

Joint Area North Committee – 25th February 2009

9. Addressing local priorities in Area North - Affordable Rural Housing (Update report from working group)

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Purpose of the Report

To provide an update to members of the Joint Area North Committee on work to review and improve the monitoring and delivery of schemes for affordable housing in Area North, as requested by the former Area North Committee, as part of the its commitment to secure increased levels of affordable homes.

Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that Members:-

1. Note and comment on the report.
2. Request a further update in 3 months time.

1. Background to this report

- 1.1. Increased provision of affordable homes in South Somerset remains a high priority, as evidence by the adopted Sustainable Community Strategy, SSDC Corporate Plan and the Somerset Local Area Agreement. Many published community-led plans (e.g: 'Parish Plans'), refer to the need to increase the supply of affordable homes for local people. The Area North Development Plan 2008-09 includes the increased provision of affordable homes as its top priority.
- 1.2. The former Area North Committee (now Joint Area North Committee), perceived the need to review the performance management arrangements for small-scale schemes, including those supported within the Somerset wide rural housing programme to ensure the best chances of success in what can be a challenging project to deliver.
- 1.3. SSDC and SCC contribute financially to the employment of 2 Rural Housing Enablers, hosted by the Community Council for Somerset, which seek to work with local parishes and registered Social Landlords, to make best use of the opportunity provided by the Rural Exception Policy, within the South Somerset Local Plan.

2. Report to Area North – November 2008

- 2.1. A report was submitted November 2008, compiled by the Head of Area Development (North), in conjunction with the Planning Team Leader (North and West), and primarily considered the relationship between housing provision and the land use system, when working at a local level. This followed discussion with members of the SSDC Strategic Housing team, and Community Council for

Somerset, together with a review of current and anticipated schemes on a parish by parish basis.

2.2. The report indicated five key messages to underpin successful delivery, which are summarised below:

- The timing and methodology of the Housing Needs Survey (HNS) needs to be properly planned within the development of a local scheme. Some concerns exist that a detailed HNS is conducted before other areas of feasibility have been concluded. This may raise expectations, or can be wasted if over time the value of the results is diminished. The HNS provides an independent assessment of local need, using an accepted methodology, used to support funding bids to the Homes & Communities Agency (formally Housing Corporation).
- There is increasing national interest in ownership models for affordable homes, not all of which have been tested. Local understanding of the advantages and limitations of different models could be improved.
- The supply and affordability of land is without doubt the single most important factor in securing a viable scheme.
- A strong and managed relationship between housing and land-use planning systems and processes is vital.
- At the local level, the development of a scheme (of whatever size), is a project. Projects tend to fail without coherent project management, which can plan for success and manage risks. In such a complex environment - continuous learning and evaluation is essential.

2.3. **The report also:**

- Proposed respective roles of the Head of Building and Development Control, the Head of Area Development, and the Area Committee, in order to ensure an enhanced level of partnership with local communities, – SSDC Housing and Registered Social Landlords, which were endorsed.
- Presented a visual overview of the links between the planning and housing processes, in three main stages, and the various outputs and outcomes from each stage. (This is repeated in Appendix B)

2.4. Finally the report made a series of recommended next steps, which are set out below, with an update on progress to date.

3. Progress against actions in November 08 report

Next Step Actions	Progress
Form an Area North Working Group to promote internal and external partnership, and monitor the progress of delivery	Working group has met, and has agreed to widen this to all areas . Current schemes considered, and updates provided on current national context for housing & planning delivery. See report from Strategic Housing in this agenda.

Complete the parish database of all known schemes, and ensure that information is collated from Registered Social Landlords	In progress, again proposed to make this a district wide exercise. Some information may still be missing. South Somerset Homes have shared information to assist on current schemes.
From current schemes in progress, identify any issues, which may affect success, on a case by case basis and where possible address these issues	All known schemes reviewed, with known action in hand reported, and additional actions agreed. Further details required from RHE. (Rural Housing Enabler)
Check and discuss the current and planned programme for Housing Needs Surveys in Area North with the Strategic Housing Manager and the Rural Housing Enabler	Discussed, task not complete

4. Current and potential affordable homes delivery in Area North

4.1 Appendix A includes the following tables:

- Table 1 List of parishes where a Housing Needs Survey was completed by the Community Council for Somerset, since 2004 under the Somerset Rural Housing Programme and a summary of progress to develop a scheme, from available information. Note that some schemes are achieved through re-development of existing stock by a Registered Social Landlord – often South Somerset Homes, and the major landowners, following stock transfer from SSDC.
- Table 2 South Somerset Homes redevelopment – planned re-development programme from existing stock, including replacement of pre-reinforced concrete homes.
- Table 3 Current status of affordable housing expected to be delivered through developer obligations (S106)

Financial Implications

None from this report

Implications for Corporate Priorities

Enabling the increased provision of affordable homes for local people in rural areas supports the following key target areas of the SSDC Corporate Plan:-

- 3.2 With partners enabling the building of 597 affordable housing units by 2011.
- 3.4 With partners enable the development of four housing schemes in rural areas by 2012.

Other Implications

Increasing the supply of affordable housing in Area North is the top priority within the Area Development Plan

Background Papers: *Area North Addressing local priorities in Area North – Affordable Housing - November 08*

Area North Committee Rural Housing update June 2008

Planning Policy Statement 3 Housing 2006 Communities and Local Government

Details of the rural exception project available from the Community Council for Somerset
