

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

27 May 2009

**Joint Report of the Director of Planning Transport and Leisure and
the Director of Health and Housing**

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Council Decision

1 STRATEGIC HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENT REPORT

Summary

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) conducted by David Coultie Associates (DCA). The report seeks Members' endorsement of this document, prepared in partnership with Sevenoaks District Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and recommends that it be adopted as a material consideration for Development Control. A presentation by David Coultie was made to the Strategic Housing Advisory Board on 23 February to which PTAB Members were invited. The matter was considered by the Strategic Housing Advisory Board on that night in terms of its implications for housing policy.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 This report was deferred from the meeting of the Board in January due to the inability of David Coultie to attend January's meeting of the Strategic Housing Advisory Board. There was no meeting of PTAB in March so this is the first opportunity Members have had to consider this matter since David Coultie's presentation to SHAB on 23 February.

1.1.2 David Coultie Associates (DCA) was commissioned jointly by the Borough Council, Sevenoaks District Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to undertake the SHMA on behalf of the three authorities. The report has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of PPS3 and the Communities and Local Government (CLG) "Strategic Housing Market Assessments Practical Guidance" (August 2007), to gain a robust and comprehensive assessment of housing demand and need within the Borough. The last similar surveys produced were the Housing Needs and Affordability Study (2002), and the Housing Needs and Market Assessment (2005) which informed the preparation of the Core Strategy and subsequent Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) .

1.1.3 Tunbridge Wells Borough Council led the exercise, as both they and Sevenoaks District Council required the report as an evidence base to support the preparation of their Core Strategies. The requirement to prepare such a study, and guidance on how to do it, post-dates the submission of our Core Strategy. We agreed to participate principally because the other two parties could not prepare a sub-regional study without our active involvement. In any event, it was considered useful to serve as an updating of our market evidence and to refine our approach to implementation of our planning policies and housing strategy objectives. Its publication is currently amongst the criteria for Housing Planning Delivery Grant award.

1.1.4 The report, which has now been published, informs the further development of housing and planning policies in the West Kent market area. The document makes recommendations on:

- the general mix of market housing by size to be delivered from future new developments, which is something new that is not addressed in our Core Strategy;
- the target levels for affordable housing and future unit delivery by size; and
- the type and size of affordable housing to be provided in the future.

1.2 Key Findings

1.2.1 The recommendations on the target levels for affordable housing, as well as the type and size of affordable housing to be provided in the future provides a clear endorsement of the Council's adopted policies. The affordable housing trigger thresholds for planning applications, affordable housing unit size percentage ratios and affordable housing tenure splits contained in the adopted Core Strategy and Affordable Housing SPD are identical to those recommended in the SHMA. **There is, therefore, no need to consider amending these documents as a result of this study.** However, the housing needs data upon which the Study is based is only valid until 2010, at which stage it may require fully updating.

1.2.2 The report also recognises the volatility of the current housing market, although this has done nothing to alter the need for improved access to affordable housing. What it has done is to sharpen the focus on the type and tenure mix during the initial stages of proposed development schemes so that future occupation of housing projects granted planning permission can be managed to best effect in terms of housing management and community support.

1.2.3 The key findings of the report are:

- the proposed scale of future provision of housing in the Draft South East Plan (as proposed to be changed by the Secretary of State) to 2026 is lower than would be required to fully meet demand levels in the market sector (notwithstanding current market circumstances) and affordable

housing need. This conclusion is hardly surprising in a predominantly restraint, Green Belt area and clearly from a planning viewpoint is over-simplistic as such factors must be balanced against other important considerations;

- future market housing provision should seek to address current stock imbalances and meet predicted demographic change, which effectively means the provision of more housing suitable for smaller households, but this does not necessarily mean 1 bedroom flats;
- it is necessary to consider a range of site thresholds below 15 units in sub-areas within each authority, recognising that viability issues may require even lower target levels. This is the approach that we have adopted. A lower threshold (five units) applies in the rural areas and viability is considered on a site-by-site basis;
- a detailed feasibility study needs to be undertaken of the various delivery issues for intermediate market rent which is a matter for the Strategic Housing Advisory Board to consider in reviewing the Council's Housing Strategy
- the need to develop Housing Strategies to make the best use of the existing stock by providing positive incentives to improve the turn-over of family houses in the social sector. This is likewise a matter for Strategic Housing Advisory Board;
- there is a requirement to address the current and future growth in older people and frail older households across all tenures and their related care and support needs. This is material to both the housing and planning functions of the Council.

1.2.4 The SHMA will inform the Council's new Housing Strategy document, as well as provide robust evidence for our continuing enabling efforts for affordable housing provision in association with future planning applications.

1.3 Planning Implications

1.3.1 As mentioned above, it is gratifying that the conclusions of this up-to-date assessment endorse the approach in our currently adopted planning documents. There is only one area that is new and that is the advice on the mix of market housing required. The recommended mix is:

- 5% - 1 Bedroom units;
- 50% - 2 bedroom units;
- 40% - 3 bedroom units;
- 5% - 4 bedroom + units

- 1.3.2 It is a requirement of PPS3 that Core Strategies should include advice on the mix of market household types but, as mentioned above, this advice post-dated the submission of our Core Strategy. Whilst we were able to take on board some of the changes in the latest version of PPS3, it was impossible to meet this particular requirement because the 2005 Housing Needs Assessment, that informed our Core Strategy, had not addressed this issue.
- 1.3.3 In the case of the SHMA David Coultie has expressed market household demand in terms of dwellings size and type. These conclusions are a material consideration for development control. That is not to say that development that does not meet these requirements should be refused, but it will help inform decisions on the appropriateness of planning submissions. For example, the relative lack of need for 1 bedroom flats. What PPS3 says is that “developers should bring forward proposals for market housing that reflect the demand and profile of households requiring market housing as evidenced in the SHMA”. It is therefore as much advice to the housebuilders as it is to the planning authority.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 In accordance with the requirements of PPS3 and Communities and Local Government (CLG) “Strategic Housing Market Assessments Practical Guidance” (August 2007) local authorities are required to carry out such surveys to gain a robust and comprehensive assessment of housing demand and need within the housing market area. The previous Studies only applied to the Borough and would not therefore comply with this requirement.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 The cost of preparing the report has been covered by the LDF Reserve fund and has been shared equally between the three authorities. The Housing and Planning Delivery Grant rewards the preparation of such a study and more or less covers its cost.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 There was a risk that the conclusions of the Study might have in some way conflicted with the content of the Core Strategy or the Affordable Housing SPD which might have necessitated their early review. Fortunately, this is not the case.

1.7 Recommendation

- 1.7.1 That the West Kent Strategic Housing Market Assessment **BE ADOPTED** as a material consideration for development control.

Background papers: None

contact: Brian Gates

John Batty
Director of Health and Housing

Steve Humphrey
Director of Planning Transport and Leisure