

Coventry Partnership Housing Theme Group Minutes 24th March 2009

Attendees (members)

Richard Monk (RM) - Chair	Whitefriars Housing Group
Stephen Rudge (SR)	Head of Housing Policy & Services, CCC
Ayaz Maqsood (AM) – Advisor	Housing Strategy Manager, CCC
John Payne (JP)	Neighbourhood Management, CCC
Sarah Perry (SP)	Coventry Partnership
Niall McChesney (NM)	City Development, CCC
Clive Benfield (CB)	Benfield Homes
Sue Green (SG)	Deeley Homes
Phil Pilkington (PP)	Coventry University Students Union
Kim Fawcett (KF)	Housing Strategy, CCC

Attendees (guests)

David Cockroft (DC)	City Centre Director, CCC
---------------------	---------------------------

1. Apologies and Introductions.

Apologies were received from Mary Wood (Midland Heart), Joan Allen (CEN), Giddy Kalsi (YMCA/HSIG)

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes from the meeting held on 20th January 2009 were agreed as accurate.

Matters arising from item 2, LDF: NM - The Council has approved the LDF Core Strategy and there is now a period of statutory consultation, after which it will go to an independent inspector to be considered for public examination.

3. City Centre Redevelopment Masterplan

David Cockroft, City Centre Director, gave a presentation on the Jerde Masterplan for the City Centre.

- Following consultation, the Jerde Masterplan for the city centre has been finalised and incorporates 10 over-arching principles for redevelopment. These will act as a guide for plans for individual developments, rather than prescribing the exact form of development for each area of the city centre.
- Important issues include the need to encourage and facilitate a prosperous night-time economy, more green open space, retention of historic buildings, and better restaurant/café facilities.
- Currently, Coventry is the 11th largest city in the UK but is ranked 52nd as a retail centre.
- The Masterplan brings in a more circular pattern to movement around the city centre with an inner loop road. The centre of the cross section is designated as a focal point, including an iconic building.
- A new roof-top city park and 'green fingers' are planned.
- There is also a design feature of higher-rise buildings along the line of the old city wall. These have been significantly reduced in height from the first plans.
- Retail space is expected to increase with 2.1 miles of extra retail frontage. Retail anchors will be used to improve legibility and the flow of the retail experience.
- 3.3million square feet of residential development has been included in the Masterplan (1.5m sq ft in the precinct area, 1.4m sq ft in extension A and 0.4n sq ft in extension B). This is mainly situated in an arc on the western side of the Masterplan area, within the high-rise development that follows the line of the city wall.
- These will all be apartments, incorporating professional loft-style living, family housing, and also sheltered housing. 1550 dwellings have been indicated, based on 92 square metres per dwelling.
- The Masterplan has taken into account existing, neighbouring development and regeneration plans (eg Swanswell).

AM – Is the residential element exclusively apartments?

DC - Yes, but the detail has not yet been decided. A residential community will be necessary for the night-time economy, with family apartments as well as professional 'loft-style' and supported apartments. The figure of 92 square metres per property is an assumption, but this is a very large unit size compared to city centre apartment developments of the past few years.

Coventry has relatively few city centre apartments. This is positive in that there has not been a problem with oversupply as seen in some cities (such as Manchester or Birmingham), but there needs to be a city centre residential community to encourage a night-time economy. Current market conditions nationally mean that developers are wary of city centre apartments, but it is expected that there will be a market for them in Coventry once market conditions improve.

AM – The Local Development Framework will require 25% affordable housing in the city centre – does the Masterplan include this?

DC – The Masterplan does not go into that level of detail, but any developments would be expected to follow planning requirements on affordable housing and tenure mix.

AM – Which will come first, the residential or the retail development?

DC – Both will need to be developed to encourage a nighttime economy and provide a critical mass of residents and facilities to attract people to live in the centre. It is almost a chicken-and-egg scenario. It also depends on how the economy recovers after the downturn, but the retail is most likely to lead as developers may be wary of city centre apartments.

CB – How has parking been incorporated?

DC – Parking for both residential and retail elements has been incorporated within the Masterplan. It is to be integrated within the development, for example underground or undercroft parking beneath the retail and residential spaces.

SR – What is the relationship between the Masterplan and the individual developments?

DC – The Masterplan is an overall vision, a goal, with wider areas planned out for different uses etc, but it is not prescriptive and each development will be designed and finalised when it is brought forward. Is important not to be too prescriptive, as the best plan for development today may not be best for development when it actually occurs in future years.

RM – Developers and RSLs within the Housing Theme Group would be interested in being involved in the future, and also in the developments and the way that they are procured, rather than only a few large, national developers being involved.

DC – There is no intention for there to be any exclusivity, the process will be open.

PP – The plans will need to take into account the Coventry University Development Plan which plans massive rebuilding on the Coventry University sites. There is likely to be a reduction in student growth overall – the only growth is likely to be in transient groups, such as part-time, postgraduate and international students. Student behaviours will change if fees increase (eg more living at home). General assumptions about student behaviour also need to change as the student population changes.

4. CBL Update

SR gave an update on Choice Based Lettings:

- SR drew attention to a recent article in Inside Housing magazine commenting on the growth of the Coventry Homefinder CBL system, following on from a survey that found that Coventry's CBL register was increasing more than any other in the country.
- The article's emphasis was on the fact that there are a relatively small number of people in band 1 - very urgent need (97), and band 2 - urgent need (1173). The majority of people are in Band 3 with no measurable housing need (20,344). This showed that people were attracted by the choice that CBL offered with 25% of lettings prioritised by length of time since registration, rather than by band.
- Properties are let relatively easily, with even unpopular types and areas receiving multiple bids. However, there are many instances where people bid but then cannot be contacted, possibly due to contact details changing without notifying the Homefinder team.
- A review of Coventry Homefinder was carried out last year and the resulting recommended policy changes went to the partner HA boards and the Council's Cabinet meeting at the end of last year. They are now working through implementing the changes.
- 1 in 4 properties are prioritised by registration date rather than by band, which was identified as a potential problem by the review. Legal advice is being sought, with regard to recent case law decisions.
- The next meeting of the steering group will be 23rd April when these matters will be discussed. If approved, the proposed changes will then be implemented around mid-May to July.

RM – It appears that many of the people on the register are waiting for particular properties or areas, or are on the list 'just in case' rather than being in any particular housing need.

SR – Agreed, only about 50-55% of people on the register are actively bidding, over a 6-month period.

RM – There is still an issue with people rejecting properties after their bid on CBL has been successful.

CB – Are the numbers going up because of repossessions?

SR – The number of repossession orders awarded in court has increased, but the number of people applying for CBL or presenting as homeless because of repossession has not gone up. The reason for this so far is unclear, and there may be an increase in the near future.

5. Community Cohesion Strategy

SP updated the group:

The Equalities and Community Cohesion Theme Group has been tasked with developing the Community Cohesion Strategy for the Coventry Partnership. Surindar Nagra (Equalities Officer at CCC) is the lead officer.

The Housing Theme group is requested to provide a statement of support and also provide some actions for the action plan towards implementing the strategy.

The Housing Theme group is requested to examine what they are doing to achieve what is in the Community Cohesion Strategy, and then identify any gaps or areas where improvement is needed. This will lead to the development of actions for these issues that can be included in the overall Community Cohesion Strategy Action Plan.

SP distributed the CLG definition of community cohesion, and the statement that the Housing Theme Group had submitted as part of the Sustainable Community Strategy under 'Equality of Opportunity; community cohesion and neighbourhoods'.

RM – A lot of work relevant to the Community Cohesion Strategy is already ongoing as part of theme members' everyday working.

NM – it needs to be made clear who will be implementing and monitoring the Strategy and the action plan.

<p>Action: RM to coordinate Housing Theme Group commitment statement for the Community Cohesion Strategy, and list of actions that members are taking/will take to support the commitment statement.</p>

6. Coventry Partnership Board Meeting – feedback

SP updated the group on the Coventry Partnership Board Meeting, which was held on 18th March:

There were four outcome accountability workshops as part of the meeting, including one focusing on Housing, in particular on maintaining people in their homes. The workshop developed three commitments:

- Improve the availability and distribution of information and advice to people in difficulties by linking up providers, partners and support agencies.
- Create a focus group of people who have experienced difficulties
- Explore the possibility of exchanging rent payments for skills

The results of this and the three other workshops will be put into an action plan, and will be taken to the Local Public Service Board in April. Funding of up to £500,000 may be available to achieve the actions required.

RM – Whitefriars has a project to bring together all advice agencies and partners across the city, to develop a directory of all the help and information available. This links to identified need to improve the availability of information to people.

JP – Six wards have been identified for a 6-month project where new tenants will receive advice packs and/or one-to-one support to enable them to access employment. This may be extended to other areas if further funding can be found.

7. The impact of the housing market downturn.

A discussion was had regarding the further impacts of the housing market downturn and economic recession on the theme group members (this has also been an agenda item at previous meetings). Comments included:

RM: Some shared ownership properties that HAs were unable to sell have now been converted to intermediate rent. There has been a trend of increase in rent arrears generally. There has not, however, been an increase in evictions.

SF: Many HAs' borrowing has been affected – funding from banks is still available but is more expensive.

AM: Funding has been brought forward from future years of the Homes and Communities Agency National Affordable Housing Programme (HCA NAHP 2008-11) and the HCA have increased their grant levels on strategic schemes.

SG: Deeley Homes have now sold their existing new build stock, but are not starting development on new sites. Some apartments that were unsold have now been let out instead, which has been successful. There has been an increase in visitor numbers but it is still very difficult to convert these enquiries into reservations and sales. Many developers are still offering large discounts or other incentives. Potential purchasers are still unable to obtain mortgages.

CB: There has been an increase in visitors to show homes, but cash buyers now expect unrealistic discounts. Benfield Homes are also renting out unsold units. The banks are reluctant to lend for speculative developments, especially apartments. There will be a shortage of stock as existing properties are sold, but very few new dwellings are constructed, whilst the number of newly forming households will continue to increase.

There has been guidance issued by RICS regarding valuation of new properties. Valuation is currently difficult due to the small number of comparables and the nature of the types of properties sold (repossessions etc) down-valuing prices and giving misleading valuations.

SR: The number of private landlords wanting to be involved in the HPPR scheme has increased. The council will be offering the government's Mortgage Rescue scheme to people who meet the eligibility criteria. There is a regional property value cap of £145,000. The council's own housing capital programme – the Strategic Housing Regeneration Fund (SHRF) – has now been discontinued and so there is no direct capital funding for HAs from the council at this time.

8. Update on Major Housing Developments

NDC:

RM – The plans for NDC are still on track to start delivering in the near future.

Swanswell:

SR – there are currently negotiations over the hospital site. The first scheme for development is likely to be the City Engineers Depot on Foleshill Road.

Canley:

SR – The HCA is keen to be involved. New housing is planned but there are issues with contaminated land that will need to be made safe.

Stoke Aldermoor/Peugeot:

SR – The next phase has not yet started, discussions are ongoing regarding the section 106 agreement.

Paragon:

SR – There are discussions regarding the section 106 payment to replace the swimming pool.

Far Gosford Street:

AM – There are two elements to this scheme: the creation of a cultural/creative quarter, and housing provision. The developer is now offering that all the housing should be affordable, and is speaking to Housing Associations. The developers are considering live-work units.

9. Any Other Business

There was no other business to discuss.

10. Dates of Next Meetings (Spire House 2-4pm)

Tuesday 23rd June 2009

Tuesday 22nd September 2009