

## STAFFORD BOROUGH LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

### MEETING WITH STAFFORD & RURAL HOMES HOUSING ASSOCIATION

DATE OF MEETING – 12 NOVEMBER 2007

#### Attendees:

Karen Armitage	Chief Executive, Stafford & Rural Homes Housing Association
Carla Rendell	Director of Property, Stafford & Rural Homes
Naomi Perry	Planning Officer, Stafford Borough Council
Mac McCoig	Principal Housing Officer - Stafford Borough Council
Alex Yendole	Principal Planning Officer - Stafford Borough Council

- Stafford and Rural Homes have recently produced a new vision and set of objectives for the Housing Association based on its core business area of providing facilities to its residents, access to key services as well as landlord responsibilities. This new document revises the corporate approach produced in 2005 at the point of transfer with the housing stock from Stafford Borough Council to Stafford & Rural Homes Housing Association and provides a 5-10 year time frame for delivery and implementation of projects based on the five year funding sets required by the Housing Corporation. Stafford and Rural Homes have achieved a lot of the objectives set out the first 20 month period of its existence. Over the next year significant investment is being planned for through development opportunities both within the Stafford Borough area and other locations through partnership working. Stafford & Rural Homes aspires to be a three point organisation by 2009, being outward looking as well as addressing weaknesses regarding rents and voids.
- Key objective 6 of the new vision specifically focuses on partnership working and increasing access to affordable housing for local people. Furthermore the other objectives focus on neighbourhood renewal, new building programmes and establishing increased social support for the Stafford Borough community.
- There are three particular key issues to be addressed in Stafford Borough's area:
  - 1 Access to affordable housing with neighbourhoods being supported through housing markets especially by improving deprived properties which will reduce the impacts on deprived communities. This will be addressed through financial support and other initiatives.
  - 2 Direct maintenance to support the private sector with surplus housing provision made available to support local employment opportunities, achieved through procurement.
  - 3 Provision of affordable housing can only be addressed in the next three years through engagement with other partners because Stafford & Rural Homes is not permitted to work independently as a house-building organisation due to conditions set out at stock transfer in 2005.

- Stafford & Rural Homes wishes to build new housing for management purposes as well as retain stock but this can only be achieved to 2011 through recently established partnerships with South Staffordshire Housing Association and Trent & Dove Housing Association.
- New build and support for existing housing owned by Stafford and Rural Homes is required to establish a sustainable business. Stafford and Rural Homes is relatively land poor as an organisation because Stafford Borough Council retained much of the land holdings at stock transfer. Land that was acquired is generally scattered across the Stafford Borough area with no major areas of concentration for significant regeneration initiatives.
- Stafford and Rural Homes have recently completed an Older Peoples Review in order to support the current residents and plan for the future in terms of new residents. There are a disproportionate amount of elderly residents within Stafford and Rural Homes properties, which is an unsustainable situation. Therefore it is important to establish a better spread of residents demographically for the future.
- A detailed review of properties has classified all houses into the following sectors; lifespan of more than 10 years, lifespan of 5 years approximately and limited lifespan requiring immediate rebuild. The review is an important part of the future business planning for Stafford and Rural Homes in order to establish redevelopment opportunities and assess future work programmes. In terms of community sensitivities it should be noted that some sheltered housing schemes fall into the category of limited lifespan requiring immediate rebuild.
- A role for the Stafford and Rural Homes Chief Executive is to manage public relations and political sensitivities concerning the work of the organisation. Since the point of stock transfer the organisation has had some time to establish its work programme but now the implementation phase is beginning in order to provide for residents in the future and therefore changes are likely to bring controversy. As an organisation some funds are available through VAT shelters (please explain this term as AY does not understand it!!). Furthermore new housing developments and stock investment portfolios are likely to release further funds in the future for the organisation. However the Housing Corporation's bidding rounds only occur every three years so limited funds will be available from this source in the short to medium term, therefore making partnership working crucial for the future.
- Stafford and Rural Homes have the following specific concerns for the future:
  - 1 Adequate services and facilities must be provided for redevelopment to take place in terms of the provision of education, transport and health provision. It is important to provide the right type and mix of houses in the area for the population demographically not just apartments. Warrington is a good example where apartment development has led to transport problems. The new development strategy must look at areas for new build taking into account existing and likely future service provision.

- 2 Research shows that there is a significant level of housing demand especially for the elderly. It is important to provide for the future provision of the population in the Stafford Borough area. The housing market currently has gaps in provision, especially in terms of those people requiring social support and disabilities. This situation is likely to become more acute following Staffordshire County Council's decisions regarding the 'Changing Lives' agenda and closing of care homes.
- There is significant demand for affordable housing across the area, which can partly be provided through the Section 106 process and key percentages being delivered through new market housing. It is vital for a balance of shared equity and rented provision to ensure a range of affordability. In some areas there have been significant Right to Buy properties entering the housing market which has reduced the amount of affordable housing available for larger settlements. The provision of affordable housing and requirements in the rural areas is set out within the 2002 Housing Needs Survey and is also emphasised by rural ward Members of Stafford Borough Council. Affordable housing is particularly acute at the parish level where there can be little or no provision and limited data concerning need. Rural affordable housing requires an effective letting policy which cascades from the actual parish to adjoining parishes and then to the rest of the Borough area. Furthermore older people's provision continues to be a key concern for the future. Homelessness has been identified in Stafford Borough but the housing stock is not available to provide homes for the people.
  - Stafford Borough Council has recently produced a Housing Strategy consultation document, which raises the issue of adults aged 20 – 30 years of age having to live with parents rather than owning their own property because of house prices. It was suggested that Stafford Borough Council should undertake further analysis of this sector to establish the significance of this problem. Stafford Borough Council is specifically addressing the prevention of homelessness through the recently produced Homelessness Strategy with two new officers being employed; one on a full time basis and one through a fixed term contract to deal with this issue.
  - The number of rural exception sites needs to be increased in order to address rural issues of social inclusion. Furthermore living standards need to be raised across the Borough Council area through investment in neighbourhoods and communities. The Housing Corporation has a particular focus on social inclusion as well as an agenda for neighbourhood renewal and quality. Such provision needs to be made available for new development of communities as well as identifying the key support and delivery mechanisms.
  - Is there a weakness in terms of social inclusion within Stafford Borough? 29% of residents with the Stafford and Rural Homes Housing Association were recently identified as having mental health issues through the STATUS survey. Every Housing Association in the country will be producing a STATUS survey every three years using the same methodology and format, which will be very useful for comparison working. Important work has been identified through the residents survey in terms of future provision and support for target groups as well as

information for social landlords, site analysis and vulnerable people.

- Staffordshire County Council has a significant role in terms of extra care provision and as previously stated this role is changing through the 'Changing Lives' agenda. Future provision will need to be concentrated in particular facilities and some property will become surplus to requirements. Clearly the release and closure of Staffordshire County Council care home facilities will put pressure on other providers such as Stafford and Rural Homes and therefore a dialogue between partners needs to occur. Stafford and Rural Homes is currently considering the future strategy in order to meet the gap in provision, which will need to be agreed by the Board of the Housing Association.
- The following actions were agreed to be progressed by the meeting:
  - Stafford Borough Council to ensure the Housing Corporation are made aware of the timescales within the Local Development Framework for bringing forward the new strategy.
  - Stafford & Rural Homes to encourage the Housing Corporation to initiate bidding rounds on a yearly basis in order to be more effective and timely regarding delivery of funds.
  - Stafford Borough Council to keep Stafford and Rural Homes informed and engaged in the preparation of interim documents regarding affordable housing, Section 106 Agreements and the Local Area Agreement delivery of 16% affordable housing for the area.
  - Stafford Borough Council to progress with bringing forward robust policies for affordable housing, through the national planning process using the new development strategy.
  - A joint meeting to be established between Karen Armitage, Paula Fernival at Staffordshire County Council and Alex Yendole to discuss housing, health and social care links in January / February 2008
  - Further discussions to take place between Stafford and Rural Homes and Stafford Borough Council on the land portfolio to facilitate the strategic housing land availability assessment. Relevant land is available through the GIS mapping systems.
- Date of Next Meeting - Monday 10 December 2007.

Note prepared by Alex Yendole  
Date last revised: 15 November 2007  
Stafford Borough Council, Forward Planning