

11. Area North Affordable Housing – 2011-12 – Progress Report

Strategic Director: Rina Singh, Place and Performance
Assistant Director: Martin Woods - Economy
Service Manager: Andy Foyne Spatial Policy Manager
Lead Officer: Jo Calvert – Housing Development Officer
Report Author: Charlotte Jones Area Development Manager (North)
Contact Details: charlotte.jones@southsomerset.gov.uk 01935 462251

Purpose of the Report

To report on the progress towards delivery of additional affordable housing in Area North.

This report has been prepared jointly by the Corporate Strategy Housing Manager, Housing Development Officer and Area Development Manager (North). The Area Development Manager (North) will present the report.

Recommendation

(1) Note and comment on the report

Background

Increased provision of affordable homes in South Somerset remains a high priority, as evidenced by the adopted Sustainable Community Strategy and SSDC Corporate Plan. Local consultation frequently refers to the need to increase the supply of affordable homes for local people.

Affordable housing is housing that will be available for people, whose financial circumstances means they do not have the opportunity to purchase their own home or rent privately from the open market. This is as a result of the relationship between their income and housing costs.

The Area North Committee endorsed the provision of additional affordable homes for local people as its highest priority in May 2010, with a specific focus on the progress of smaller scale schemes in rural parishes.

Affordable Housing Programme – Area North

The current programme in Area North is made up of three main types of scheme:

- Where the provision of additional units of affordable housing forms 35% of a larger scheme of housing, secured as part of legal agreement alongside the planning consent.
- Where an existing owner of affordable housing re-develops an existing scheme, perhaps by demolishing and rebuilding to a higher density, or by using adjoining land to extend the layout.
- Where a scheme is brought about through the use of the Rural Exception Policy within the saved South Somerset Local Plan, generally requiring 100% of the houses built to be 'affordable' and owned or rented by residents with a qualifying local connection to

that parish, in perpetuity. The emerging Localism Bill, together with the revised development plan for South Somerset (the Core Strategy) *may* provide the means to include some element of market housing to both provide a mix of tenure, and to cross-subsidise rather than require grant-aid.

Enabling the progress and delivery of affordable housing schemes

In view of the importance to local sustainability, Area North has allocated £15,000 to assist in the progress of small scale schemes, with the priority to be on schemes already under development, or where parishes have already spent time considering affordable housing issues. The Area Committee have also endorsed Affordable Housing as its highest priority.

As a result, the Area Development Manager has prioritised time from the team's work programme and increased levels of communication between key services internally, and with ward members, 'developers' and parishes.

So far, the funding has been used to support the cost of housing needs surveys (printing and postage). No further funding has been required to date; progress has been secured through greater levels of involvement from Area Development and the Development Management team, from within existing budgets and by increased communication between all parties involved. The re-appointment of the Housing Development Officer has also made a considerable difference to assist with progress at a local level.

However in future resources are likely to be required to support negotiation with land owners, community engagements or other preparatory work, or the development of Neighbourhood Plans referred to be the Localism Bill. The main costs of scheme development is undertaken by the Housing Provider (formally known as Registered Local Landlords and Housing Associations.)

- Larger schemes have a greater economy of scale than smaller schemes – this can affect levels of support offered. However there is also the potential that more involvement can be achieved from the community in smaller parishes.
- There is strong local and national opinion that even the smallest of settlements warrant a mix of tenure and include a proportion of affordable housing to promote local quality of life.

In the light of both of the above points, small rural schemes need to remain a priority for all partners who can make them happen. Key factors include close attention to the progress of each scheme's project plan, and taking opportunities to gain capacity into the process from local communities. This can go as far as eventual ownership of land and the homes themselves.

Forms of ownership and models of affordable housing

Information on types of affordable schemes, and further details of Community Land Trusts included within Appendix B.

Recent progress

An update on the status of different schemes across Area North parishes is included in **Appendix A**. The programme is closely monitored by the Housing Development Officer and the Area Development Manager (North) working closely with the Development Management service and the respective development teams of the Housing Providers.

The role of the Ward Member, parish councils and clerk is often critical to overall success, and this requires excellent communications and a genuine partnership.

Current progress (by a variety of those involved) towards the delivery of additional affordable homes in Area North includes:

- Early stages of work to identify need and opportunity for small scale schemes in villages in Ash, Compton Dundon, High Ham, Montacute, Shepton Beauchamp and Tintinhull.
- Site specific, pre-application work completed or underway in Norton sub Hamdon, Long Sutton and Long Load.
- Planning applications submitted for determination in Huish Episcopi and Long Sutton.
- Affordable housing approved as part of applications in Somerton (Northfields) and South Petherton (Hayes End)
- Completed and occupied or partly occupied schemes in Huish Episcopi (Bartletts Elm and Eastover); Ilton and Curry Rivel.

Expected next steps

Further expected progress over the next 2-8 months includes:-

- Further round of discussion with parishes / partners to develop ideas and understanding of future process – High Ham, Shepton Beauchamp, Compton Dundon, Tintinhull, Montacute. Special focus on Localism Bill and draft Core Strategy – Policy SS2.
- Better definition of required actions to progress scheme in Ash and Long Load.
- Submission and / or determination of schemes in Long Sutton, Norton-sub-Hamdon, Huish Episcopi.
- Completion of s106 agreements for approved schemes.
- Ongoing development and occupation of schemes with consents and funding.

Together with: -

- Completion of the South Somerset Core Strategy for Inspection and adoption during 2012.
- Parish workshops on Affordable Housing – possibly Autumn 2011

Financial Implications

None from this report

Corporate Priority Implications

The development and delivery of more affordable housing in Area North contributes directly towards the following key target areas in the Corporate Plan:

- With partners, enable the building of 597 affordable housing units by 2011 (Corporate Plan 3.2; SCS Action 26; LAA – NI 155)
- Increase the net additional homes provided (Corporate Plan 3.3; LAA – NI154)
- With partners, enable the development of 4 housing schemes in rural communities by 2012 (Corporate Plan 3.4; SCS Action 26.1)

And directly towards:

- Reduce the number of households living in temporary accommodation (Corporate Plan 3.6; NI 156)

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI 188)

All affordable housing in receipt of public subsidy, whether through the Homes and Communities Agency or from the Council, has to achieve the minimum code three rating within the Code for Sustainable Homes.

Equalities & Diversity Implications

All affordable housing let by Housing Providers in South Somerset is allocated through Homefinder Somerset, the county-wide Choice Based Lettings system. Homefinder Somerset has been adopted by all five local housing authorities in the county and is fully compliant with the relevant legislation, chiefly the Housing Act 1996, which sets out the prescribed groups to whom 'reasonable preference' must be shown.

*Background Papers: Addressing Local Priorities in Area North – Affordable Housing – Nov 08, Feb 09, Mar 09, Sept 09, Jan 10.
Area North Affordable Housing Programme – update report May 2010.*
