

## **BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL**

### **HOUSING AND MAJOR PROJECTS POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

Tuesday, 31st January, 2012

**Present:-** Councillors Rob Appleyard (Chair), Steve Hedges (Vice-Chair), Les Kew, Barry Macrae, Brian Simmons, Paul Fox and Gerry Curran (In place of Will Sandry)

**Cabinet Member for Homes & Planning:** Councillor Tim Ball

**Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development:** Councillor Cherry Beath

**Also in attendance:** John Betty (Development & Major Projects Director), Derek Quilter (Divisional Director, Project Management, Major Projects), Graham Sabourn (Associate Director for Housing) and Samantha Jones (Corporate Policy Manager - Equalities)

#### **34 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **35 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

#### **36 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Councillor Will Sandry had sent his apologies to the Panel, Councillor Gerry Curran was present as his substitute.

#### **37 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

Councillor Rob Appleyard declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest in Item 8 (Somerset CHT: Blueprint for the Future). He acts as the Council's representative on the Somerset Community Housing Trust Board. He stated that having had a conversation with the Vice-Chair of the Panel that he would hand over the role of Chairman for that item but remain in the room to hear the debate.

#### **38 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN**

There was none.

### **39 ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS - TO RECEIVE DEPUTATIONS, STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OF THIS MEETING**

Mr David Redgewell was present, he had requested to make a statement to the Panel regarding Item 12 (Housing & Major Projects Update). A copy of the statement can be found on the Panel's Minute Book.

### **40 MINUTES - TUESDAY 15TH NOVEMBER 2011**

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting as a true record and they were duly signed by the Chairman.

### **41 SOMER CHT : BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE**

Victor da Cunha, Chief Executive, Somer Housing Group and Louise Swain, Executive Director, Customer Services gave a presentation to the Panel regarding this item. A full copy of the presentation can be found on the Panel's Minute Book, a summary is set out below.

Our mission – the reason we exist: “To make a positive and profound contribution to the neighbourhoods we work in – inspiring and empowering people to succeed in life.”

Our vision is that by 2017: “We will be a modern, customer-driven, ethical business, which makes a positive contribution to people and places.”

Our six strategic priorities:

1. A renowned customer service culture
2. Great properties and places
3. Ethical care and support services
4. Happy, safe, popular neighbourhoods
5. Help for people needing work
6. Lobbying for positive social change

Preferred legal form: One Registered Provider;

- To improve customer services
- To reduce complexity and duplication
- To reduce the level of indebtedness
- To simplify the regulatory burden

A separate Care and Support business:

- To create a centre of excellence which is well known in the market place
- To allow us to do work for non-residents
- To remove double regulation
- To allow us to better compete
- To improve our overall financial transparency and performance

Clear and separate non-charitable business:

- To allow us to do more things which generate income
- To allow us to do more “housing for sale” as a cross subsidy for affordable housing
- So we don’t have to sell properties

Approach to Georgian Stock:

- Minimise disposals
- Bring back to use long term voids
- Ensure accommodation is suitable to need
- Requires a broader range of solutions
  - Continuation of Market rent – perhaps with some homelessness activity too;
  - Modest amount of furnished apartments and holiday lets (with training an employment potential).

New housing supply:

- Continuation of our commitment to develop social housing
- Capacity to provide 1,260 new homes over the next 5 years
- Capacity to support key sites as a strategic partner
- Commitment to regeneration

Our accountability to you:

- On-going day to day relationships with Cllrs important
- Strategic Partnership Meetings in place
- Presentations to overview & scrutiny and other formal meetings / committees
- “Democratic Filter” process to be agreed
- Bi-annual Cllr briefing to be taken forward

Councillor Paul Fox commented that he had a slight concern over the Group’s plans to diversify as he would not wish to see any adverse impact to the current users of the service.

Mr da Cunha acknowledged that the Group’s powers were not limitless and that the focus would still remain on being a great landlord.

Councillor Les Kew asked how many of the Group’s properties were of Georgian stock and what were their current condition.

Mr da Cunha replied that the figure was between 540 – 800 properties.

Louise Swain added that the Georgian stock was of variable standards.

Councillor Gerry Curran commented that he saw Somer as an efficient vehicle. He suggested that they use the word ‘housing’ somewhere within their vision statement and stated that a partnership with the Council is vital.

Councillor Steve Hedges commented that residents need to be shown respect when responding to their problems / concerns.

Mr da Cunha agreed and said that he wanted the public to talk about them in a positive manner. He announced that recently five new objectives had been agreed

within the organisation, these were, to be Caring, Respectful, Open, Fair and Trusting.

Councillor Rob Appleyard thanked both Victor and Louise for their attendance on behalf of the Panel.

## **42 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE**

Councillor Tim Ball, Cabinet Member for Homes & Planning addressed the Panel. He informed them that the Concept Brief for the MOD sites in relation to housing is currently being drafted and has the potential to generate up to 1200 units. The brief is expected to be published in March.

He spoke of how Taylor Wimpey had been announced as the development partner by Kraft for work on the Keynsham Somerdale site.

He stated that the number of empty homes within the Council had reduced from 500 to 430 and that this would contribute towards to figures associated with the New Homes Bonus. He added that a property in Southdown that had been empty for 10 years & had featured in Empty Property week was now being marketed by Knight Frank and had received 5 viewings. The owner wished to thank Housing Services for their support, which included a garden clearance.

He informed the Panel that the number of properties receiving energy efficiency measures had gone up from 114 at the end of September (red) to 522 at the end of December (green). That figure already exceeds the year-end target of 300.

Councillor Cherry Beath, Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development addressed the Panel. She spoke of the Cabinet's recent decision to take part in the Broadband Delivery UK scheme to increase broadband speeds in rural areas, she wished to highlight that the current agreement was better than the previous proposal.

She informed them that a comprehensive report had been written by the River Group and that the report should be seen by the Panel at some point in the future.

She stated that the emergency works in relation to Victoria Bridge had been completed and that any future decisions would form the basis of a Cabinet report.

She wished to praise the work carried out so far by officers on the pilot study Planning the Future – Funding the Future.

Councillor Barry Macrae asked that the Panel be kept informed of the work associated with the Planning the Future – Funding the Future study.

Councillor Steve Hedges asked when the Victoria Bridge would again be open to the public.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that they were awaiting the developers to make their way through that particular area of the site and anticipated that it may be open again in late summer 2012.

Councillor Gerry Curran asked if the officers present had any information relating to the planning application that had been submitted for land to the rear of the Argos site on the Lower Bristol Road.

The Development & Major Projects Director replied that he believed the application was submitted by a private developer, but he would make some enquiries and send a response to Councillor Curran.

The Chairman on behalf of the Panel thanked the Cabinet Members for their updates.

#### **43 EMPTY PROPERTY POLICY UPDATE**

The Associate Director for Housing introduced this item to the Panel. He informed them that the number of empty properties had been reduced from 500 in 2009/10 to the current figure of 430 and that it was likely to continue to decrease over the coming months / years with a dozen high priority properties having already been identified. He added that by bringing this number of houses back into use £0.5m had been generated as part of the New Homes Bonus.

Councillor Les Kew commented that he felt the policy gives a good opportunity to improve local neighbourhoods. He asked if any particular areas of the Council were affected more than others.

The Associate Director for Housing replied that there was a general spread of properties across the authority.

Councillor Steve Hedges commented that he felt this was a very worthwhile exercise.

The Chairman wished to commend the Equalities Impact Assessment that was carried out as part of the policy process. He also called upon the Cabinet Member to continue to support this work area in the future.

The Chairman on behalf of the Panel thanked the officers concerned for formulating the policy.

#### **44 ADULT SOCIAL CARE & HOUSING SERVICE ACTION PLAN**

The Associate Director for Housing introduced this item to the Panel. He explained that the Plan had been formally discussed at the Wellbeing Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> January and that this was an opportunity for members of this Panel to ask any questions they had in relation to it.

The Corporate Policy Manager for Equalities commented that the Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) that was carried out as part of this process was used as an exemplar to other service areas.

The Chairman on behalf of the Panel commended the officers involved in the EIA and the Service Action Plan.

## **45 HOUSING & MAJOR PROJECTS UPDATE**

Mr David Redgewell, South West Transport Network addressed the Panel. He called for the doors to the bus station at Southgate to be repaired as soon as possible and asked that the Bath Transport Package be subject to a full public consultation in relation to its bus routes, stops and shelters. He added that this must be carried out to show that the scheme is compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act.

He also asked for the Council to ensure that rail services are integrated with bus services in the area including those at Oldfield Park train station. He stated the importance of the bus corridors through Western Riverside to Windsor Bridge and the Lower Bristol Road.

The Development & Major Projects Director replied by saying he would take those messages back to the relevant officers within his department.

He then wished to highlight to the Panel some of the main points within the report.

### Sustainable Development Overview

The Directorate is responsible for providing a co-ordinated and integrated approach to the provision of Housing, Jobs, Business growth and Economic activity and is focused on delivering Sustainable Economic Growth as set out in the Economic Strategy of April 2010 and the Smart Economic Growth Cabinet paper of November 2010. Work continues on Planning and Financing the Future programme (PaFF). This is being carried out to establish the impact of development upon viability and corporate financing.

The ability of the Council to deliver its priorities and aspirations in this area continues to depend on the alignment of policies in Planning, Transport and the ability of the Council to influence and encourage growth and development through its asset base and influence.

There are significant challenges ahead in bringing forward development but there are also major opportunities through our Enterprise Area -Bath City Riverside, Bath Western Riverside, Bath Quays South and Manvers Street. Also, Norton Radstock Regeneration, MOD Sites, Keynsham, Somerdale and Temple Street - all of which could and should have significant ability to help the economic growth, development agenda and Housing delivery.

Councillor Barry Macrae commented that he was concerned by the figures on page 73 of the agenda which showed that the Housing Completion Target 2011/12 would not be met. He also asked for a graphic illustration to be shown for the number of homes that were in the process of being built and the number of homes that had been applied to be built.

Councillor Eleanor Jackson commented that she was aware of a number of sites where applications had been granted but now no developer finance was available. She added that any officer assistance in areas such as this would be most welcome. Councillor Les Kew commented that in the current financial climate a developer will not build without knowingly being able to sell the end product.

Councillor Gerry Curran agreed with the comment made by Councillor Kew and said he felt sure the forthcoming land areas mentioned earlier in the debate would help the Council fulfil their quota.

The Development & Major Projects Director replied by saying that the work carried out by the Associate Director for Housing was very valuable as the New Homes Bonus money can be used across the Council.

### Bath City Riverside - City of Ideas Enterprise Area

This designation means that the area will be one of the first to benefit from some of the financial gains from business rate retention accrued from the Bristol Temple Quarter Enterprise Zone. A MoU between the Local Authorities is currently being prepared to articulate exactly how this will work.

Bath City Riverside is being used as a pilot project for the Planning Delivering & Financing the Future initiative to test the potential for rolling out the project across the whole of B&NES. Work has started to articulate the scope of the Bath City Riverside Enterprise Area. Key activities have been:

- A study has been commissioned to identify options for the delivery of upstream flood storage as part of a Strategic
- Flood Risk Management Strategy for the river corridor in Bath

### London Road

Following extensive recent local consultation on the issues and potential solutions for addressing problems in the London Road area, Council officers are now considering the activities which could form a Regeneration Action Plan, and the funding which is available / which may be necessary to take such activities forward. The Council owns the freehold of three buildings in the area – numbers 2, 3, and 4 Long Acre, which have the potential to contribute towards the wider regeneration of the vicinity.

During July and August the Council invited Expressions of Interest from community groups and from the open market for numbers 3 and 4 Long Acre. Resources have been identified to develop an overall plan for the area, including initial ideas for the Long Acre properties.

### Flood Mitigation

In 2010 the Council commissioned a Flood Risk Management Strategy report which identified the provision of upstream flood water storage, combined with on-site flood defences, as the strategic solution to facilitate development of sites in the river corridor in Bath. A Bath Compensatory Storage Study has been commissioned which is being undertaken in conjunction with the Environment Agency. The stage 1 report investigated eight potential sites along the river corridor east of Bath for the

provision of flood storage and recommended three sites, at Kensington Meadows, Mill Lane Bathampton and at Bathford, for further technical investigation. This work is being undertaken as part of stage 2 of the study. The results will be the subject of consultation prior to the development of detailed scheme proposals.

Councillor Brian Simmons asked how much the flood mitigation works were likely to cost.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that it would be in the region of £4.5m.

Councillor Paul Fox suggested that areas within the train and bus station be set aside to show the public what the 'vision' of the project is.

The Development & Major Projects Director welcomed the suggestion.

The Chairman on behalf of the Panel thanked all the officers concerned in the publication of this report.

#### **46 DEVELOPMENT AND MAJOR PROJECTS SERVICE ACTION PLAN**

The Development & Major Projects Director introduced this item to the Panel. He informed them that the directorate was potentially a net income provider to the Council, focused upon delivery of development, housing and direct Council projects, and that it pro-actively managed projects for other directorates within the Council.

The Divisional Director for Project Management addressed the Panel on the six service priorities, in particular:

Priority 4 – To deliver homes to meet the needs of an expanding economy.

Priority 5 – Deliver development projects that contribute to the cultural, economic and built environments of the Districts unique places.

Priority 6 – Delivery of the Councils capital programme in a cost effective way and on time through excellence in project management.

Councillor Barry Macrae commented that he hoped the directorate were not losing their philosophy of the need to generate employment for the area as well as housing.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that the directorate had never lost sight of the need for growth in both areas.

The Chairman asked how long the posts that are to be removed had been vacant.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that at least one of the posts had been vacant for a year.

The Chairman asked if some officer costs were funded directly from the capital budget of specific projects.



The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that yes, Capital Projects do fund some of the officer posts; the revenue budget is a net budget after charges to capital projects.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the Development and Major Projects Service Action Plan as printed.

#### **47 PANEL WORKPLAN**

The Chairman introduced this item to the Panel.

Councillor Barry Macrae commented that he would not want see the Panel simply as a Housing Panel as without the appropriate developments and major projects it would be difficult to generate the houses required for the area.

Councillor Paul Fox commented that he believed a review of the Panel remits would take place prior to the Council's Annual and Ordinary meeting in May 2012.

Councillor Gerry Curran commented that housing is a big issue along with employment and that key employment sites must be delivered.

The Development & Major Projects Director replied by saying that the development agenda could be enhanced within the current reporting structure.

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**