

Local Development Framework Steering Group

A meeting of Local Development Framework Steering Group was held on Monday, 8th December, 2008.

Present: Cllr Robert Cook (Chairman), Cllr Mrs Jennie Beaumont, Cllr John Fletcher, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Roy Rix, Cllr Mick Stoker, Cllr Mick Womphrey

Officers: M Clifford, J Dixon, J Elliott (DNS), Mrs T Harrison (LD)

Also in attendance: No other persons were present

Apologies: Cllr Colin Leckonby, Cllr Ross Patterson and Cllr Steve Walmsley

LDF 51/08 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillors Fletcher, Nelson and Rix declared a personal prejudicial interest in relation to the Special Townscape Charter Areas report due to living within identified areas within the report.

LDF 52/08 **Draft Minutes of the meeting held on 3rd November 2008.**

Consideration was given to the content of the draft minutes of the meeting held on 3rd November 2008.

CONCLUDED that the draft minutes of the meeting held on 3rd November 2008 be agreed.

LDF 53/08 **REPRESENTATIONS TO THE CORE STRATEGY LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK**

Members were advised that only 7 organisations/people had commented on the core strategy by the time of the meeting. It was anticipated that most comments would be received towards the end of the consultation period which finished on 22nd December 2008.

CONCLUDED that the report be noted.

LDF 54/08 **AFFORDABLE HOUSING VIABILITY STUDY LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK**

Members were advised that consultants would be commissioned to carry out an affordable housing viability study and Officers explained the purpose of the study.

Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing stated that the target for affordable housing should also reflect an assessment of the likely economic viability of land for housing within the area.

The PPS3 requirement had been reinforced by a Court of Appeal decision. The Court upheld an earlier legal decision, which found that the affordable housing requirement stated in the Blyth Valley Core Strategy was not supported by an

economic viability study, and was not valid.

The Tees Valley Strategic Market Assessment (SHMA) Report was not yet complete but current indications were that it would show a substantial increase in the affordable housing need for the Borough.

Core Strategy Policy 8: Housing Mix and Affordable Housing would be provided within a range of 15-20% depending on whether a site was brownfield or greenfield and the needs of specific areas.

The target of 15-20% had been informed by an affordable housing viability exercise, which reviewed residential planning permissions that had been granted since 2004. This exercise found that 15% affordable housing provision had been agreed (Section 106 Agreements) on brownfield sites.

Tees Valley Living had expressed an interest in leading the development of a Tees Valley-wide approach to undertaking viability work. However, owing to resource constraints, they had not yet been able to progress.

The in-house viability exercise already undertaken was considered to be of significant value. However, it was recognised that it was not a comprehensive affordable housing viability study. The exercise was undertaken as an interim measure whilst awaiting the development of the sub-regional methodology.

Given that the Core Strategy was at a very advanced stage of the LDF process it was considered that undertaking a more in-depth viability study could no longer await the development of the sub-regional methodology. It had, therefore, been decided to commission consultants to undertake a study and Arc4 had been appointed.

The fundamental purpose of the research would be to test the viability of both the level of affordable housing provision and the mix of affordable housing tenures proposed in Core Strategy Policy 8 as well as of the proposed threshold for affordable housing provision of 10 dwellings. The proposed level of affordable housing provision of 15-20% would need to be tested on a housing sub-area basis.

The study would be based on “beacon” sites. “Beacon” sites could be a mix of notional and “example” sites. The key would be to test a representative range of sites. This approach was considered best suited to informing strategic policy, which the study was designed to do. It was not designed to be a viability appraisal of specific sites and did not attempt to take into account site-specific factors that could arise on some sites such as flood risk, contamination, noise intrusion and the need for major highways improvements. Where relevant these factors would be taken into account at the planning application stage through officer negotiation. The remit of the study would be to determine the level of affordable housing provision that was economically viable based on the values achievable for new build property sales minus the site acquisition and new build costs (as informed by the latest available data).

It would be important to ensure that the study would be robust in the event of the current house price volatility continuing, so its findings would not be rapidly invalidated by a continuing decline in house prices. In order to address this the

report would assess at least 3 main scenarios, as followed:

- The base scenario should reflect the position in October 2007. This was a position when the market was reasonably stable before the “credit crunch” had a major impact.
- A position which reflected about a year later, October 2008 with about average 10% fall in prices.
- A position reflecting a greater fall in prices. A fall of 20% was widely predicted and it would be prudent to model such an option.

The timetable for the study was as follows:

- Emerging findings 23rd January
- Draft Report 6th February
- Final Report 20th February

Members queried the need for consultants when Stockton Council had Officers with related expertise. Members were advised that although Officers were knowledgeable and had expertise and would be used in the study they did not however have the full specialised knowledge to carry out the study.

Queries were raised regarding the reliability of the information provided by developers. Officers advised that collaborative working with key stakeholders was a requirement of Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3) and that it would be the responsibility of the consultants to verify the quality of the data that developers provided. Officers also advised that as part of the study the consultants would undertake a correspondence-based consultation with developers. This would provide an opportunity for developers to comment on the initial draft outputs of the consultant’s work.

Concerns were raised regarding how Officers would gain a clear picture from the study when the housing economy was so volatile and how the consultants would allow for fluctuations.

Officers acknowledged that due to the current economic situation the consultants would need to work in a number of variables covering a wide remit. Officers suggested that the consultants could be held on a retainer to keep costs down instead of re-engaging their services every time a new variable took place.

Clarification was sought on the definition of affordable housing. Officers advised that the most up-to-date general definition was at Annex B of PPS3.

Members stated that affordable housing needed to be in sustainable areas where residents would have access to services such as buses.

CONCLUDED that the report be noted.

**LDF
55/08**

Special Townscape Character Areas

A report was given informing Members of the creation of a list of areas of 'special townscape character' and the process in assessing the areas to form an evidence base for the emerging Regeneration Development Plan Document

The character and distinctiveness of many areas within the Borough had been

under pressure from development in recent years. National planning policy for housing encouraged the intensification of housing development and in particular development on 'previously developed land'. This coupled with the demographic changes within the Borough towards a need for smaller households, could result in individual home owners becoming increasingly tempted to realise the potential value of their property through development of large plots of garden land (new dwellings alongside the original), subdivision of dwellings, or the demolition of large detached housing and their replacement with higher density flatted development. The Council recognised that if a considered approach was not adopted then such developments could contribute to the loss of character or distinctiveness of an area. Redevelopment of this sort could also disrupt the pattern of development and result in the loss of trees and hedges.

It was anticipated that site visits following a consistent methodology would be undertaken on the shortlisted areas during the coming months. From the site visits and further assessment of the areas 'special townscape character' a final list of sites would be agreed upon.

A detailed assessment of each site agreed as having 'special townscape character' would then be undertaken and incorporated into a report to form an evidence base for policy emerging as part of the Regeneration Development Planning Document.

Members received clarification that the sites were those with buildings as well as houses. Discussion took place on other areas that could be included.

Members observed that due to difficulties in enforcement, Planning Committee received applications for backyard developments which resulted in piecemeal developments; however it was considered that upon completion of the study, there would be greater control and coordination.

Members were advised that the topic of backyard development was going back to Parliament.

The report would provide an evidence base to the Local Development Framework. Policies regarding 'special townscape character areas' would be consulted upon as part of the Development Planning Document in which they were contained.

CONCLUDED that:

1. The report be noted.
2. Members will inform Officers of any additional areas of potential special townscape character which Members feel are under pressure from development.