

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT
GROUP HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON WEDNESDAY, 17
SEPTEMBER 2008**

MEMBERS

* Cllr J D Hawkins – Chairman

* Cllr R C Steer – Vice-Chairman

* Cllr B F Cane

* Cllr S E Cooper

* Cllr M J Howarth

* Cllr C W Jones

* Cllr L P Jones

* Cllr D M O'Callaghan

* Denotes attendance

Also in attendance at the invitation of the Chairman:

Cllrs J I G Blackler, M J Hicks, P W Hitchins, M F Saltern and J W Squire

Officers in attendance:

All Agenda Items: Member Support Services Manager;

Item 5 (Minute CPDG.11/08 below refers): Head of Community Regeneration and
Affordable Housing Manager; and

Items 6 and 7 (Minutes CPDG.12/08 and CPDG.13/08 below refer): Housing Advice
Manager.

CPDG.9/08 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Community Policy Development
Group held on 22 May 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and
signed by the Chairman.

CPDG.10/08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members and officers were invited to declare any interests in the items of
business to be considered during the course of the meeting but none
were made.

**CPDG.11/08 ADOPTION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING SUPPLEMENTARY
PLANNING DOCUMENT**

Members considered a report which set out a summary of the content
of the revised Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document
(AHSPD) and sought support for the recommendation that it be
adopted.

The AHSPD was deemed to be a key document in the South Hams Local Development Framework portfolio, which supported the Affordable Housing Development Plan Document (AHDPD) recently approved by a Planning Inspector as 'sound' following its Examination. Members' comments were requested on the revised AHSPD, prior to its consideration for adoption by full Council alongside the AHDPD.

During discussion, particular reference was made to:-

- a) the high affordable housing targets contained in the AHDPD. In supporting the principle and emphasising the importance of delivering affordable housing, a number of Members questioned whether the high targets could inhibit the number of houses built, particularly in light of the current economic downturn. In response, officers acknowledged that the targets were challenging, but this approach had largely been endorsed by the Inspector and adoption of the documents would provide a framework and clarity to enable progress of the Council's number one Corporate Priority.

Furthermore, significant emphasis had been introduced by the Inspector throughout the AHDPD to the term 'viability', with the onus placed upon developers who believed that they were unable to meet these targets to demonstrate why this was the case;

- b) the size and type of affordable housing units (paragraph 3.5 of the presented AHSPD). To reinforce the document, the Group requested that the term 'where possible' be removed from the paragraph, in relation to the need for affordable housing units to reflect identified housing needs and create mixed, well integrated and sustainable communities;
- c) working in partnership with preferred partners. Some Members felt that the Council should be open-minded and make it as easy as possible for developers to deliver affordable housing. Therefore the Members questioned whether the Council should discontinue the practice of working with preferred partners. In response, it was noted that the partnership approach was felt to work well in the South Hams, expediting rather than frustrating progress towards securing affordable housing developments;
- d) reference to the South Hams in the document. The Group requested that at paragraph 5.3 of the document, reference to 'the district' should be replaced with 'the South Hams'. Members felt that this not only provided clarity, but was also important when considering the current Local Government Review;
- e) spending off-site contributions in the locality. Members urged that wherever possible, off-site contributions be spent in the locality to the development site. In response, officers advised that, whilst contributions would be allocated into a district wide fund, whenever the opportunity arose monies would be spent in the locality.

However, the monies were time constrained, and where that time was running out, it was felt to be better to use the money elsewhere in the South Hams, than lose it;

- f) flexibility. The need to maintain flexibility in applying the provisions of the document and not become overly prescriptive was reinforced by the Group;
- g) the process being time consuming. In recognising that the Council was still a national front runner in this process, some Members expressed their frustration at the delay in delivering sites for affordable housing;
- h) assessment of Housing Need. Due to the importance and emphasis placed upon local Housing Needs Surveys, it was felt that increased reference could be given to them in the document.

In conclusion, Members wished to publicly thank officers for their hard work and efforts in reaching this important milestone. In particular, praise was extended for the professionalism that officers had demonstrated during the intense Examination process.

RECOMMENDED

That Council be **RECOMMENDED** that the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document be adopted.

CPDG.12/08 HOMELESSNESS REVIEW AND STRATEGY

The Group considered a report which sought its comments on the proposed Homelessness Strategy for 2008-11, prior to recommending its adoption to the Executive.

The report advised that recently, operational changes and a focus on performance management had led to significant improvements in many areas of performance within housing advice. The proposed strategy would build on the progress made and allow the service to take the next step forward in delivering an improved service to meet the needs of the residents of the South Hams.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) A Member questioned whether consideration had been given to classifying Gypsy and Traveller permanent site issues as a core priority. In response, officers confirmed that this had been considered, but it was felt that greater emphasis should be given to the twelve core priorities (as identified in the presented agenda report) in the first instance;

- (b) Assurances were sought that the Homelessness Forum would not simply be a 'talking shop.' Officers confirmed that the Forum would have the ability to spend monies to address the core priorities, with the Council tasked with facilitating its work to create more effective homelessness prevention;
- (c) It was noted that the Forum would report back to the Group on its progress on a six-monthly basis;
- (d) The Group wished to suggest that the lead Executive Member for Housing become a representative on the Homelessness Forum.
- (e) Following a lengthy debate regarding publicity of the homelessness prevention advice provided by the Council, Members concluded that a letter and poster should be sent to each town and parish council clerk, which highlighted the service available.

In conclusion, Members wished to thank those officers involved in compiling the document. However, whilst the content was excellent, the view was expressed that the document was not easily readable and when published, it was requested that its formatting be amended.

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that the strategy and action plan be adopted and that authority be delegated to the Executive Member for Housing to agree minor changes to the strategy and action plan.

CPDG.13/08 HOUSING STRATEGY – PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Members received and noted the update on performance in the delivery of the Housing Strategy (as attached at Appendix A).

During discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) the currently declining numbers on the Housing Register (as at 1 September 2008). The belief was expressed that there were a number of residents who believed it to be pointless to add their names to the Register. Therefore, the true reflection of housing need was being under estimated, which was detrimental when attempting to justify development sites;
- (b) the numbers of households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. Members welcomed the update that there were currently no households residing in this type of temporary accommodation;

- (c) Whilst assurances were given, Members wished to stress the need for priority to be given to those on the Housing Register when allocating the accommodation within the housing project at St Barnabas, Dartmouth.

(Meeting started at 10.00 am and concluded at 11.50 am)

Chairman

HOUSING PERFORMANCE INFORMATION – September 2008

New Affordable Housing Provision – Starts and Completions

2007/08

Housing Starts = 51

Housing Completions = 59

2008/09 (2nd quarter)

On Site = 74

Completions = 0

Scheduled Completions = 79

Other Housing Issues

Beacon Research Projects

All three Beacon research projects (Land Leasing, Second Homes and Community Land Trusts) are either complete or in the final stages of report sign off. The three reports will be available on the Council's website following a report to Councillors during October.

South Hams Intermediate Rent Enterprise (SHIRE)

The initial 5 unit pilot programme has been completed and will provide homes for 5 local families. A further programme of acquisitions has been agreed with potential acquisitions currently in the pipeline. The scheme provides an important addition to the Council's mainstream development programme and a real opportunity to provide affordable homes for local residents.

St Barnabas

South Hams DC, Signpost Care Partnerships and Training for Life have worked in partnership to create both housing and training opportunities for Dartmouth with the refurbishment of St Barnabas church. Training for Life, a social enterprise organisation, have taken over the management of both the restaurant and the supported housing project and are working closely with the Housing Advice Team to ensure appropriate support is available to enable tenants to sustain permanent tenancies in the future.

The training restaurant "The Dartmouth Apprentice" opened in July and will see apprentices begin their training in the Autumn. Whilst it is not a condition of tenancy it is hoped that many of those who live in the scheme will take up the training opportunities on offer.

Housing Market Update

Developer activity continues to decline on the back of falling house prices creating challenging times for the delivery of affordable housing. The Council's AH team are looking at several initiatives to overcome the issue and ensure continued delivery.

The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) Launch

The new Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) is scheduled to begin operating in early December. The HCA will bring together English Partnerships, the Housing Corporation and the Academy for Sustainable Communities, together with some delivery functions of Communities and Local Government (CLG).

Housing Advice

Housing Register and Nominations

Number on housing register (1/9/08)	1539
Number of households in high housing needs (more than 250 points)	517
Number of Nominations to RSL's (April-August 2008)	93

Temporary Accommodation

Number of Private Sector Leased Properties	54
Number of Families with Children in Bed and Breakfast	0
Number of Households in Bed and Breakfast (at 31.8.08)	1

Alan Robinson
September 2008