

TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE – WEDNESDAY 5 MARCH 2008

REPORT OF THE HOUSING ENABLING MANAGER

PROPOSED DISPOSAL OF A PIECE OF COUNCIL OWNED LEISURE LAND AT WELLSPRINGS BETWEEN ENMORE ROAD AND WELLSPRINGS ROAD. FOR THE PROPOSED MIXED DEVELOPMENT OF 20 SOCIAL RENTED AND SHARED OWNERSHIP AFFORDABLE HOMES THROUGH HOUSING INNOVATION LTD at no cost to the public purse.

(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillors Cllr. Hazel Prior Sankey And Cllr. Richard Lees).

SUMMARY

The shortage of affordable housing in Taunton Deane is serious. Coupled with an acute shortage of building land in the Council's land banks this makes the provision of Affordable Housing almost impossible through the Council's own resources. Brownfield sites in Taunton suitable for significant development are in short supply. It is therefore essential that the Council consider every development opportunity to produce Affordable Housing.

Taunton Deane has one of the highest ratios of house prices to average joint incomes in the West Country. Home ownership is becoming impossible for most low income people and the lack of affordability is getting worse all the time. 2006 figures published in Home Truths by the National Housing Federation (south west) 'The real cost of housing' 2007-2012 illustrates the difficulties for people to buy in this area, average house price £199,533, average income £17,077 house price affordability ratio 11.7. As a result the Housing Waiting List continues to grow.

For many years now the Council has been unable to provide the numbers of affordable housing that are required to meet demand. Affordable Housing delivery through RSLs has fallen short of the required figures. ARK Consultancy carried out a Housing Need Survey in 2006 and this demonstrated a need for 564 social/affordable homes per year. This figure is increasing. Fordhams have been asked to carry out a County Strategic Housing Market Assessment and officers fear a significant increase in the demand for Affordable Housing.

With the demand for housing growing rapidly it is necessary for the Council to look for innovative ways of providing the housing needed and to consider the difficult issue and assess the viability of building on open green areas such as part of Wellsprings open space. This piece of land was offered for Affordable Housing and will be able to accommodate 20 three bed family homes with a mix

of 10 for social rent and 10 for affordable shared ownership. These three bedroom houses will be available for applicants and transfers on our Housing Waiting List. Three bedrooms homes are in short supply and will be greatly welcomed by people living in small or cramped conditions.

Housing Innovation Ltd, a company based in the South West and London, is in a position to be able to purchase this land for £200,000 which equates to £10,000 per plot. There will be no public funding with delivery of the homes at the end of this year (subject to planning). This scheme will work if this Council and Housing Innovation Ltd work in partnership. It is necessary that the money raised from the sale of this land should be ring fenced for Leisure and Open Space.

Hard copies of the site location plan and scheme design will be handed out at the meeting.

Appendix 1 Report from the Leisure Development Manager.

Background

Currently there are approximately 4553 on the Council's Housing Waiting List. Over 3432 are applicants, 1121 want to transfer. It is likely that those applicants on the waiting list will wait for up to 8 years.

Completions of new build over the past four years have been disappointing

02/03	106
03/04	43
04/05	48
05/06	93
06/07	53

There are currently six major Section 106 sites in the pipeline. These sites have brought forward problems that are delaying the delivery of all housing on these sites. It is quite likely that it will be 2010 before we see any significant delivery of Affordable Housing on these sites. We currently rely on small windfall sites, exception sites, and small developments on Housing owned land.

Councillors and Officers will recall that Housing Innovation Ltd, came to Taunton Deane Council to present their unique funding and delivery model and this was greatly accepted and considered to be a good way forward. It was agreed that this Council would work in partnership with Housing Innovation in delivering Affordable Housing.

Current Situation

At our request the architect for Housing Innovation Ltd drew up three different site plans (appendix 2) that is indicative of what could be produced on a limited amount of open space. It was felt as much choice should be offered to the residents as possible.

After identifying the land at Wellsprings Road (site location plan attached appendix 3) a consultation exercise was carried out with 120 local residents. A pack containing a detailed letter, site plans of the three schemes and a questionnaire was distributed with a 47% return. There were obviously concerns over the loss of space and varying concerns over each scheme. The area identified for consideration as Scheme three was considered to be the least intrusive development and this is the area put forward today for consideration. The design will include a green corridor along the Kingston Stream with careful sympathetic design to fit in with the surrounding area.

RECOMMENDATION

Members are recommended to approve the disposal of the land to provide much needed three bedroom Affordable Housing for families on our Housing Waiting List in the light that

- This particular site will be able to provide 20 three bedroom houses with no cost to the public purse.
- These new homes can be delivered during the next financial year (subject to planning)
- Taking account of concerns raised regarding the loss of open space, the full £200,000 raised from sale of this site will go towards improving open space amenities in the area, which is on the priority list for improving play opportunities.

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Housing Enabling Manager***

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Appendix 1

COMMENTS OF LEISURE DEVELOPMENT MANAGER ON THE PROPOSAL

THE SITE

The site proposed for development is in North Taunton and forms part of the Wellsprings Linear Open Space which links the Taunton Green playing fields in the north with the Rowbarton Allotments site in the south, forming a pleasant informal open space along the Kingston Stream. It passes through the wards of Pyrland and Rowbarton and Lyngford.

The area proposed for development is part of the informal open space south of Wellsprings Road in the ward of Lyngford. It provides a visual amenity for adjacent houses, is used for informal recreation and activity, provides pedestrian access into the wider open space network and has a vehicle access across it to Rowbarton allotments. The proposed development would take one fifth of this area of open space.

THE SUPPLY OF OPEN SPACE

This part of Taunton has less open space in relation to the amount of open space available across the town. In Taunton there is an average of 2.5 hectares of open space per thousand people and in the Lyngford ward in which the site is located there is just 1.73 hectares per thousand people. This would suggest that disposal of this area of land is not advisable as it will leave an even greater shortfall. (The very closely adjacent wards of Pyrland and Rowbarton and Fairwater also have shortfalls at 1.4 hectares and 1.23 hectares per thousand people respectively)

Indeed the disposal of open space in an area not identified as having an over supply could provide evidence for developers that the Council has no basis for requiring off-site contributions for public open space in the future from developers in this vicinity. It will also set a precedent for the future showing that the Council is not averse to considering the disposal of open space for development. For these reasons I cannot support this proposal.

MITIGATION OF THE IMPACT OF THE PROPOSAL

Should Members be minded to approve this disposal it is vital that it takes steps to guard against the risk of developers challenging future and recently negotiated Section 106 requirements for open space contributions.

In order to do this the entire receipt of £200,000 from the sale of this site should be reinvested into improving local public open space and its accessibility. This would create more user facilities and generate greater active use of the open spaces by a wider range of people in the community.

In particular this ward is ranked 5th in the Taunton Deane Play Strategy priority list for improving play opportunities and there is room to create a modern play space on the remaining land. The provision of facilities for parents, dog walkers and to enhance the wildlife habitats would also add to the quality of the remaining open space. It is understood that the developer concerned has agreed to retain a green corridor along the stream and the vehicle access into the allotments. The walk along the stream needs to be as wide as possible in order to safeguard the wildlife habitat value of the stream and its banks.