

South Hams Strategic Partnership: Affordable Housing Working Group Initial meeting on 5th September 2006

Present: Alan Robinson (SHDC Director - Community), Pauline Warner (DCC), Debbie Holloway (SHDC Housing Team), Cllr Isabel Steer (SHDC Executive Housing portfolio), Sue Scrivener (PCT), Wendy Price (Adult Community Services), Roger Grainger (DCC), Mike Kelly (Police / Community Safety), Kay Dawson (SHDC Community Development Officer), Michael Hourican (Tor Homes).

Apologies: Mary Ridgeway (Devon Strategic Housing Group), Cllr Julian Brazil (DCC), Howard Toplis (Tor Homes), Alison Morgan (Supporting People).

Background / Scene setting

The original South Hams Community Strategy and SHSP focus has been on building relationships and developing networks. With the development of new Sustainable Community Strategy 2006-11, SHSP are looking for specific actions. The current partnership working around the new Sherford development gives a good example of how partnership can design and deliver services for our communities.

Severity of affordable housing issue in the South Hams is well understood by those around the table. Recent survey identifies need of at least 600 houses a year in South Hams to meet demand. Targets have been set for the delivery through the planning process - Local Development Framework (LDF). Housing market survey shows that the lowest priced houses have shown biggest percentage price increases. Second home buyers are targeting the smaller / cheaper homes. This has consequences for services providers, due to recruitment / retention of key workers. There are also issues for the partners around lowest income families with housing issues i.e. pressure on support from social services, health and possible anti social behaviour, together with meeting the needs of an increasingly older population.

Central government is pushing for improved delivery of affordable housing. SHDC has a key remit in producing the LDF, and has invested in additional staff, a 'CP1' team, [Council Priority 1 – Secure a supply of affordable housing] consisting of a housing officer, planning officer and valuer, to push affordable housing forward. SHDC also has Beacon Status for affordable housing which may help secure some freedom and flexibility. There are also the housing targets within the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) to consider. There is a need to identify sites across the South Hams which would be suitable for development, and a suggested key action of this group is to facilitate identification of sites of the SHSP partners. This will link to initiatives such as: support offered to key workers, the Supporting People Strategy, and potential to use various funding streams.

Strategic Context / Local Area Agreement (LAA)

The Devon Strategic Housing Group brings together a range of key players such as housing associations, Government Office, Housing Corporation, Social Services, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), DCC, and reps from specific services on issue based pieces of work. The DSHG is looking at range of housing issues, supported by 2 staff members. Katie Shorten looking at youth homelessness initiatives linking with the Childrens Trust targets LAA targets; and Mary Ridgeway, the Affordable Housing Coordinator. Both work to Action Plans incorporating district issues.

Planning: The RSS is currently being reviewed. It is driving forward new housing, primarily in urban areas at the expense of market towns and rural area needs. The RSS will be subject to 'examination' shortly, which may lead to review of rural issues following comments received from numerous parties. The SHDC LDF Core Strategy had good airing at its recent 'examination'. It has been essential to show the evidence base and clarity of vision. Inspectors report is due at the end October 06.

Summary sheet of LAA actions circulated. The LAA is contract between central & local government on the delivery of services. It identifies local priorities under 4 themes, and promotes flexibilities and freedoms, of funding and policies, promoting effective targeting of resources and the collective tackling of issues. Housing is a cross-cutting theme, but actions are mostly embedding in Economy theme. An affordable housing working group has 'evolved' coordinated by Mary Ridgway, with local authority reps and the Rural Housing Enablers, as rural housing issues was the impetus to include housing in the LAA.

There is a perceived difficulty of achieving development in small communities. The flexibilities and freedoms are needed to help achieve affordable housing in rural areas.

Ob1: Sustainability. No recognition is made of the 'social dimension', i.e. how well 'organised' is the community, what is the social capacity and cohesion; have they worked together to produce a community plan. It should not just be a measure of physical services i.e. is there a shop, school, etc. There is a need for a 'toolkit' to assist delivery depending on situation and evidence of need. This would promote the 'flexibility and freedom' for future development. An event is planned for November 06, where the Commission for Rural Communities has been invited to present a sustainability toolkit.

Ob2: Evidence base. The facts and figures of the rural housing need is now available at ward level.

Ob3: Land supply. This is a key area for SHSP and this group. It is looking at influencing public bodies and the development of a protocol to share info around disposal of land giving notice as early as possible. This group could be a pilot project area.

Ob4: Key Workers. A database of HR contacts is being compiled. This will assist a piece of work around the issues of recruitment and retention of staff due to the lack of affordability housing. Work is also to be done on the definition of 'key worker' and/or 'essential worker'. This has links with Ob3 above.

Partners Input:

SHDC: Affordable Housing has shot up the agenda and local people want to see action now. A key area of work is to look at land assets, in main towns and rural communities, to start to identify potential sites. A case in point is Elwell House, where partnership working could have led to a different outcome, but there is an awareness and understanding of partners differing priorities. Partners need to consider how they deliver on a range of priorities, including the management of assets. SHDC had previously used assets to generate income. Having reviewed it priorities and put affordable housing as top priority, assets now have different focus. Also need to be aware of future Gypsy & Traveller issues.

The LDF is flexible enough to take both an objective and pragmatic approach. We should also learn from the High Bickington approach! SHDC role is to 'enable' through the LDF process and promoting partnership working including the community.

PCT /ACS: have been on working group in West Devon area looking at accommodation, co-location and identifying land. This has raised awareness of land ownership. It was prompted by a social care and health joint working drive.

ACS: The modernisation plan of ACS, especially residential services, is underway with the focus on 'prevention' services. This will include looking at residential and office sites. In South Hams this includes, extra care housing in Kingsbridge (Kiln House and Square Quay), and Rushbrook in Totnes, which is a large, central site providing specialist mental health care, connected to the hospital.

It is essential to be clear on need, in order to make a case for resources. There is a move away from acute hospital settings to provide more local services for communities. There is a need to look at: the number of hospital beds in South Hams, also day care and respite care. There is awareness that the Dartmouth Hospital site is not meeting needs, and there are also access and parking issues. There is awareness that the Police are also looking for an appropriate site in Dartmouth and there is the potential that these could link. A significant amount of work is also being put into the design of services for the new Sherford development.

There is the potential to design 'life-time' homes for people with specialist needs, could be potential for pilot project. There would need to be developer engagement in the planning process, as they need to be involved in design. The LDF will have key role.

Police: Two key areas:

1. Key worker employment: Dartmouth police officers cannot afford to live in Dartmouth, and travelling to Dartmouth reduces disposable income. This leads to a continual change of staff, managers, support staff, which is not good.
2. Supported housing: Breaking the crime cycle, especially of prolific offenders. They are vulnerable people and potentially create an issue for local communities. This is not easy area of work to sell (to communities or politically). Significant local engagement has been done around the St Barnabas scheme in Dartmouth for example, which has made a potentially unpopular scheme supporting vulnerable single people accepted by local people.

Tor Homes: Have experienced working with local authorities disposing of assets and their timescales which don't fit with RSL targets. They are also constrained by funding stream timescales. Parkers Way / Barn in Bridgetown Totnes, provides opportunity for Tor Homes / Midas to build new homes, working with Social Services.

DCC: Have assets / estate that is not 'fit for purpose' and future ownership is currently being reviewed.

General discussion:

Should this group target its actions on a town-by-town basis, as some town issues / potential are clearly more 'advanced' than others.

- Each town has different issues / needs.
- Could wait on the evidence from: DSHG revised new work plan, Key worker evidence and LDF process, but shouldn't wait on the 'perfect product'.
- Housing market assessment results. Can evidence need / project through the report, and therefore key areas for priority.

- Bridgtown, Totnes and Townstal, Dartmouth have highest levels of deprivation and could be target areas?
- Identify together a specific project / town which is in all our interest, as a pilot.

Issues to aid decision-making:

- Totnes and Dartmouth LDF documents are next to be prepared
- Totnes has severest housing need
- Regeneration of Bridgtown has challenges, either using Duke of Somerset land or increasing density on existing development
- Dartmouth needs a critical mass to support the community college
- PCT is reviewing Dartmouth hospital service.
- PCT could relocate to Townstal to aid regeneration, but we need care not to undermine town centre as a result of relocating services to edge of town locations.
- Need to build any future project in parallel with LDF process.

Also

Who is missing from this meeting?

- MOD, SWW, DCC estates, Fire & Ambulance services?

Are the right people in your smaller project teams?

The 'social' dimension. Doesn't neatly fit into planning system, but have good reason and evidence to use it.

Where do we go from here?

- Agreed the group will focus on Totnes.
- The new 'CP1' officers will all be in post by mid-Oct.

Key tasks as starting point: To be provided to SHDC by **5th October**.

- Assessment of partners assets in Totnes & hinterland; (Agreed it would be helpful to receive information in a standard format to aid assessment - see table below)
- Current use the site, and what might partners intend to do with the site, with broad timescale; (Please include fit for purpose sites, with no intention to change!)
- Second meeting when this info is reported back. Identify who to invite as a result.
- Date of next meeting - linked to arrival of CP1 team, provisionally end October 2006.

DSHG:

- Talk to High Bickington or English Partnerships about protocol / rules of engagement;
- Investigate how much 'warning' is given of disposal of an asset?

Specific piece of work around Kingsbridge site:

- Wendy and Debbie to meet.

