



NOTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GROUP
TUESDAY 17 JULY 2012

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

PRESENT:

Councillors N C Lawrence (Chairman), S J Boote, N K Boughton-Smith, T Combellack, L B Cooper, J E Greenwood, M G Hemsley, Mrs M M Males, G R Mallender

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors D G Bell and R M Jones.

OFFICERS PRESENT:

M Dunne	Principal Area Planning Officer
D Dwyer	Strategic Housing Manager
S Harley	Head of Planning and Place Shaping
C McGraw	Head of Community Shaping
M Marshall	Principal Area Planning Officer
V Nightingale	Senior Member Support Officer
A Pegram	Development Control Manager
P Randle	Deputy Chief Executive (PR)

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

There were no apologies for absence

1. Declarations of Interest

There were none declared.

2. Notes of the Previous Meeting

The notes of the meeting held on Monday 26 March 2012 were accepted as a true record.

With regard to the action points Members were informed that these had all been completed. The Deputy Chief Executive (PR) gave a further update on the Site of Interest for Nature Conservation adjacent to the disused railway line in Ruddington. He explained that the land was owned by the Railway Heritage Trust and the Nottingham Wildlife Trust was currently looking at obtaining a licence to manage the area. Negotiations were taking place regarding the use of Section 106 money to enable the Wildlife Trust to maintain the site for a minimum of ten years. It was envisaged that work would commence within the next few months.

3. Cabinet Member Questions

There had been none received.

4. Choice Based Lettings Progress Report 2012

The Strategic Housing Manager presented a report on the Choice Based Lettings scheme which had now been in operation for around fifteen months. Members were informed that there were fourteen housing associations and three councils operating the sub regional scheme. The scheme has one common housing register and everyone uses the same IT software framework. Properties are advertised on a weekly basis and the person who bids and is the highest on the list is offered the tenancy. It was felt that this was a more open and transparent process although it had to be recognised that there was no guarantee that somebody would be housed quicker, as this was determined by the number of properties available.

Members were informed that a piece of work was to be undertaken later in the year to ascertain how accessible the system was and why 41% of people registered had not made a bid. Officers assured Members that assistance was available from staff, who could bid on people's behalf or there was an autobid facility. Another area for consultation was the review of the housing allocations policy. This could have some wide ranging changes due to the flexibility that was introduced as part of the Localism Act. This was a complex issue as all three local authorities had a common Allocations Policy; however each area would have to reflect their own local circumstances.

Following the commencement of the scheme officers had taken on board partners' and customers' comments and had made some changes to the system. Originally the properties had been advertised every two weeks but this had been changed to weekly in order to speed up the process. Also the system could offer people a more holistic approach and could signpost people towards other services, ie jobs in the local area.

Following a question the Strategic Housing Manager explained the differences between the four bands with Band 1 being in urgent need to Band 4 who were low priority. It was also recognised that as people's circumstances changed they could move up and down the bands. Members were concerned that some people in Band 1 were not bidding. Officers explained that the system enabled officers to identify anyone who had not made a bid within a set timescale, if they were in Bands 1 or 2 then officers would contact them and see why and whether they needed any further assistance. Members were informed that people who were in temporary accommodation had up to twelve weeks to make a bid. Officers felt that this was too long and were proposing to shorten this to six weeks, especially as the hostels were being fully utilised.

Members asked questions about the number of allocations across the bands. Officers explained that the figures could be skewed by the number of sheltered accommodation that was being let and also the hard to let properties, which would be taken by people in Band 4 or even from the other two councils' areas. The scheme had been devised with an approximate 5% cross boundary mobility, although it was recognised that there still had to be a local connection for the majority of lettings.

In respect of vulnerable people Members were concerned that it was more difficult to identify the needs of people with mental disabilities and asked how officers identified the most appropriate way forward. The Strategic Housing

Manager explained that each case was assessed on its own merits and if necessary asked for supporting information from a doctor or a specialist. Unfortunately officers could only act upon the information they were given, however, officers in the Housing Options Team had a wide experience base and would signpost people to various agencies that could assist them. Also if the team had concerns they would seek further information to assist the person. Referring to the report Members stated that people with learning disabilities might have less engagement with Choice Based Lettings than other categories of disability. The Strategic Housing Manager stated that this was an area where further research would be undertaken and contact would be made with those people to ascertain if there were any barriers stopping them using the system.

With regard to the number of people on the register Members were informed that demand for housing did outstrip supply and that on average 25 applicants were rehoused every month. Annually officers conducted a review of the register and approximately 40% did not respond and therefore their application was removed, thus keeping the register at approximately 1,200. To help meet demand officers were considering innovative ways to use the private sector. Members were concerned that the number of people on the waiting list without any need (Band 4) factored into their deliberations regarding the number of houses that needed to be built and therefore if the actual need was less than the number of people on the list this could affect the decisions the Council made and the pressure that was put on developers to deliver more social housing. In response, the Strategic Housing Manager said the evidence base for determining housing need not only took account of numbers on the housing register (backlog need) but also demographic data which was used to ensure the Council adequately planned for future emerging households. Most of the need (evidence base) for affordable housing came from emerging households (74%) rather than people on the housing register.

In response to a question Members were informed that there had been a restructure in the Housing Allocations Team at Metropolitan Housing Trust, which had coincided with a number of people being on leave and this had impacted on the figures for April and May 2012 but this had now been resolved.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Group, stated that the report had been excellent and very informative.

It was AGREED that this subject should remain with the Community Development Group for further scrutiny next year and that one of the elements for the next report should be how the team in partnership with Metropolitan Housing Trust deal with hard to let properties.

5. Planning Application – Public Notification Process

The Deputy Chief Executive (PR) stated that there had been a request to scrutinise the notification process. The Group were presented with information regarding the current process and the reasons why people were consulted. The Development Control Manager had produced a flow chart which illustrated how a planning application was considered, what steps there were in the

process and how the consultation could impact on that process. The Development Control Manager explained that consultations on amended plans were not required by law.

The Group acknowledged that the Council met its statutory obligations, had a very sound process in place, did considerably more than it had to regarding notifications and provided a very good service. Members felt that this was an area that required consideration to identify issues that were reported to Councillors and to ascertain if there were any areas that could be improved.

The Group were shown examples of recent applications and how, depending on the impact of the development, the notification exercise was undertaken. He explained that although people might be interested in the development only material planning considerations could be taken into account. It was recognised that it was a balance between raising people's expectations that they could influence a decision and planning guidance regarding material considerations. However, anyone could comment on an application and everyone who had made a comment would be consulted if the application was resubmitted. Referring to the examples the Development Control Manager explained that, on a recent application, officers had asked for the proposed flight paths of the helicopters and consulted with everyone in that area.

Following a question, officers explained that a large number of applications are publicised via a site notice. Officers used Ordnance Survey maps to identify properties that should be consulted. At the site visit the officer could also identify additional properties and some applications were advertised in local papers. All applications were on the Council's website, paper copies were held at the Rushcliffe Community Contact Centre and paper copies were sent to town and parish councils.

The Development Control Manager explained that officers had initiated areas for improvements and these included notifying adjacent parishes regarding applications that could have a wider impact and now a map of the application site was shown on the site notice. Following a suggestion the Development Control Manager stated that the Council's system was being updated and it was hoped that soon the decision notice would automatically either be sent electronically, if an email address had been supplied, or by post.

Members queried the consultation process regard the siting of telephone masts and whether everyone within the perceived radiation area should be notified. Officers explained that near neighbours were notified, a site notice was erected and that any school within a 250 metre radius was consulted. The health implications were taken into consideration by other agencies; the Development Control Manager stated that where a mast met the ICNIRP (International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection) regulations, then health would not be a material planning consideration when deciding an application.

With regard to site notices Members raised concerns that these were not being removed following a decision. It was suggested that the parish council should be asked to remove them. Officers stated that they were considering asking the applicant to remove the site notice. Although as all parishes did receive

notification of the decisions this could act as a trigger for them, or Ward Members, to remove the notice.

In respect of training for parish councillors the Head of Planning and Place Shaping stated that this had been an item at a recent parish forum and she had made the presentation available to the parish clerk.

Members asked officers to consider:

- Informing adjacent ward members, if a consultation crosses the ward boundaries
- Consider ringing/emailing the ward member before a site visit to ascertain if the development would have a wider impact
- Sending site notices to the parish council to place on their notice boards, as was already done for conservation areas and listed buildings
- Ward Members could contact community associations in their areas as they were not statutory consultees. Also they could have the weekly list of planning applications
- Putting a QR (quick response) code on the site notice

The Chairman thanked the officers for attending the meeting and providing an informative and interactive session. It was acknowledged that officers and Members were working in partnership to ensure that the community were informed and that they did not have their expectations raised unrealistically.

6. **Work Programme**

The Group considered its work programme. It recognised that there was flexibility within the programme to accommodate any issues arising from the Localism Act.

The meeting closed at 9.10 pm.