

Coventry Partnership Housing Theme Group
Minutes of meeting held 25th June 2008

Attendees (members):

Richard Monk (RM) - Chair	Whitefriars Housing Group
Stephen Rudge (SR)	Housing Policy and Services, CCC
Councillor Nigel Lee (NL)	Cabinet Member (Climate Change, Housing and Sustainability)
Stewart Fergusson (SF)	Orbit Housing Association
Mary Woods (MW)	Midland Heart Housing Association
June Morley (JM)	Coventry Partnership
Giddy Kalsi (GK)	Coventry YMCA, representing HSIG
Carole Bray (CB)	University Hospital Coventry
Sue Green (SG)	Deeley Homes
Kim Fawcett (KF)	Housing Strategy Team, CCC

Attendees (guests):

David Soutter (DS) Coventry University

1. Apologies and introductions

Apologies were received from: Pat Walsh, Clive Benfield, Tim Brown, Lynda Bull, John Payne, Ayaz Maqsood.

Councillor Nigel Lee was introduced as the new Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Housing and Sustainability.

2. Notes of previous meeting

KF gave an update of progress on the Coventry Housing Fair, which is supported by the Coventry Partnership Housing Theme Group.

The Housing Fair is to be held on Friday 25th July 2008, 10.00am to 4.00pm in the Lower Precinct shopping centre, and is a chance for the public to meet with housing providers and learn about their housing options. There will be stalls covering the Council's housing services, and also a range of other housing providers, developers and professionals. There will be entertainment throughout the day to attract people.

3. Coventry University Development Plan

David Soutter, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Resources), Coventry University, gave a presentation on the Coventry University Development Plan.

Student Growth and Graduate retention/employment:

- Objectives for 2010 include growth from 13,200 FTE students to 15,000 FTE students. The University is on target to reach this number.
- Roughly 40% of current students come from Coventry, Warwickshire and Birmingham postcodes. This is not expected to vary significantly by 2010.
- When the Government reviews the cap which is currently placed on student tuition fees, this may change (if fees are increased, more students may choose to study close to home).
- There will be a growth in the number of overseas students.
- There will also be growth linked to local employment.
- A key target is to improve the employability of graduates – target to raise the proportion of graduates going straight into graduate-level jobs from 60% to 70% (this excludes students going on to post-graduate study).

RM questioned whether Coventry is a net importer or exporter of students. DS replied that it is a net importer.

Development of the Campus

- The University has an Estates Strategy and a Master Plan to set out development for the next 10-20 years.
- The campus dates from the 1960s - 70s and many buildings have come to the end of their useful lives, and no longer serve the changing needs of modern students.
- Some buildings will be adapted and modernised, some will be replaced, on a strategic basis.
- The university campus occupies a fairly well-defined area in the city centre, this is seen as a strength and will be retained. The main student residential areas are Charterhouse and Hillfields.
- There are few informal learning spaces or social spaces for students to gather on the campus. There are also issues with roads and traffic and the lack of a social 'heart'.
- The University aims to retain the compact campus area and will try to obtain land within this same area for growth. One aim is to double the size of the Technology Park.
- More space for student housing would ideally be located in the areas where student accommodation already exists, but without creating a student 'ghetto'

RM asked whether there is a good relationship between student residents and other residents in the area. DS replied that the relationship seems good. Members of senior management have links with local residents associations and there are mechanisms in place for dealing with concerns. Residents associations and local councillors are being consulted as part of the development plans.

SR queried what the plans are for land acquisition. DS replied that it is not necessary to acquire all of the surrounding land, and the university would want mixed use to prevent a university ghetto or empty areas out of term time. The university is developing a land acquisition strategy with other local stakeholders.

The next 5 years:

- A new multi-storey car park will be built on university land behind the Library (due to open December 2009).
- A student enterprise building will be built next to the art gallery. This will be a social area with the Student Union, food hall, informal learning space, retail and enterprise units, careers service etc. Start on site is due May 2009, with completion due September 2010.
- A new building for the Faculty of Engineering and Computing on Gulson Road (start May 2009, due for completion September 2011).
- Extension of the sports centre.
- Expansion of the Technology Park for the Institute for Creative Enterprise where students can set up their own businesses on graduation.
- Demolition of the building on Jordan Well/Cox Street.

The next 5 – 10 years:

- Improvements to existing buildings, especially ground floor and entrances.
- A further multi-storey car park on Cox Street

10 years and beyond:

- Priory Halls of residence (currently housing 550 students) will be demolished – the tower block may be demolished earlier than this.
- Further refurbishment and replacement of existing buildings.

Student Housing

- The market is segmented – very different requirements of undergraduates and mature students with families or overseas students.
- The university is developing a long-term student housing strategy, which will feed the detail into this broad development plan.
- The demand is currently for better quality, purpose designed student accommodation.
- The university is developing student accommodation or procuring the capacity to accommodate the growing student population, to reduce the impact on the private rental sector.

RM stated that the Housing Theme Group would be particularly interested being engaged with the University regarding the impact of students on housing in the city.

4. LAA and NIs

June Morley gave an update on the Local Area Agreement and the National Indicators:

The Sustainable Communities Strategy is nearing completion.

JM distributed draft theme overview documents for the themes in the Strategy. The overviews include the LAA indicators, lead officers, and other information. For each theme there are long term and short term priorities. The long term priorities go up to 2026, the short term priorities will change as goals are reached to work towards the long term priorities.

NL asked whether the most up to date versions of these theme overviews would be available in an accessible place, such as CMIS. JM replied that the theme overviews will be included as appendices in the Sustainable Communities Strategy.

The Sustainable Communities Strategy also includes some local priorities that are not included in the 198 National Indicators.

The LAA was sent to ministers this month, and it is hoped that it will be approved shortly. 35 out of the 198 National Indicators have been chosen to be included in the LAA. Two National Indicators that have been included in the LAA relate directly to housing. These are:

- NI 154 – Net additional homes provided
- NI 155 – Number of affordable homes delivered (gross)

A comprehensive action plan is being developed for each National Indicator included in the LAA. JM hopes to bring these to the next meeting in September for discussion.

JM invited comments from Theme Group Members to be sent to her.

RM commented that the Theme Group members also have an impact on, and an interest in, many of the other National Indicator action plans and the themes in the Sustainable Communities Strategy.

5. Impact of the Market Downturn on Theme Group Members

RM led a discussion on the impact that the downturn in the market is having on the Theme Group Members. Comments and opinions from Theme Group members included:

Developers are still getting enquiries about new properties, but it is increasingly difficult to convert these into purchases – people are having difficulty obtaining mortgages. There is little that developers can do until the problems with mortgages are solved.

Developers are making workers redundant. The numbers of starts, completions and sales are all down.

The reduction in starts and completions will have an adverse impact on meeting the National Indicator targets discussed in item 4.

Housing Associations are finding it more difficult to sell shared ownership properties, again partly due to purchasers having difficulty getting mortgages. HAs are now offering incentives such as one year rent free. Some HAs are also considering rent into ownership schemes as an alternative to shared ownership.

Housing Associations are avoiding new developments of shared ownership apartments, as these have been harder to sell.

HAs and Landlords have not yet found an increase in rent arrears, as there have not been problems in the employment market. However this may change due to increases in utilities and energy prices, as energy arrears are increasing. Benefits are not keeping up with these increases.

The Housing Corporation has announced a package of funding available for HAs to purchase stock from developers, but HAs must consider the long-term suitability of each scheme.

The Government target for more housing has meant that funding is directed at HAs developing new units, and there is little funding to improve existing stock.

Housing Associations are finding that the grant rates available from the Housing Corporation for new developments are too low.

Homelessness applications to the Council have increased, but this is not yet due to an increase in repossessions. It seems to be due to private renters not having their short hold tenancies renewed.

The private rental market currently seems to be strong and there has been a growth in enquiries for properties to rent. However, some buy-to-let landlords may have difficulty remortgaging.

Property prices seem to be falling but this is not enough to solve affordability problems for first time buyers, and affordability may even be getting worse as purchasers now need up to 25% deposit to get a mortgage.

Action – This item is also to be included in the agenda for the next meeting.

6. Worklessness

There has been a national focus on tackling worklessness recently, 80% of new Whitefriars tenants are not in work.

Richard Monk asked that the Theme Group members consider what is currently done to address worklessness, and what could be done in the future. This can then be discussed at the next meeting.

Action – This item is to be included in the agenda for the next meeting.

7. Major Housing Projects in the City – update on progress.

RM - The outline planning application for NDC is to be submitted as planned. Start on Site is due 2010/11, but advance demolitions are taking place now in partnership with the developer and NDC. The Decent Homes contract for Phase 2 has been let and work will start in late summer. The community will be kept fully informed of progress.

SR has met with planners and others to consider options for Stoke Aldermoor, but the funding which is coming from the Section 106 agreement at the Peugeot site will not be available until Phase 2 has started.

SR - Meetings and negotiations are continuing regarding the affordable housing requirement for the Canley redevelopment. An outline planning application will be submitted at the end of the summer.

SR – Developers are keen to start at Paragon Park but the scrap metal yard needs to be relocated.

MW – The Whitley Village application for funding is to be resubmitted to the Housing Corporation.

8. Any Other Business

RM enquired about the review of Choice Based Lettings (Coventry Homefinder) that is being conducted by Guy Wardle. SR expects the report to be finalised at the end of June, which he will circulate to the HA partners and discuss at the next meeting.

RM explained that Catherine Ewing (Strategy Assistant, Housing Strategy Team) is leaving Coventry City Council and thanked her for providing support to the Housing Theme Group.

9. Dates of Future Meetings:

25th September 2008 2-4pm

25th November 2008 2-4pm