

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

7 November 2011

Report of the Director of Health and Housing

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 STRATEGY & ENABLING UPDATE

Summary

This report updates Members on the progress being made by the Council's Registered Provider (RP) Partners in providing new affordable housing in the Borough, and summarises the programmes for 2010/11 to 2013/14. The report goes on to describe the progress on housing strategy matters.

- 1.1.1 The effective negotiation, planning and delivery of affordable housing forms one of the key priorities of the Council's housing service. Allied to this is the need to track and monitor the progress of RPs in delivering new schemes. Failure to secure a steady supply of new homes has a direct knock-on effect on the levels of homeless households placed in temporary accommodation or bed and breakfast. Members will be aware that the Council is under a duty not to house homeless families with children in bed and breakfast except in an emergency, and then for a period not exceeding six weeks.
- 1.1.2 While we are dependent on our partners to ensure timely delivery of new housing, the Council also has a role to play in tracking performance. This is important to ensure that any difficulties arising on new schemes are highlighted early on and corrective action taken.
- 1.1.3 Set out at **[Annex 1]** is a monitoring spreadsheet showing the completed schemes in the year to date and the development programme to 2013/14. The table identifies:
- the scheme address;
 - RP Partner;
 - start on site (SoS);
 - total number of units to be provided (rent and/or shared ownership);
 - detailed split of rent and shared ownership units;

- expected date of completion; and
- information on progress.

- 1.1.4 Members should be aware that details on some schemes may alter where planning permission has yet to be secured. The number of units to be provided is therefore an indicative figure for strategic planning purposes, pending confirmation of final scheme details. As new schemes come forward these will be also be added to the schedule.
- 1.1.5 Members will note that the projected development programme for 2011/12 has recently only shown the Kings Hill affordable housing from Russet Homes, and hence the delivery for this period is estimated to be lower than previous years, which showed a very healthy level of performance. However Russet Homes are now expecting to complete four homes at Leybourne Grange in this year's delivery too. Overall Members will be glad to see that subsequent periods show a high yield of affordable housing connected to schemes that have both planning permission and a commitment to delivery from the developer and housing association partner.
- 1.1.6 The dip in outturn for the 2011/12 period is likely connected to the preceding downturn in the housing market and wider uncertainties connected to grant funding for affordable homes and the Government's emerging housing and planning policy frameworks, and is therefore not limited just to Tonbridge & Malling. However viewed over the wider Comprehensive Spending Review period of 2011 to 2015 the programme remains very healthy.

1.2 Registered Provider Framework Submissions (LIP)

- 1.2.1 Members will recall that the HCA tasked each RP to submit a four year development package to Government by the start of May which detailed the funding ask of each scheme, by Borough and District. The Council worked extensively with each of our RP Partners following the endorsement of the West Kent Local (including Maidstone) Investment Plan (LIP) to ensure that these packages were both robust and in line with our strategic expectations and aspirations.
- 1.2.2 The HCA expect to be in contract with each RP by the end of November confirming their programme up until 2015, following which a more detailed breakdown of each Partners aspirations can be shared through a subsequent report to the Board. The contract between the HCA and each RP will detail a number of factors, linked to the level of public subsidy the HCA are distributing nationally.
- 1.2.3 This will include "firm" schemes that have certainty of delivery within the 2011-15 period, where planning time scales are robustly understood, and also "indicative" schemes where these factors are not presently known but completion by end of March 2015 is expected.

- 1.2.4 The HCA are aware that considerable time has passed since the original west Kent LIP (including Maidstone) was created, and are therefore looking to refresh its contents in further meetings between the four local authorities involved. Housing will report further progress on the LIP refresh and other Framework related matters through future papers to this Board.

1.3 Kent Forum Housing Strategy Update

- 1.3.1 The development of the Kent Forum Housing Strategy (formerly known as the Kent & Medway Housing Strategy) is a commitment in the Kent Regeneration Framework. The stated ambition for the project was to develop a “fit for purpose Housing Strategy for Kent and Medway that provides strategic direction, innovation and actions as a response to the huge diversity of housing need and opportunities across Kent and Medway”. The Strategy was launched in May with the title “Better homes: localism, aspiration and choice - A housing strategy for Kent and Medway”.
- 1.3.2 The implementation of the Strategy will be delivered by Kent Housing Group (KHG) on behalf of the Kent Forum, working together with other cross-Kent networks such as Kent Planning Officers Group and the Joint Policy and Planning Board for Housing. The Kent Forum has requested that the Strategy be refreshed to ensure that further iterations will be developed to reflect the fast moving legislative and policy environment moving forward.
- 1.3.3 In relation to the refresh proposal the Council’s housing and planning officers met with the team behind the Strategy in August to ensure that its implementation was aligned with our own key housing priorities for the next four years. The Strategy’s Implementation Plan contains:
- a report on progress since the endorsement of the first Strategy;
 - updated case studies to include examples that relate to the recommendations of the first Strategy;
 - updated asks of Government to reflect current concerns;
 - SHMA “Market Update”; and
 - summary of what has happened in the external environment (national policy changes etc) and take coherent position on these.

The subsequent refresh proposal was approved by the Kent Forum in September.

1.4 Older Persons Protocol

The Council continues to work with KHG in the creation of an Older Persons Protocol. This document is a key output of the Kent and Medway Housing Strategy, and also links to the Council's Housing Strategy Action Plan 2009 -12.

- 1.4.1 The Protocol remains in its very early stages, but is looking to assist the wider enabling process for older persons developments to ensure the full range of housing need for this demographic can be best met. The west Kent local authorities are meeting shortly to explore the potential of performing a small pilot with the Elderly Accommodation Council in relation to providing detailed advice to older persons about existing suitable housing in the area. Future reports to this Board will update Members on this exciting project.

1.5 Rural Programme

- 1.5.1 Members will be aware of the Council's ongoing Rural Housing Needs programme, as described within Annex E of the adopted Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document. The surveys are conducted independently through Action With Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK).
- 1.5.2 ACRK have recently responded to the changing funding environments and are now engaged with Kent's local authorities by operating through Kent Housing Group, and subsequently have a healthy programme of studies moving forward.
- 1.5.3 The Council has issued a clear brief to ACRK to complete the studies already commissioned for Addington and West Malling, and we will update Members on the progress of these with further reports to this Board. We look forward to widening this programme to other parts of the Borough in the future.

1.6 Coldharbour Project

- 1.6.1 Members will be aware of the ongoing project between Kent County Council and the Council in refurbishing and enlarging the existing Coldharbour Gypsy and Traveller site in Aylesford. The site currently consists of eight pitches, and in 2009 planning permission was granted for expansion into land immediately to the west for a new site of eighteen pitches. However, the grant regime that the project sought to access was abolished by the HCA as the wider economic environment worsened.
- 1.6.2 Earlier this year HCA offered KCC the opportunity to obtain £932k of unused grant allocation for the provision of Gypsy and Traveller pitches from elsewhere in the country. KCC have accepted this allocation, which is conditional upon the start of a scheme by April 2012.
- 1.6.3 Although sizeable the allocation was not enough to cover the entire capital cost of the project. However, the necessary land was acquired and a new architect was appointed by the Project Board to design an acceptable new site that was

achievable to the available funding. This has resulted in a new site design for twenty six pitches, against the current onsite provision of eight pitches.

- 1.6.4 The new site design was refined and developed working in partnership with local and lead Members, along with a consultation event for the current site residents and wider Gypsy and Traveller community in Tonbridge & Malling.
- 1.6.5 The Council is glad to report that this has enabled the Project Board to submit a detailed planning application in September, for determination in early November. Hopefully this will enable a suitable contractor to be tendered for and thus allowing the funding requirement for a start on site by April next year to be fulfilled.
- 1.6.6 There remains a capital funding shortfall between the HCA allocation and scheme costs. KCC have committed to funding this gap to enable the provision of an 18 pitch scheme (leaving a balance of eight to be provided from the 26 hopefully gaining consent). The Project Board are seeking to bid for further HCA funding that is known to be available for the final eight pitches, for which the infrastructure (access road and utilities) will already be in place. The Council has also committed to contributing £11k towards project management disbursements for the latest Coldharbour scheme.
- 1.6.7 Members are reminded that the expansion of the existing Coldharbour scheme is to allow the Borough to meet the pitch shortfall described in our Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment, and is therefore to address the identified housing needs of our Gypsy and Traveller population.
- 1.6.8 **Kent Housing Group Conference 2011**
- 1.6.9 In October representatives across the Council's housing service attended the second annual Kent Housing Group Conference. This was an excellent event that included key note speakers such as Henry Cleary, OBE, Deputy Director, Department for Communities and Local Government and Naisha Polaine, Head of Area for Essex and Kent for the HCA.

1.7 Low Cost Home Ownership Initiatives

- 1.7.1 The Homebuy Agent Moat provides a report for Tonbridge & Malling on low cost home ownership initiatives, as shown in Table 2 below.
- 1.7.2 Members will note that the level of interest in low cost home ownership initiatives remains high, compared to the actual number of sales, which remain low compared to previous years. This reflects the downturn in the housing market and wider economy.

Table 2 – TMBC Homebuy Statistics Quarters 1 & 2 (April – September) 2011

Low Cost Home Ownership Product	Number of Households
Number of Enquiries	168
Number of Applications	159
Homebuy Direct Sales	0
First Time Buyers Initiative Sales	0
Newbuild Homebuy Sales	2
Resales	8

1.8 Legal Implications

1.8.1 The Council needs to secure a sufficient supply of affordable housing to meet its statutory duties.

1.9 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.9.1 The Affordable Housing Programme (AHP) is the means by which public subsidy is secured for the delivery of affordable housing. RPs must adhere to strict value for money and design considerations imposed by the HCA.

1.10 Risk Assessment

1.10.1 Failure to secure sufficient investment in affordable housing could mean that the Council is unable to deliver its local strategic housing priorities and meet its statutory obligations to the homeless and others in housing need resulting in unacceptable financial and reputational risk.

Background papers:

contact: Chris Knowles

Nil

John Batty
Director of Health and Housing