund together with partner contributions. Planning application for the site to be submitted in June 2010.

HOUSING LANDLORD SERVICES

- We have a comprehensive Service Improvement Plan that addresses the concerns raised by the Audit Commissioners when they inspected Bridgnorth Housing Services and reported in Dec 2008. A peer review of the housing services in Oswestry also illustrated that a number of improvements were required. The Service Improvement Plan covers all of the CIRCA 4300 council homes in both areas.
- There has been extensive liaison with tenants both within in individual former district areas and through Shropshire Residents United Executive (SURE) which covers both stock areas. Tenants have been extensively engaged in setting performance standards i.e. undertaking routine estate walk-about.
- Tendering exercises across both stock areas have produced financial savings through economies and scale and the repairs and maintenance services have been subject to a Lean Review.
- Waiting times for adaptations in council owned stock have been halved and the service is now more responsive to customer requests for adaptations.

Key Issues

- Council strategies yet to be fully developed. Service delivery will be shaped once these are completed. This includes family poverty and older people.
- HRA Business Plan. There is uncertainty about Government proposals for housing until after the elections and the plan can be delivered. This will then allow the completion of an asset management strategy.
- Further development of partnership working required.
- The development of a new merged computer system in July will enable us to more fully monitor how we deliver services how satisfied tenants are with different aspects of the service. We will also expand the pilot project for Direct Debits and offer to all tenants.
- We now have a full year service costs and can use this to assess whether to split service costs from rents to generate income.

- Our benchmarking information was received in March. We will use this to examine our service and develop targets for efficiency savings.
- Market testing has been completed in a number of areas for maintenance contracts. We are currently exploring how far this should be extended to other service areas.

Nationally, there are still significant challenges ahead. These include:

- The national need to significantly reduce public expenditure will, understandably, impact on the service.
- The Housing Finance Reform proposals have yet to be fully assessed. In addition, the change of Government may mean that further proposals may be made.
- Once the national picture is in place the future plans for Landlord Services can be developed to ensure that the service development maximises the opportunities available.

HOUSING COMMUNITY

- The Supporting People Commissioning Framework has been redefined and reviews of Older People's and Young People's Services are currently underway to ensure the proper focussing on the Supporting People Grant.
- Private Sector Housing has consulted on the timely provision of the Disabled Facilities Grant to private sector and registered social landlord properties. An empty homes strategy is presently being prepared and will be presented to the Council for adoption in the near future.
- The homelessness contract previously operated by South Shropshire Housing Association for the former south district area has been terminated by mutual consent and there is now 1 homelessness service operating across the county. The emphasis on preventing homelessness remains including the maximisation of opportunities in the private rented sector and the prevention of repossession.
- The Choice Based Lettings Scheme is operated jointly by Shropshire Housing Group and Shropshire Council. The partnership is hopeful that Severnside Housing will join as full partner in the near future.

Key Issues

- Extend the Common Allocation Policy across the major Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), including as a minimum the three large scale voluntary stock transfer RSLs.

- Establish a housing register in common with the council and the three large RSLs.
- Introduce a common Choice Based Lettings Scheme.
- Keep to a minimum any empty social housing stock irrespective of tenure.
- Undertake work to bring empty homes back into use as affordable housing.
- Increase support from partner agencies to deliver Adaptations service.
- Complete all the actions arising from the Audit Commission inspection report on Supporting People.
- Develop and implement a revised Supporting People Commissioning Plan based on the outcomes from a robust needs assessment.

Reshape Supporting People services subsequent to receipt of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.