

# Coventry Partnership Housing Theme Group Minutes

25<sup>th</sup> September 2008

## **Attendees**

Richard Monk (RM)- Chair	Whitefriars Housing Group
Stewart Fergusson (SF)	Orbit Housing Association
Trevor Passingham (TP)	Whitefirars Housing Group
Cllr Nigel Lee (NL)	Cabinet Member, CCC
Lynda Bull (LB)	Community Services, CCC
Mike Fowler (MF)	Coventry Cyrenians
Niall McChesney (NM)	City Development, CCC
Sue Green (SG)	Deeley Homes
Tim Brown (TB)	De Montfort University
Ayaz Maqsood (AM)	Housing Strategy, CCC
Stephen Rudge (SR)	Housing Policy and Services, CCC
Nigel Wain (NW)	Coventry Partnership
John Payne (JP)	Neighbourhood Management, CCC

## **1.Apologies**

Roger Griffiths, Clive Benfield, Giddy Kalsi, Mary Wood, Carole Bray, Joan Allen, Bob Wilson

## **2.Notes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising**

AM reported that there had been very positive feedback from the Housing Fair, which was held on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2008. There was a good level of participation on the day. Feedback shows that people were pleased with the range of stalls on offer, and felt that the main issues in housing, such as development, energy efficiency and homelessness were well covered. The entertainments were also popular, though some people felt them to be too long. The Strategy team is currently looking at using the idea in the future for 'mini-fairs' in areas such as Canley. Ideas such as holding the event during school holidays and having it at lunchtime will be carried forward.

## **3.Concerto III Bid**

SF gave a presentation on the Concerto III bid for European funding for eco-residential pilots.

- Project involving Whitefriars, Midland Heart and Orbit, aimed at improving energy efficiency of existing housing stock, in order to reduce fuel poverty and CO2 emissions,
- The concept is Passive Housing; key features are: good insulation, passive use of solar energy, energy efficient window glazing and frames, limitation of air leakages, passive pre-heating of fresh air and heat recovery from exhaust air, passive solar collectors to heat water.

### **Funding**

- European Programme- Concerto III; "Three cities who wish to demonstrate and implement energy efficiency and renewable energy applications" working together
- 40m Euros available for up to ten projects
- 70% of budget is spent on the project i.e. refurbishment in this case (up to 50% of this money can be grant funded)
- 20% goes on research (up to 75% of this can be paid for by the grant)
- 10% goes on management and promotion (100% funded by the grant)

### **The Bid**

- 3 cities; Coventry, Foligno (Umbria, Eastern Italy) and Ivanich (Croatia). Tirana (Albania) and a Serbian city are also associated with the Croatian partner's bid.
- Current participants in Coventry: Housing Associations (currently planning to put in £700,000 each), Coventry City Council, Coventry University; English Partnerships are potentially keen to take part, (and SF will soon have a meeting with E.ON to discuss their participation).

-Bid will cost roughly £8million, of which 50-60% will come back from the EU.

Timetable

-Initial bid by 8<sup>th</sup> October

-Negotiations for successful bids between October and January.

TP explained that Whitefriars are hesitant due to a current lack of available funds.

AM asked whether Whitefriars' participation would depend on funding from elsewhere

TP replied that they are not currently in a position to participate without additional funding.

JP asked about the situation with the Whitley Village project

SF replied that the project was put to the Housing Corporation, that they were impressed with the technologies but felt the project was too expensive. AM said that Midland Heart are now looking to re-draw the proposal.

**RM stated on behalf of the group that the LSP Housing Theme Group gave its support to the Concerto III bid for European funding.**

SF said that there would be an LSP seminar in the next two to four months to promote the programme.

#### **4.The Housing Market Downturn**

AM briefed the group on the current situation:

-The government's overall target for provision of 3 million homes by 2020 has not changed.

-Mortgage approvals are down and house building starts have reduced dramatically.

-Affordability is affected because house prices have not reduced significantly.

-The shared ownership market is currently struggling the most.

-Recent government announcements include:

-£200m funding for Housing Corporation brought forward from future budgets

-Rent to HomeBuy to be introduced to tackle difficulties around unsold stock.

-Mortgage Rescue Package for 6,000 households (AM noted that this was a very low

-A further £400m brought forward from Housing Corporation budgets to give funding to local authorities to buy unsold stock

-Stamp Duty freeze for properties of £175,000 or less (this will probably have little impact in most of Coventry)

The council is preparing bids to the Housing Corporation for rescue packages on unsold stock, and asking for guidance on programmes such as the Mortgage Rescue Package. Council funding is also being put into rescue packages.

Concern was expressed about the creation of large social housing estates.

SG said that from her organisation's point of view, the main priorities are to sell stock, and to let what cannot be sold. One of the main problems is the decline in mortgage availability.

SF stated that for most Housing Associations, shared ownership is the biggest problem. Measures to incentivise buying are being used to try to shift standing stock. Apartments will not be built at the moment.

TP said that Whitefriars are currently buying back some of the properties that they owned previously.

SR said that the council is planning to hold a city summit on 23<sup>rd</sup> October, to include representatives from building societies, banks, Housing Associations, Developers and Estate Agents, to look at the government's proposals and how they can be used in Coventry.

SR stated that figures of people declaring as homeless are only increasing at a very slow rate. However, NL replied that, having spoken to letting agents, the demand for 3 and 4 bedroom houses is rocketing, and people are evidently moving into rented property before they are evicted.

## **5.Choice Based Lettings Review**

SR gave an update on the Choice Based Lettings Review; however, agreement between Housing Associations and the Council on the outcomes of the review is still pending

Some of the main points were as follows:

- 65% of those registered had never made a bid

NL, TB and SF highlighted that people are not bidding because they are holding out for a particular property, street or area.

TB stated that these figures were typical for similar national schemes

-Offer Refusals

- acceptance on first offers increased but only from 47% to 59%

- in 28% of these cases, a refusal was noted because the person to whom the property was offered did not respond (some of these might be due to changed contact details; the system will be updated to ask people, when they bid, how they would like to be contacted)

### Aspects that the consultant suggested would need changing

- If legislation governing Housing Associations states that a person who wins a bid does not have to be housed, and the Association refuses to do so, the Housing Association, not the council, must be accountable and deal with any request for a review.

- the banding system should be changed to reflect different levels of housing need; the 1,2,3 will be kept but sub-groups within the banding are proposed. This will give reasonable preference to those for whom it is required by law.

-Age of Registration

- The registration age must be reduced to 16. Housing Associations can operate their own policies determining whether tenancies are granted to 16 and 17 year olds, but a common protocol would be advantageous.

- People downsizing from houses should be rewarded in the banding scheme

- Associations should put a local 'Lettings Policy' in place so that the most desirable properties cannot be allocated to undesirable tenants, e.g. those with rent arrears.

- Legal advice should be sought to ensure that the letting of 25% of properties by date of application is legal and can continue.

**Action SR will circulate the review document electronically, and invite comment on it**

## **6.Worklessness**

Deferred- no discussion

**Action This item is to be included on the agenda for the next meeting**

## **7.LAA and National Indicators**

NW distributed 'reference' copies of the Sustainable Communities Strategy; a 'reader-friendly' version is being created.

The LAA has been signed off; NW provided copies of this. An action plan has been delivered.

The 6-month review of progress against the LAA will be presented to the Board in December.

There will also be a report assessing progress against the Sustainable Communities Strategy indicators, relating to health and education for example. This report should be available around the time of the next meeting.

There will then be a refresh of the LAA, which is an opportunity for the group to put its views to Government Office and help to shape the LAA.

## **8.Any Other Business**

NW made a request for articles on issues around delivering sustainable communities to be featured in the Partnership newsletter, e.g. the Housing Fair.

**Action**- AM will receive any such items. The deadline is Tues 30<sup>th</sup> September.

**9.Date of Next Meeting**

25<sup>th</sup> November 2008 2-4pm