

Consultation on a Housing, Homes & Accommodation Strategy for Surrey

Planning Policy Committee – 23rd March 2023

Report of: Chief Planning Officer - Cliff Thurlow

Purpose: To note

Publication status: Open

Wards affected: All

Executive summary:

The report summarises the circumstances of a response that needed to be sent to Surrey County Council concerning this Strategy and why it was not considered that Tandridge District Council should support the Strategy.

This report supports the Council's priority of:

Creating the homes, infrastructure and environment we need but without prejudicing the Council's other statutory functions.

Contact officer Cliff Thurlow - email: cthurlow@tandridge.gov.uk

Recommendation to Committee:

The report be noted and the response to Surrey County Council be endorsed.

Introduction and background:

1. Surrey County Council commissioned the services of Inner Circle Consultancy to undertake a fact-finding exercise seeking the views and opinions of stakeholders across the County in relation to housing and other social aspects.

2. The purpose of this draft Housing, Homes and Accommodation Strategy for Surrey attached at **Appendix A** has been to provide an overview for all interested parties of the current state of housing, accommodation and homes in Surrey in a broad and contextual way across the county as a whole, supplementing the detailed work each district and borough does at a local level. This strategy is intended to act as a "Call to Action" to address the housing crisis currently affecting the County as a whole.
3. The first phase of work, in summer 2022, produced a baseline assessment of the current situation. This was considered to allow for a second phase of work that has led to the recently published consultation draft of a Strategy.
4. The Strategy is written in a way which Surrey County Council believe will support increased partnership working and increased control over public land in the County to ensure adequate accommodation is provided across relevant tenures. The strategy also outlines several actions which are to be achieved through partnership working in relation to housing, planning development management and health.
5. In February 2023, all Surrey Districts and Boroughs were asked to provide a response to the final strategy document by 10 March 2023, prior to it being presented to Cabinet by Surrey. The Council's response, is attached at **Appendix B** and, given the short timescale to respond, was compiled by senior Councillors and Officers from both the Planning and Housing departments.

Tandridge District Council's Response to the Consultation:

6. Surrey County Council were seeking a response on this consultation by the 10th March. This did not allow time for the Council's response to be considered and commented upon by Housing Committee and Planning Policy Committee. A draft response was therefore prepared and put to the Planning Policy Working Group (which includes the Chair of the Housing Committee) for comments.
7. The one part of the report that Council officers and Members would support is the approach of "One Public Estate", that is the need for public sector landowners to accept that disposal of land cannot only be seen through a lens of maximizing commercial return, but on achievement of wider objectives and community values supporting the provision of affordable homes.
8. However, officers and Members of the Council have real concerns about the content of other parts of the Strategy, as follows:
 - a) That the strategy with its repetitive references to a "Housing Crisis" in Surrey will be used as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications and the examination of local plans; the Council would not want its decisions on planning applications, evidence at appeals and evidence at the Local Plan examination undermined by such a document;

- b) Tandridge District has no large towns or main centres and including high density “20 minute Neighbourhood Principles” into our local policies would significantly and detrimentally change the character of our small towns and is not supported; the Government, in its Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill reforms to national planning policy states that housing densities for new development should reflect local character and circumstances;
 - c) This is not an appropriate time to bring forward a housing strategy when central government has signalled significant changes in how housing needs will be assessed and met by district councils which will not require that constraints such as Green Belt are set aside;
 - d) Tandridge District already has its own very successful model of identifying Council owned sites and other publicly owned land for the delivery of affordable housing;
 - e) As the local planning authority, the Council believes that working in partnership with other agencies it is best placed to determine local policies, housing need and where development should take place; and
 - f) That decisions on applications for County Council development on its own land be delegated to Surrey’s districts and boroughs in the interest of consistency in decision making and transparency in how those decisions are made.
9. The matters set out above are elaborated in more detail in the reply to Surrey County Council at **Appendix B**.
10. Taking into consideration the points above, Surrey County Council were informed that Tandridge District Council will not be a partner in the Housing, Accommodation and Homes Strategy for Surrey. It was also requested that this position be noted in the final document.

Key implications

Comments of the Chief Finance Officer

There are no direct financial costs, revenue or capital, from this committee paper’s recommendations.

Comments of the Head of Legal Services

There are no specific legal implications emerging from this report.

Equality

There are equality issues stemming from the subject matter of this report, namely housing. However, these are matters that the Council is already directly addressing through its own house building programme and affordable housing and other planning policies.

Climate change

There are no significant environmental / sustainability implications associated with this report.

Appendices

Appendix A: A Housing, Homes & Accommodation Strategy for Surrey

Appendix B: Reply to Surrey County Council on behalf of Tandridge District Council.

Background papers

None