

SCRUTINY REVIEW – CREATING MORE AFFORDABLE HOMES IN SOUTH WILTSHIRE A REPORT MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Over the next three years we need to:

Deliver 350 new affordable homes including: rural housing, bringing back into use empty properties and housing with support.

Enable 50 tenants to transfer to smaller properties, releasing a larger home to be re-let to a family.

To improve the balance of smaller homes negotiate with developers to build 'for sale' 100 one and two bedroom properties.

Make the provision of affordable housing a clear corporate commitment that should not be sacrificed for other planning gain.

To seek continuous improvement through effective partnerships with both the public and private sector.



Why?

A total of 797 households per annum are likely to be seeking affordable housing over the next five years.

The number of older people is increasing as people are living longer.

House prices continue to rise, demand is outstripping supply.

Local wages are below the national average.

There are an increasing number of households who require some form of support to retain their home.

One and two person households are increasing whilst the predominance of the housing stock is for traditional family households.

80% of private sector housing requires some form of improvement. This is directly linked to a higher than average number of households experiencing fuel poverty.

Our own housing stock still requires substantial investment, although we remain optimistic that we can achieve the decency standard.

How are we going to achieve this?

The review has identified what we need to do in order to achieve our outcomes



So, what do we need to do?

1. Introduce detailed Supplementary Planning Guidance setting out the Council's requirements for the provision of affordable housing, both rented, shared ownership and market housing.
2. In support of one of the Council's five key objectives, to agree an internal methodology for members and officers that allows planning gain to be prioritised to ensure maximum opportunities for securing affordable housing.
3. Influence private developers to build a more balanced mix of homes including more 1 and 2 bedroom properties.
4. Identify which of the Council's surplus land holdings could be used to facilitate additional new social housing.
5. To consider whether it would be advantageous to transfer such land at a nominal value in order to facilitate a non-grant funded scheme.
6. Progress discussions with Signpost Housing Association on developing a 'special purpose funding vehicle' to facilitate additional affordable housing.
7. Review the Council's cash incentive scheme, comparing with schemes operated by other Authorities, and re-launch to encourage more people to move thus releasing more larger properties for letting.
8. Respond creatively to potential rural exception sites through establishing a Rural Housing working group with the objectives of:
 - Encouraging large country landowners to develop/refurbish accommodation for the provision of affordable housing
 - Support the countywide Rural Housing Enabler post;
 - Develop a local methodology for undertaking rural housing needs surveys based on good practice being developed by the Countryside Agency;
 - Ensure housing has a voice in initiatives such as the Coastal and Market town.
9. Participate in the national discussion concerning debt-free authorities and lobbying government on the potential implications.
10. Continue to pursue other initiatives that deliver on a smaller scale such as Private Sector Leasing, Keyworker, Self-build, Sustainable construction

Purpose

This report summarises the key outcomes from the Scrutiny Review. A detailed report of the Review is available in the Members Room and will be available on the Internet. What needed to be achieved over the next three years was discussed at Council on 23 September and presented to Cabinet on 16 October.

Background

In April 2002 the Community & Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel established a working group to undertake a review of 'Creating more affordable Homes in South Wiltshire'. The purpose of the review was to clarify the issues facing the Council and then through a series of meetings and visits to identify good practice and innovation being developed by other organisations to deliver additional affordable housing.

What did the scrutiny involve?

The Working Group set out its agenda to deliver the objectives of the scoping paper by:

Convening roundtable discussions with:-

- The Council's Registered Social Landlord Partners, the Housing Corporation and Housing Needs Consultant, Richard Fordham;
- Private Sector Developers
- Countryside Agency, South West Regional Development Agency and Government Office for the South West.

Visits to:-

- London Borough of Islington
- Test Valley Borough Council
- Stroud District Council

Collating a range of documents associated with the current issues of delivering more affordable housing.

How do we compare?

Our visits to other authorities revealed that we do as much if not more than some of the best performing Councils, we just don't shout about it! For example we:-

*Have a preferred RSL Partnership;
Invest substantial resources into new social housing;
Operate a Private Sector Leasing Initiative;
Recognise our strategic housing function;
Have effective partnerships with the voluntary sector.*

Feedback from the round table discussions was extremely positive and welcomed the Council's approach. Many of the people involved would welcome the opportunity to continue such dialogue on a regular basis.

Defining Affordable Housing

The group endeavoured to define what affordable housing exactly means. The Government's view is that it should be up to each local authority to publish its definition and Salisbury's is detailed below. However, the group felt that this should not be an exclusive definition and where appropriate a broader framework could be applied such as for key workers or affordable market rented accommodation.

Definition of Affordable Housing - Salisbury District Local Plan (Adopted, 1996)

Where there is a demonstrable lack of affordable housing to meet local needs, the Local Planning Authority will seek, on general purpose housing sites of one hectare or more, the provision of an appropriate proportion of affordable housing subject to market and site conditions, and other material considerations. This policy will be subject to the following criteria:

- i) the proposed development will be for persons unable to compete in the existing local housing market who are in need of accommodation and who are resident or permanently employed in the local area, or who used to live in the local area and wish to return for reasons of employment or family connections.*
- ii) arrangements will be made to ensure that the benefit of affordable housing is enjoyed, not only by the initial occupiers of the dwellings provided, but also by their successors, for example, through the management of the property by a housing association, a trust or some similar organisation.*

Primarily this includes social housing for rent and shared ownership but not exclusively. IT IS NOT SUB-STANDARD OR LESS QUALITY ACCOMMODATION

Outcomes

Through the series of discussions and visits Members and Officers have been able to identify a range of issues that offer opportunities for the Council to facilitate more affordable housing. These are set out at the beginning of this report.

Recommendations

Members are asked to confirm their support for the five point plan and recommend to Cabinet that these be adopted together with taking forward the 10 operational action points. A further report should be brought back to the Panel in six months to monitor progress.

Important links that have contributed and support this paper and the detailed report:

LGA Circular 218/02, Submission to inquiry into Affordable Housing
LGA Circular 207/02, Key workers and affordable housing
DTLR, Delivering Affordable Housing through Planning Policy
The House Builders Federation, Building a Crisis – Housing under-supply in England
Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Britain's Housing in 2002 – More shortages and homelessness

The Working Party included:

Councillors Mrs Evans, Miss Howard, Leo, Osment and Mrs Welsh.

Tenants Panel: Mr Illsley, Mr Southey

Officers: Debbie Dixon, Andrew Reynolds, Alistair MacDonald and Arabella Davies.

Acknowledgements and thanks to:

Stroud District Council

Test Valley Borough Council

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Signpost

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Government Office for the South West

Countryside Agency

South West RDA