



Coventry Partnership - Housing Theme Group

Minutes

25th February 2010

Attendees

Richard Monk (RM) - Chair	Whitefriars Housing Group
Ayaz Maqsood (AM) – Advisor	Housing Strategy, CCC
Stephen Rudge (SR)	Head of Housing Policy & Services, CCC
Councillor Nigel Lee (NL)	Cabinet Member – Climate Change, Housing & Sustainability
Stewart Fergusson (SF)	Orbit Heart of England
Sarah Perry (SP)	Coventry Partnership
Mark Andrews (MA)	City Development, CCC
Clive Benfield (CB)	Benfield Homes
Tim Brown (TB)	De Montford University
Joan Allen (JA)	Community Empowerment Network
John Payne (JP)	Neighbourhood Management, CCC
Chris Carrington (CC)	Warwick University
Kim Fawcett (KF)	Housing Strategy, CCC

Guest Attendees:

Juliette Verdier-Stott (JVS)	Regeneration Team, CCC
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1. Apologies and Introductions.

Apologies were received from Brian Walsh, Peter Deeley, Carole Bray, Philip Pilkington and Tim Jones.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

RM - Item 3 - Private Sector Rent and the potential contribution to meeting housing needs will be discussed as an agenda item at the next meeting. A representative from the Landlords Forum will be invited.

AM - Item 5 – Supporting People Update – The planning application for the new Salvation Army hostel has been approved and the process required to close the temporary car park has started. There have been objections about the loss of the car park. It is hoped that work will start on site in July 2010.

SR –Item 6 – Coventry Homefinder Update – The new software is being tested. The process of closing the registrations of people who did not respond to the update letter has started. Applicants will be able to have their application reinstated if they wish by contacting the Homefinder team. There are still 200-250 new applicants each week.

3. Single Conversation and Local Investment Plan for Coventry

Juliette Verdier-Stott (Regeneration Funding and Development Officer, CCC) gave a presentation, the main points of which included:

- The Single Conversation is the business model that the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) will use to engage with local authorities.
- This approach uses a single framework and process, to guide all HCA investment in the area.
- Martin Reeves (Chief Executive of Coventry City Council) is the Project Sponsor.

- A draft Single Conversation framework document has been written and is close to being agreed. This is the first phase in a three part process, and will be followed by a Local Investment Plan (LIP) and Local Investment Agreements (LIA)
- There are six thematic and six spatial priorities identified in the paper.
- Developments from Total Place will be fed into the process and we will be looking at flexible investment models eg. CCC input of land with a share in profit and risk, or grant recycling.
- The next step is to develop the LIP – all future HCA investment in Coventry will be expected to align with investment priorities in the LIP. This is currently being drafted.

Thematic priorities:

- Ensuring investment achieves growth.
- Ensuring investment increases housing access and affordability.
- Delivering suitable housing provision for vulnerable groups.
- Facilitating improvements to existing stock.
- Ensuring the economic growth of the city centre
- Targeting investment to reduce worklessness.

Spatial priorities:

- WEHM New Deal for Communities
- Canley
- Foleshill and Stoke Aldermoor
- Friargate
- Swanswell
- City Centre

RM – What are the governance arrangements for the Single Conversation process?

JVS – There is a diagram that I can send to you, the Housing Theme Group is included.

RM – Total Place and Total Capital – if this is the dominant agenda, RSL development programmes may be affected, as the HCA may want to go through one procurement route.

RM – What consultation will be done with the public?

JVS – Public consultation will be later in the process, but before the summer.

SR – This could tie in with the Housing Fair 2010.

SR – Coventry has been very successful in the past in bidding for funding for individual developments/schemes. Where will this fit in to the Single Conversation?

TB – this would be at the Local Investment Agreement stage.

JVS – Schemes may fit into the thematic priorities even if they do not fit into the spatial priorities.

SR – At a recent conference, the HCA confirmed that the National Affordable Housing Programme (NAHP) will continue in the future. If this is the case, Coventry will still want access to bid for this funding. The individual developments through NAHP are very important to meet housing needs.

SF – There are likely to be cuts to funding in the future, so exploring different ways of investment is very important – for example, funding given as an equity share rather than a simple grant.

SR – The investment model using an equity share rather than a grant would work where properties are developed to be sold on in the future (for example shared ownership), but how would this work for social rented or supported housing that is not developed to be sold on?

NL – The concern with the expectation of Council land being provided, is that it is an asset which should be made the most of, and should not be taken off the register at nil value with no return. There would have to be a ground rent or similar. There needs to be recognition of recompense back to the LA.

CB – A separate housing partnership company can be set up.

SR – There also need to be a cost-benefit analysis – if Coventry receives large amounts of funding from the HCA in return for land which would be valued at less than this, a case could be made.

CB – What involvement will the private sector have? Will there be opportunities such as Kickstart and HomeBuy Direct through the single conversation process?

RM – The impression is that it is aimed at large developers, rather than smaller, local developers.

SF – It would depend who is the lead developer for each scheme. For example, a housing association may be the lead developer, and then use smaller local companies to carry out the work.

4. Updating Coventry's Housing Strategy

Ayaz Maqsood gave an update on the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire (CSW) Sub-Regional Housing Growth Strategy and the Coventry Housing Strategy 2010:

- The CSW Housing Growth Strategy has been developed in conjunction with the HCA. It has taken the lead from the RSS Phase 2 revision, which plans for housing growth across the West Midlands region. This is politically sensitive. The Conservative Party would scrap the RSS targets if they came into power after the general election. If another party is elected and the RSS is retained, the growth figures may be revised. The CSW Housing Growth Strategy has been slightly amended to recognise this. It states that the strategy is based on the current RSS targets, but may be revised in the future if there are changes to the RSS.
- We are now developing a new Coventry Housing Strategy for 2010 - 2015. The previous strategy ran from 2005-2010. Many of the themes and issues from the 2005 strategy still apply. There will be a Consultation event on Thursday 1st April. All Housing Theme Group members will be invited. There will also be further consultation when a draft strategy is produced. We are aiming to complete the new Coventry Housing Strategy in the summer.

JA – What level of community involvement will there be? What consultation will be done for the Coventry Housing Strategy?

AM – Community representatives will be invited to the consultation event on 1st April, but this is only the start of the process. There will be consultation on the website and other events such as the Housing Fair, focus groups, ward forums etc.

Discussion followed regarding the Conservative green paper on planning and potential changes to the planning system after the elections.

5. Housing Market Conditions – has there been an improvement?

The group had a general discussion about the housing market. Main points made include:

CB – There are signs of improvement in the housing market. Mortgages are slightly more readily available and there are now more realistic valuations on new build properties, particularly apartments. Developers want to start building on new sites, but banks are still reluctant to provide funding. This year it is likely that prices will remain relatively flat, but the volume of construction will increase.

NL – Santander have announced that they will be providing a new mortgage product with up to 90% loan to value for first time buyers.

NL – Private rent situation – many properties at the upper end of the market are empty and difficult to let, as the initial costs are so high (deposit/bond, rent, moving costs etc). There has also been a decrease in the number of corporate lets. There are still disreputable landlords at the lower end of the market.

SF – Orbit are involved in the Mortgage Rescue scheme and have assisted a number of families across the country. Shared ownership houses are still very popular, but apartments are less popular. People need help and advice to find mortgages for shared ownership but it is possible.

SR – There still has not been a significant rise in the number of people who are making homelessness applications because of mortgage arrears/repossession. There has been an increase in homelessness due to the end of Assured Short hold Tenancies, but investigations with landlords have not found an increase in Landlords struggling with buy-to-let mortgage repossessions either.

6. Major Regeneration Schemes – Update

Friargate

AM – the masterplan has been approved and there is work under way with the HCA. There has been public concern about the transport links around the station area and the closure of the junction with the ring road. This development is mainly commercial/office space, but there is a number of apartments included in the plans.

Paragon Park

AM – proposals have been redrawn following significant hurdles – the metal scrap yard that was to be relocated will now be staying on the site. The housing element has been reduced to approx 450 units (previously it was approx 600), of which 20% will be affordable housing, split 5% social rent and 15% intermediate tenure. The issue of access has been resolved – this will now be direct access off Foleshill Road. Development is due to start next financial year.

Peugeot/Stoke Aldermoor

SR – The developer is renegotiating the Section 106 agreement and has requested to provide affordable housing on site rather than a commuted sum. The emphasis will be on larger, family housing.

RM – The Stoke Aldermoor area is a concern because the area has the potential to become a failed neighbourhood, so this scheme needs to be developed carefully. If it fails, it will impact greatly on the community and cost the city and the council over decades.

AM – It has been identified as a priority area in the single conversation process.

WEHM New Deal for Communities

RM – Phase 1A1 has received planning permission (154 units), and Start on Site is expected in May 2010. This is a very complex development due to the district heating system and other issues. There have been issues with the legal agreement with the developers, but this is being resolved. Whitefriars and the HCA have agreed to share the risk of buying properties from the developer if they are unable to sell.

Walsgrave Hill

JP – Developers are liaising with local residents again, and they plan to submit a planning application soon. The scheme has been changed from previous plans with regards to highways changes and an extension from approx 700 residential units to approx 900 units.

City Centre

MA – The Area Action Plan (AAP) has been developed and will be considered at the Cabinet meeting and Council meeting in March. Then the plan will be submitted to the Secretary of State and there will be a 6-week period of statutory consultation. There are plans for approx 4500 residential units, predominantly apartments but some housing.

Coventry University

SF – There are three major projects at the moment – the student enterprise centre, the engineering and computer building, and acquiring land around the techno-centre to bring this into the university quarter. Any student housing development is being done by private companies such as Unite.

Canley

NL – Outline planning permission has been granted and reparation work is starting on the park area. A number of developers are interested in the Canley regeneration scheme. The first detailed planning application will hopefully be submitted in the summer, and it seems likely that the first phase will be the Prior Deram area, followed by the community centre.

General Discussion:

JP – A lot of these schemes include large numbers of apartments – these were hit hardest in the credit crunch. Should we be planning for so many more?

RM – In the City Centre and Friargate, it would not be practical and in keeping with the massing of the developments to include large numbers of family houses.

CB – Apartments will work if they are in the right location and aimed at the right market.

NL – The forecast is for an increase in single-person households in the future, but apartments need to be in the right location, with good design and facilities, and realistic service charges.

7. Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) Review

At the last meeting, Mark Andrews requested that the group prepare any comments that they may have of the SHLAA sites, especially regarding deliverability.

If there are any comments, these need to be sent to Mark Andrews by the end of March. The SHLAA review will then be considered by the Cabinet Member for City Development and the Planning Committee, and be published on the council website.

ACTION – Any comments on the SHLAA review to be sent to Mark Andrews at mark.andrews@coventry.gov.uk or 024 7683 4295 by the end of March 2010.

8. Any Other Business

SP – The Coventry Partnership has launched the Coventry Community Cohesion Awards 2010. These are designed to celebrate the work of local people in helping to make Coventry a cohesive city. Details are on the Coventry Partnership website and the deadline for nominations is 30th April 2010. www.coventrypartnership.com/Cohesionawards

SR – The aerial survey of roof spaces has now taken place – this will identify properties with insufficient loft insulation etc. The data should be available soon.

AM – this will be included in an energy efficiency update agenda item at the next meeting.

Dates of future meetings:

- 18th May, 2pm - 4pm
- 19th August, 10am - 12noon
- 17th November, 2pm - 4pm

(All in 6th Floor Conference Room, Spire House, New Union Street, Coventry CV1 2PW)