

TANDRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE

Minutes and report to Council of the meeting of the Committee held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Station Road East, Oxted on the 30th November 2021 at 7.30pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Pursehouse (Chair), Lockwood (Vice-Chair), Gaffney, Gillman, Groves, Hammond, Mills, Morrow, Ridge, Shiner, Steeds and Swann

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Farr and O'Driscoll

195. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 28TH SEPTEMBER 2021

These were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

196. HOUSING QUARTER 2 (2021-22) PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee considered an analysis of progress against its key performance indicators, together with an updated risk register and a Council housebuilding / affordable housing development summary for the second quarter of 2021/22. Upon presenting the report, the Executive Head of Communities confirmed that the status update for Risk H2 (delivery of the target number of properties via the Council house building programme) on page 23 of the agenda pack should have stated:

“Monthly contractor meetings continuing - both Uplands and Bronzoak forecasting delays due to materials shortages. Some programme change to minimise disruption as far as possible. Flats are affected more than houses. Looking at split handover at Uplands.

Build costs increasing due to materials shortages - limited impact on current design & build contracts but development costs likely to rise in the short/medium term.

Limited resources in development team preventing progress on identifying new schemes. New team member due to start in Jan 2022.”

In response to Members' questions, Officers confirmed that:

- it was too soon to assess the impact of the lifting of the (Covid related) ban on evictions in respect of the number of households in temporary accommodation (the temporary legislation expired in October 2021) although more households were now approaching the housing needs team for advice
- the possibility of amending the calculation for KPI H07 (average cost of repairs to properties for Council tenants) would be pursued, i.e. to 'total cost to date' divided by 'total number of jobs to date' ... to provide a mean cost figure at any point in time

- notwithstanding the challenges of having to compete with developers on the open market, potential purchases of specific sites for Council housing were being pursued and would be reported to Members if negotiations progressed
- negotiations were ongoing with the landowner of the prospective affordable rented scheme near Dormansland Station with a view to the homes being delivered as part of the Council housebuilding programme – the matter may have to be referred to the Committee for a decision in due course
- building homes to the net zero carbon standard was more expensive for developers ... the Council had committed to achieving the standard for new builds, although this did not apply to property acquisitions.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

197. APPROPRIATION OF LAND FOR COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING - NEXT STEPS

The Council held land for various statutory purposes to perform its functions and, subject to certain provisos, could use powers to transfer the use of land from one purpose to another. Relevant properties at the following locations were currently held for housing purposes and had to be appropriated for planning purposes to enable Council house developments to proceed:

- Auckland Road and Windmill Close, Caterham
- Featherstone, Blindley Heath
- Hollow Lane, Dormansland

The appropriation process had commenced in accordance with previous Committee decisions and a report was submitted which informed Members of the outcome of consultation with affected residents, i.e.:

- one objection in respect of the proposed Windmill Close development
- thirteen responses in respect of the proposed Hollow Lane development, although there were no outright objections to affordable housing on the garage site or the appropriation process itself – the main concerns related to the proposed design of the flats and the parking court.

The key observations and conclusions of the report were that:

Auckland Road and Windmill Close, Caterham

Appropriation of the sites for the economic, social and environmental well-being of the areas is justified when set against the very great need for affordable housing in the District.

Featherstone, Blindley Heath

The size of open space proposed to be used for the proposed development is negligible and its loss will not compromise current usage. On balance, the loss of the space can be justified due to the significant demand for affordable housing locally.

The current flats at 63-78 comprise 8 bedsits and 8 one beds. They are small and outdated and do not meet the current insulation standards. They have suffered from condensation and dampness for many years and are very expensive to repair. Roof and window replacements are due in the next few years, requiring significant investment in an otherwise failing building. Replacing the properties with modern, well insulated buildings designed to be operationally net zero carbon is a better and more cost-effective approach. The redevelopment will enable the Council to respond to the significant need for family sized housing in the area. As part of the appropriation process, the consent of the Secretary of State is required where there is existing housing on the site. Information will be submitted to demonstrate that the land is no longer required for the purpose for which it is held and that the appropriation of the site for the proposed redevelopment, which will contribute to the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area, is justified in these specific circumstances.

Hollow Lane, Dormansland

The consultation feedback will be discussed with the architect and a site meeting with residents will take place in the coming weeks. Further liaison with residents and the Parish Council will take place as the plans evolve.

Appropriating the land for planning purposes does not mean that planning approval will be granted. The appropriation of the site for the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area should be considered justified when set against the very great need for affordable housing in the District. As and when a planning application is submitted for the scheme, the land will already be held for the correct purpose and any third-party rights will have been identified and considered.

Some properties have rights of way over the access road through the garage site. If planning approval is granted, the Council will endeavour to minimise any disruption during the development and will keep residents informed throughout the process. Whilst the appropriation would enable the development to proceed if planning permission is granted, the Council would be required to pay compensation for interference with any valid third-party rights.

The residential development of the garage site would necessitate the provision of alternative parking elsewhere. The proposals include the creation of a parking court in New Farthingdale to compensate for the loss of parking at Hollow Lane garages and help ease the parking issue in New Farthingdale. The Parish Council has previously expressed a desire to explore the idea of re-designing the central green areas of New Farthingdale to provide additional parking spaces and recognises the need to improve accessibility for vehicles.

The proposed parking site is publicly maintainable highway land and, notwithstanding the residents' concerns, it is not a village green or open space and cannot be considered as land for public recreation given its status as highway land. Before the Council can appropriate this land for planning purposes, a process must be followed to remove highway rights and extinguish the rights of the public to pass and repass. This process results in the making of a legal order known as 'stopping up the highway'.

The report also confirmed that, on completion of any development, the land would need to be appropriated back to housing land from planning purposes.

Arising from the debate, Officers advised that the Council's housing allocations scheme sought to address the greatest housing needs of the whole District and didn't seek to restrict availability to those in the immediate vicinity of particular schemes. However, Community Land Trusts (non-profit organisations that own and develop land for the benefit of the community) were potential vehicles for providing affordable homes for local people and the Council could work with them to seek appropriate sites.

RESOLVED – that:

- A. in respect of the proposed development sites at Featherstone open space, Hollow Lane, Auckland Road and Windmill Close, the land at each site be appropriated for planning purposes to facilitate the redevelopment of the land for the proper planning of the area and contribute to its economic, social and/or environmental wellbeing;
- B. in respect of the land at Featherstone, the Council the consent of the Secretary of State be sought for the appropriation of housing land for planning purposes by demonstrating that the land is not required for the purposes for which it is currently held and that the use of the power of appropriation is in the public interest;
- C. in respect of the land at New Farthingdale, the land be appropriated for planning purposes in order to facilitate the redevelopment of the land for the proper planning of the area and contribute to its economic, social and/or environmental wellbeing, following the stopping up of any highway land required as a result of the proposed redevelopment;
- D. in respect of all of the aforementioned sites, delegated authority be provided to the Executive Head of Communities:
 - (i) subject to any necessary statutory consents and procedures in relation to Featherstone and New Farthingdale (outlined in recommendations B and C above) to sign a memorandum for:
 - Hollow Lane, Dormansland
 - New Farthingdale, Dormansland
 - Auckland Road, Caterham
 - Windmill Close, Caterham
 - Featherstone, Blindley Heathstating in each case that the land is appropriated from housing to planning purposes;
 - (ii) to sign a memorandum for Featherstone Open Space stating that the land is appropriated from general fund to planning purposes; and
 - (iii) at the appropriate time, to sign a memorandum for each site stating that the land is appropriated from planning purposes to housing.

198. CAPITAL FUNDING OF ACCOMMODATION FOR ROUGH SLEEPERS

At its meeting on the 28th June 2021, the Committee supported the Council's participation in a joint bid to Homes England with the other three East Surrey Authorities (Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley and Reigate & Banstead) in partnership with 'Transform Housing and Support' (Transform). That bid sought grant funding to purchase eight move-on properties across the four local authority areas, including 2 x one bedroom flats in Tandridge, to provide supported housing for former rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping. At that time, the Committee approved the use of commuted sums (provided by developers in lieu of on-site provision of affordable homes) of up to 25% of the total scheme cost, subject to a maximum of £50,000 per unit (total £100,000) to be provided to Transform to enable the purchase of the two local properties.

However, due to changes to the grant levels from Homes England, the original bid did not proceed, and the East Surrey partnership had since submitted a revised application to Homes England. It was now necessary to increase the level of commuted sums involved to £68,000 per unit if the Council was to participate in the programme. Furthermore, given the low levels of rough sleeping in the District, Homes England would now only support a bid for one move-on property in Tandridge.

During the debate, Officers explained that the cost of providing a property for the programme included a provision of £40,000 for necessary works, e.g. the installation of a more energy efficient boiler and new windows. The property in Tandridge would probably be a former Council owned flat, previously sold under the Right to Buy and will not be part of the Council house building programme; neither would it be subject to the 'net zero carbon standard' requirement.

RESOLVED – that the use of commuted sums of up to £68,000 (representing 25% of the total scheme cost) be approved and given by way of grant to support Transform Housing and Support in the purchase of one property in the District to provide housing with support for rough sleepers, former rough sleepers or those at risk of rough sleeping.

199. ASSISTED PURCHASE SCHEME POLICY

The Council operated an Assisted Purchase Scheme with the aim of increasing the capacity to meet housing needs by giving existing council tenants a financial incentive to vacate their property and purchase a home on the open market. Although numbers participating in the scheme were relatively low (two completions in 2021/22 to date) the report before the Committee advocated that the scheme should continue, both to help release Council housing and to enable those who aspire to home-ownership achieve their goal.

The Scheme had not been reviewed for several years and the report recommended revisions to:

- take account of house price increases during the last 10 years; and
- target funding at those properties which were urgently required and make best use of public funds, i.e. by restricting eligibility to qualifying tenants occupying properties with two or more bedrooms.

Members debated the extent to which the scheme represented value for money. Officers advised that a key priority of the scheme was to retain the housing stock and that grants were funded from the Housing Revenue Account.

RESOLVED – that the following amendments be made to the Assisted Purchase Scheme with effect from 1st April 2022:

- A. eligibility for the Scheme will be restricted to qualifying tenants occupying properties with two or more bedrooms;
- B. the fixed grant amount payable to applicants purchasing a property be increased as follows (amounts relate to the property being vacated):
 - for a two-bedroom property from £15,000 to £22,500
 - for a three-bedroom property from £18,000 to £27,000
 - for a four-bedroom property from £20,000 to £30,000;
- C. the fixed grant amount payable to applicants purchasing a share in a property with a partner or relative be increased as follows (amounts relate to the property being vacated):
 - for a two-bedroom property from £11,250 to £16,875
 - for a three-bedroom property from £13,500 to £20,250
 - for a four-bedroom property from £15,000 to £22,500; and
- D. the fixed value limits for qualifying purchases be increased as follows and reviewed annually:
 - for properties with up to three bedrooms: £268,878 to £358,000;
 - for properties with four or more bedrooms: £295,766 to £393,800.

In accordance with Standing Order 25 (3) Councillor Steeds wished it recorded that she abstained from voting on this matter.

Rising 8.43 pm