

COUNCIL MEETING – 17 DECEMBER 2002

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR STONE – HOUSING SERVICES

1. Securing Social Housing

“Social Housing ” – means subsidised social housing for rent.

It is unlikely that in the foreseeable future there will be a significant increase in the amount of Social Housing Grant available for Councils to allocate to Housing Associations to build new homes. The delivery of social housing locally needs to increase significantly to allow us to work towards our target of 131 dwellings per year (the figure established in the Couttie Housing Needs Report). Less than 50 social housing units will be provided next year.

In order to increase provision, the Government is recommending that Councils introduce Supplementary Planning Guidance to secure an increase in the developer’s subsidy on sites allocated for housing. The objective is to secure social housing on planning sites at nil public subsidy. Council Social Housing Grants could then be used to fund other Housing Association schemes not tied in to private housing developments.

The Current System - Using an example property value of £100,000, the Housing Association currently raises approximately £40,000 in private borrowing paid for from rents and the remaining sums come from the Housing Corporation Social Housing Grant (SHG) £30,000 and Local Authority SHG of £30,000.

A Section 106 agreement is used when an application for private housing is submitted by a developer and the site is one hectare or over, or the scheme is for 25 units or more. If the site is a Local Plan allocation, the target % for social housing has already been set in the report agreed by the Executive in May 2002. The percentages vary from 20% - 35% depending on whether there are exceptional costs associated with a site’s development. The terms of the Section 106 agreement are spelt out at the time of the application and the final wording is agreed between the Council, the developers and the Housing Association.

On windfall sites not identified in the Local Plan, the proportion of social housing will be determined on a site-by-site basis, generally within the range above.

The New Proposal for Providing Social Housing - Recent Strategic Planning and Housing Review Panels have recommended that the Council adopts an additional policy to provide social housing. Under this new Supplementary Planning Guidance on Section 106 sites, the Housing Association would expect to pay the developer only 40% of the value of the social housing (the figure for this is set by the Housing Corporation and is known as the "total cost indicator" (TCI). The remaining 60% would be seen as a subsidy from the developer.

To achieve this the developer could give the land free to the Housing Association and bridge the gap between the cost of the land and the 60% by way of a financial contribution. Alternatively the developer could build the dwellings and sell them to the Housing Association at 40% of their TCI value. These dwellings would be built in accordance with Housing Corporation design standards.

This new arrangement would mean that no additional subsidy on these sites would need to be provided by the Council or the Housing Corporation.

2. New Social Housing in Cotford St. Luke

Redland Housing Association has completed 20 houses at Milsom Place. A planning application has been submitted for a further 20 dwellings at Manning Road. This will be an "Eco site".

Knightstone Housing Association and SHAL Housing Limited are working together to provide 10 houses and flats, and 10 shared equity houses on the Village Centre site.

3. Energy Efficiency Strategy

A new Strategy to promote domestic energy efficiency is currently being created. It includes plans to develop financial incentives, grants, advice and promotion and involves many partners both within and outside of the Council. Some recent initiatives include an Energy Efficiency Week prize draw to win a fridge and kettles, plus two radio interviews on local stations at the start of Warm Homes Week to promote grants and advice available from the Energy Efficiency Officer.

There has also been an excellent response to the advert placed in the Taunton Times recently and many phone calls have been received from people requesting more information.

This winter's Deane Warmth campaign is imminent and will again involve a partnership with a utility company. The grant will once again provide insulation measures to those vulnerable to cold and damp conditions.

4. New Housing

There were 74 completions at Cotford St. Luke between October 2001 and September 2002 with a further 250 still to come.

Sites with Planning Permission in Taunton will provide a further 430 completions, With 110 at the Rugby Club, 50 off Lisieux Way and 50 at Bishops Saab Garage.

In Wellington a further 130 dwellings, with 58 of these on the Tonedale site.

Although there are 1,300 committed dwellings in the system for the Borough it is fair to say that in Taunton the number of sites is 'drying up' pending the Local Plan sites coming through.

Councillor Phil Stone

