

Minutes of the Meeting of the Extraordinary Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 29 October 2019 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Lynn Worrall (Chair), Chris Baker (Vice-Chair), Qaisar Abbas, Colin Churchman, Andrew Jefferies and Joycelyn Redsell

Lynn Mansfield, Housing Tenant Representative

In attendance: Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health/Interim Director of Children's Services
Carol Hinvest, Assistant Director of Housing
Keith Andrews, Housing Development Manager
Kelly Myers, Housing Development Project Manager
Ryan Farmer, Housing Strategy and Quality Manager
Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

16. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

17. Housing Development Process

The Housing Development Manager addressed the Committee and in doing so explained that following the Committee's decision at the June 2019 meeting to endorse the delivery of a New Homes Delivery Programme. He further outlined the report set out the criteria and process of which prospective sites would be identified for residential development by the Council.

Members heard how the Council had agreed ambitious targets for house building both within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and by Thurrock Regeneration Limited (TRL) which were to build, up to 500 affordable HRA homes between 2019 to 2029 and 1000 homes for sale and rent by TRL by 2023. This followed the publication of the South Essex Strategic Housing Market Assessment which assessed the need for housing in Thurrock between 2014 and 2037 as being between 1,074-1,381 new dwellings per annum, within which the affordable housing element is estimated at 472 dwellings per annum.

Officers continued to take Members through the report, highlighting the key criteria for sites deemed potentially suitable for development; sites would often fall within more than one criterion.

The Chair of the Committee then explained that she had used her discretion to allow a resident to ask a question. She then asked Mrs Campbell to join the Committee and ask her question.

If the site includes open space it would only be brought forward for development, if the space is considered of poor quality and no longer required for that purpose, as defined in the Open Space 2006 assessment. Why would you consider development in a deprived area, with no youth club for young people, which is used for recreation reason, would you consider that poor quality?

The Housing Development Manager, thanked Mrs Campbell for her question and explained that if a site was to be considered for development, it would have to meet one or more of the key criteria. He further explained that a wide range of factors would be taken into account and it wouldn't just be choosing an area of land without consideration.

Members queried if it was possible to give members of the public more information on the consultations and the process the Council was following. Additionally it was enquired should only 50% of a site be used would the remaining 50% be improved for future use. The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health/Interim Director of Children's Services confirmed that each site would have its own consultation and follow the planning application process. It was also stated that officers would support infrastructure where possible.

Councillor Abbas requested that relevant Ward Members are included within the consultation referred to at point 2.6 in the report, which officers were happy to agree.

The Housing Tenant Representative enquired as to the breakdown of the 1000 TRL homes. The Housing Development Manager informed the Committee the homes would be a range of tenures including affordable homes in line with the Councils Planning Policy, some would be to rent and some shared ownership.

Members sought clarity on the use of land which had been fly tipped on, with the assumption that such land would not be appropriate for development. The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health/Interim Director of Children's Services stated that all possible sites would undergo review, however any sites deemed to be contaminated would not be used, such as old refuse sites.

The Chair thanked Officers for the report and stated she was pleased to see that the Committee and Members had been included at this early stage of the process.

RESOLVED:

Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to comment on the proposed process and criteria by which Council owned sites are selected for redevelopment for residential purposes.

18. Housing Strategy Timetable

The Housing Strategy and Quality Manager presented the report which explained the importance of Thurrock Council having a document which stated its ambitions and goals with regards to housing in the borough. The current Housing Strategy was adopted in Thurrock in 2015.

It was remarked it was anticipated that the refreshed Housing Strategy would be in effect from 2020 until 2025 and would cover the range of tenures available in Thurrock, not only social housing but also owner-occupiers and the private rental sector. It was highlighted that the strategy would also consider housing need in the borough and the barriers which residents may face with accessing safe and secure accommodation, rather than providing an analysis of options or sites for housing provision

Members thanked Officers for the report and during questions it was sought as to whether the Council already had most of the information it required from other consultations, such as the Local Plan. The Housing Strategy and Quality Manager explained that other information could be taken in to account however the strategy was also to assist with the barriers people faced within the borough and to offer them the support and opportunities they needed.

RESOLVED:

Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the contents of this report, and comment on the proposal to develop a new housing strategy. In particular, the Committee are asked to comment on the consultation proposals as set out in section 6.

19. Garage Project Update

The Assistant Director of Housing informed Members the Council currently held a stock of 2500 garage buildings located across the borough. The numbers of garages in use at any one time changed from week to week, however Members were notified, at the date of the report, there were currently 716 void garages, which constitutes 28% of the overall garage stock.

It was further explained out of these void garages, there were 69 'Free to Let' and the remainder were currently out of management due to a number of reasons including access issues, inspections required, repairs and clearance required. Member were notified a planned programme of works had been set to clear the garages and schedule the repairs over the next 6 months.

Members were assured Officers would be making the most out of the sites, should a garage not be suitable for repair or development then the space would be used for parking.

Councillor Redsell commented that lots of the garage sites across the borough were in need of some TLC for a number of reasons. She further commented she felt it was a good idea to use the spaces for car parking if they were not worthy of repair.

The Housing Tenant Representative queried if Officers would be prepared to convert a garage into a single dwelling as was previously done in Purfleet. The Assistant Director for Housing said that it would be something that officers would think about but it would depend on whether this was deemed the preferred development option.

Councillor Jefferies welcomed the report, however stated that residents in South Ockendon had not had a great experience with the repairs of garages.

It was enquired as to whether garages within the borough were still required to be refurbished. The Assistant Director for Housing explained there was a waiting list for garages so the demand was definitely there.

RESOLVED:

It is recommended that Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive this report for information and comment.

20. Housing Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2019/2020

The Committee discussed the work programme for the up and coming year. The Chair explained she had spoken with Officers and to ease the pressure on the December meeting. Members agreed the amendments to the Work Programme.

RESOLVED:

1. That the following report/s be rescheduled to the February meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- **Housing Performance Update**

The meeting finished at 8.25pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**