

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

19 May 2014

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 STRATEGY AND 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 2012/13 to 2014/15. The report goes on to describe the progress on various housing strategy initiatives.

- 1.1.1 The effective negotiation, planning and delivery of affordable housing forms one of the key priorities of the Council and an area of significant activity for the housing and planning services. 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 work with our partners to plan and ensure timely delivery of new housing, the Council also has a role to play in facilitating progress and 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 2014/15. 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 and some may not proceed. 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.

1.2 Affordable Housing Scheme Updates

1.2.1 Members will be pleased to note that through our Registered Provider Partners the Council delivered over 200 new affordable homes for the 2013-14 period, 86 for shared ownership and 130 for affordable and social rent. This is approximately double the number of affordable homes from the previous, when the Council exceeded a very respectable 100 new homes.

1.2.2 The Pinnacles scheme in Tonbridge delivered through Circle Housing Russet has now been completed, with the housing association having a formal launch event for local Members and other stakeholders in early May. Members will be reassured to know that the additional shared ownership homes were successfully marketed, with the scheme being very well received by those looking to take their first step onto the housing ladder.

1.2.3 The Cannon Lane (Crab Apple) development through Moat and Wards that contains 40 affordable flats remains delayed. The developer and housing association continue to be in constant dialogue with the Council, with the affordable flats hopefully being ready for occupation in early summer this year.

1.3 Coldharbour Gypsy & Traveller Scheme

1.3.1 The final stages are being completed at the ongoing project between Kent County Council and the Borough Council in refurbishing and enlarging the existing eight pitch Coldharbour Gypsy and Traveller site in Aylesford.

1.3.2 The site's acoustic barrier along the northern perimeter is being installed, and should be finalised by early May. All other landscaping and related construction matters are concluded, with twenty five of the twenty six pitches occupied with the last one being resolved at the time of writing this paper.

1.3.3 Kent County Council's Gypsy & Traveller Unit's site manager's report that the completed twenty six pitch Coldharbour site has is functioning very well, and the fresh community has excellent internal relationships between new and existing households that are continuing to blossom.

1.4 Changes to The Help To Buy Agent

- 1.4.1 Members will be aware that since 2006 Moat have been the Help To Buy Agent (previously Homebuy Agent) for Tonbridge & Malling and the South East. The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) has re-tendered the Help to Buy Agency service, and Members will be disappointed to learn that as a result of this OJEU competition Moat's role ended on 31 March 2014.
- 1.4.2 As of April the service transfers to Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association (BPHA) for the East and South East. The Council would like to take this opportunity to thank Moat for their service in this role, and recognise that they have played a strong part in helping to shape and develop the service into one that has benefited Tonbridge & Malling and allowed the shared ownership tenures to assist meeting our strategic housing needs.
- 1.4.3 Moat will continue to build and market their own shared ownership homes, and all other aspects of their operation as a Registered Provider remain unchanged.
- 1.4.4 The sudden transition to BPHA was unexpected and a surprise to officers around Kent. At this early juncture it is hard to fully understand all the implications of losing Moat as our local Agent, and the impacts if any, for the Council's adopted Protocol with the previous Help To Buy Agent in relation to eligibility criteria for such homes within the borough. The latest version of this Protocol was revised and subsequently endorsed by Members at this Board last July.
- 1.4.5 Officers have written to BPHA to welcome them to their new role, and also introduce the borough by clearly outlining our expectations as to how shared ownership properties are marketed within Tonbridge & Malling.
- 1.4.6 There is some welcome news in that the Help to Buy Relationships Manager who worked at Moat for many years has been typed to BPHA and will be working across the Kent, Sussex and Surrey area. This will retain a degree of local knowledge and continuity from our many years of working with the previous Help To Buy Agent.
- 1.4.7 At this moment BPHA are unable to provide the quarterly reports for Tonbridge & Malling relating to the numbers of enquires and sales of the various Help To Buy products and initiatives, as has been enjoyed in previous versions of this paper to this Board. This is because it is uncertain at this time whether the historic databases held by Moat that show local performance data will be transferred to BPHA in any meaningful way to allow these reports to be actioned as before.
- 1.4.8 Progress on the dialogue with BPHA across all matters relating to their new role within the borough will be reported to Members through subsequent papers to this Board.

1.5 Legal Implications

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

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 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.

1.7 Risk Assessment

- 1.7.1 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

Steve Humphrey

Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health