



NOTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GROUP
TUESDAY 26 OCTOBER 2010

Held at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Pavilion Road, West Bridgford

PRESENT:

Councillors Mrs J A Smith (Chairman), S J Boote, T Combellack, M G Hemsley, T W Holt, G R Mallender, P W Smith (appointed as a substitute for Councillor J E Cottee), J A Stockwood and B Tansley

OFFICERS PRESENT:

S Dempsey	Principal Conservation & Design Officer
D Dwyer	Strategic Housing Manager
S Harley	Head of Planning and Place Shaping
P Marshall	Principal Planner
V Nightingale	Senior Member Support Officer
P Randle	Deputy Chief Executive (PR)

APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE:

Councillor J E Cottee

8. Declarations of Interest

There were none declared.

9. Notes of the Previous Meeting

The notes of the meeting held on Monday 26 July 2010 were accepted as a true record.

Councillor Boote raised the issue of tetrapaks and how too much emphasis was put on to the amount of increased weight recycling different materials could achieve. He felt that other issues should be taken into account such as environmental impact, reducing the amount of waste sent to landfill. He believed it was vital that the Council found a supplier who could re-use this material.

Councillor Stockwood drew Members attention to Item 5 Children and Young People and the Group's request to reconsider this issue in early 2011.

10. Cabinet Member Questions

There were none received.

11. Affordable Housing in Rural Areas

The Principal Planner gave a presentation on the process, progress and future of the Council's programme to build affordable homes in the rural areas, known as exception sites, which were supported by national government

policy. He stated that this type of development did not compromise the Green Belt or countryside policies. Members were informed of the Trent Valley Partnership that had been developed to deliver these projects. It was felt that the Partnership approach gave a more robust methodology and a degree of control.

Members were informed that the process had been developed and had evolved over time. As part of the process all small villages of less than 3,000 people had been contacted to seek support for such schemes. If the parish council was supportive the Partnership carried out a survey to identify a viable site, village need and general support. As part of an exception site the land was sold at agricultural values which enabled sites to be viable and affordable. Following a question Members were informed that these houses remained affordable in perpetuity and, if shared ownership, that there would always be some equity in the property that was not for sale.

The Group were informed that 14 housing needs surveys had been undertaken resulting in 12 potential sites for rural exception development being considered. The 12 sites were capable of delivering up to 82 affordable properties within the smaller parishes across the Borough.

The Group considered the process as set out in the appendix and whether it was appropriate. With regard to the process, Members were informed that after five years the reliability of a survey was doubtful; however within those five years the process could be restarted at any point. The Strategic Housing Manager explained that in East Bridgford a new survey had been undertaken. With regard to the two parishes that had not progressed schemes Members were informed that it was probably due to a lack of support as there was sufficient development in the area; surveys were undertaken following support from the parish council but there had to be a local need identified. Also as the parishes were key to the process they could opt out of the process at any time.

The Strategic Housing Manager explained that nationally new initiatives regarding housing trusts were being developed which would give parish councils more control, however the Council had received very little information at present. Following a question regarding the required level of support proposed and the costs associated with a possible referendum to enable a development to proceed without the need for planning permission, the Deputy Chief Executive (PR) explained that as yet there was no further information but agreed to inform Members as soon as possible.

Following a question, the Group were informed that the Partnership had initially developed a programme to survey all parishes under 3,000 population which were considered sustainable as this was a key criteria for leveraging funding from the Homes and Communities Agency. All of these parishes had now been completed. The Partnership were now consulting with the parishes again to identify areas where there was support to carry out another survey.

Members queried why there was a need for the Partnership to have control of the process. The Strategic Housing Manager explained that the Partnership had to ensure that planning policy was followed and that the process was consistent, transparent and engaged with residents. The Head of Planning and Place Shaping stated that it was imperative that the Council could show that

the money was being spent fairly over the Borough. The Deputy Chief Executive (PR) explained that the Council, as part of the Partnership, had acted as a conduit, provided confidence for the parishes and links to the planning process. He also stated that with regard to the second development at East Bridgford the Partnership had less involvement.

With regard to funding, Members were informed that following stock transfer the Council had committed £4.8 million towards social housing and that some of this funding had been made available for exception sites. The average grant for exception site developments equated to £15,000 per unit.

Following a question, officers explained that there were extra criteria to the tenancy requirements to ensure that local need was met. With regard to shared ownership there was a national criteria that the household purchasing an intermediate product, including shared ownership must not earn more than £60,000 per annum.

Members queried how agricultural land was obtained and whether incentives were offered. Officers stated that no incentives were available and that one of the drivers was a social conscience, also the land was not able to be used for market value housing. Members were given an example of land at Kinoulton that had been owned by a local family.

The Group discussed the definition of Affordable Housing and agreed with the national definition as defined in Planning Policy 3. It was felt that some schemes would not have support because people did not understand the definition of affordable/social housing. However, as each scheme was completed this should dissipate concerns.

Members agreed that the process set out in Appendix 1 to support Rural Affordable Housing was appropriate and felt that it did not need to be altered or strengthened in any way.

Whilst considering whether the programme had been successful and offered value for money, Members of the Group discussed whether the schemes were meeting the needs of the local area. It was noted that more need was identified in the west of the Borough whereas more schemes had been developed in the east; officers explained that this was due to support for the schemes. The Strategic Housing Manager explained that although a couple of the shared ownership units had been hard to sell due to the current economic climate all the units were now occupied. It was confirmed that as the affordable units were required to be kept in perpetuity they would continue to meet local need.

The Group discussed the Council's grant towards energy efficiency measures for the new developments and whether this met the needs of vulnerable people or if it could be used differently. Officers explained that when developing properties officers tried to address as many of the Council's priorities as possible, including the use of renewable energy and reducing fuel poverty. Members agreed that it was more cost effective to fit energy efficiency measures as part of a new build rather than retrofitting properties which proved to be very costly.

Members agreed that the Council should continue to provide support for the provision of affordable housing in rural areas on the current basis.

It was AGREED that

- i) the Group recognised the work that had been undertaken by the Trent Valley Partnership and considered that the programme had been successful and offered value for money, and
- ii) that the programme should be supported in its present form in the future.

12. **Small Environmental Improvements Programme**

The Principal Conservation & Design Officer gave a short presentation on the small environmental improvement programme. She explained that it had been introduced in 1993 and aimed to provide money for schemes to enhance the public realm, from providing benches to improving shopping parades. There was also the parish planting scheme where up to £500 per parish could be awarded towards tree and bulb planting. In 2003 £850,000 was included in the programme for West Bridgford Town Centre. The annual budget for the programme was £105,000 plus £28,000 for fees. With regard to the parish planting scheme one parish expressed concerns this year about the use of resources for this purpose.

It was explained that a letter was sent to all parishes and Borough Councillors every two to three years for proposals. The criteria were that the scheme had to provide a visual enhancement, was not on public land wholly owned by either the Borough or County Council or fell under the remit of another budget. The majority of schemes were designed to have no, or low, maintenance. Contributions were not requested from the parishes although shop owners were asked for a contribution where their frontages were being improved.

Members discussed the marketing of the scheme and felt that there should be an annual update to Members. The Deputy Chief Executive (PR) explained that originally there had been a sub committee to oversee the programme; however the cost of administration of the programme had to be balanced against the overall scheme budget. Members felt that there should at least be involvement in the schemes from the Ward Member.

With regard the funding some Members were concerned that some of the schemes were too large and that by funding these projects it did not support the Council's decision to remove grant funding for the parishes and ensuring that the parishes raised their own funds. However, it was recognised that the Borough Council had the officer expertise which would be difficult for all parishes to have. If more power and responsibility was devolved to parishes this could become a challenge. Members felt that there should be more information how this scheme dovetailed with other grants available from the Council.

In respect of the programme, officers explained that there was a five year rolling programme and there was a pool of schemes to be considered. However, the programme was coming to an end and was due to be refreshed.

Members and officers felt that there was an opportunity for the scheme to be evaluated, to consider whether it offered value for money and what measures could be implemented to assist in deciding if the scheme was successful. It was also felt that the scheme should be linked to the Council's priorities and not the Community Strategy. Another aspect to be considered would be match funding, although this had not been part of the original scheme it had to be considered in the present economic climate. Members felt that by asking for match funding this would dissuade the smaller parishes and those areas that were unparished, and could be inequitable towards the larger parishes.. It was noted that there would be a freeze on how much Council Tax could be raised by the parish/town and Borough Councils. Members were reminded that Cropwell Bishop had, with the support of its residents, raised a significant amount via the parish precept to build a community hall.

Members considered whether the programme should be limited to schemes of under £10,000.

Following a question, officers explained that if in a year the budget was uncommitted it would be returned to allocations, however the budget had always been committed.

The Group agreed that Members supported the parish planting scheme.

It was AGREED that

- i) the Group recognised the work that had been undertaken as part of the Small Environmental Improvements Programme; but
- ii) considered that the future of the programme should be reviewed having particular regard to the Council's current budget discussions.

13. Programme

The Group considered its work programme. It felt that the issue of Children and Young People should be added to the Group's meeting in April. The Deputy Chief Executive (PR) explained that, at a recent Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice Chairmen's meeting it had been agreed that the work programmes needed to be flexible and that they might be need to be revised.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm.

Action Sheet

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GROUP - TUESDAY 26 OCTOBER 2010

Minute Number	Actions	Officer Responsible
11. Affordable Housing in Rural Areas	The Deputy Chief Executive (PR) agreed to inform Members as soon as possible regarding the new national initiative in respect of housing trusts especially regarding the required level of support proposed and the costs associated with a possible referendum.	Deputy Chief Executive (PR)