

# SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12<sup>th</sup> September 2012

Present: Mr EA Sangster (Chair)  
Mr A Archer; Councillors JA Brinsden, P Harries, Mrs L Jenkins, Mrs A Lee and DWM Rees; Mrs M Thomas.

(NPA Offices, Llanion Park, Pembroke Dock: 10.30am – 12.40pm)

## 1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor PJ Morgan.

## 2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2012 were presented for confirmation and signature.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2012 be confirmed and signed.

## 3. Background Documents

Officers began by explaining the contents of the documents circulated to Members prior to the meeting, which it was hoped would provide them with a clear understanding of affordable housing and a background to the Authority's policies.

The first document to be considered was an extract from Technical Advice Note 2 which contained the definition of affordable housing, and Members asked whether Pembrokeshire County Council's (PCC) interpretation of the guidance differed from that of the Authority. Officers replied that the Authorities' had drafted joint Supplementary Planning Guidance on affordable housing, however PCC had not yet adopted that guidance and it differed slightly. Members also asked whether low impact development fell under this definition. Officers advised that they did not believe so, as the main purpose of such dwellings was to manage the land for conservation purposes and to do so in a sustainable fashion, rather than to provide housing that was affordable and remained so in perpetuity.

The next document was an extract from the Preferred Strategy, the pre-Deposit Local Development Plan documents, which set out the policy options that were considered and the alternatives discarded at the time of Plan preparation. The Preferred Strategy had been subject to consultation, and the third document contained an extract of the main issues raised in relation to housing during that consultation. Within this the Head of Park Direction pointed out the conflicting responses provided by different objectors to many of the questions which had been asked.



The fourth background document was the Housing chapter from the Adopted Local Development Plan which set out the current policies. Members sought a breakdown of affordable housing granted permission by the Authority and the Head of Park Direction provided initial figures. In considering these figures, the Chief Executive asked whether other Authorities with a similar percentage of affordable housing on developments of two or more units were experiencing a similar completion rate, and the Head of Park Direction agreed to carry out some research into this and report back to a future meeting. Members were also keen to hear the views of developers, Housing Associations and others who had experience of the negotiations surrounding the percentage of affordable housing negotiated on particular sites and asked officers to invite suitable representatives to a future meeting of the Committee. There was also some discussion on the role of social housing grant in determining this percentage and it was suggested that Lyn Hambidge, the Head of Housing Commissioning for Pembrokeshire County Council could explain this further.

Attention was also drawn to the population projection figures provided by the then Welsh Assembly Government, and paragraphs 4.193 and 4.194 of the Plan explained the approach taken by the Authority in this regard.

The final document sought to provide a briefing on some of the general questions asked by Members in the initial meeting of the Committee with regard to housing need, viability assessments, S106 agreements and the affordable housing contribution. It was again suggested that Lyn Hambidge would be able to provide Members with greater detail on some of these issues if they wished to invite her to a subsequent meeting of the Committee. There was some discussion on the problem of providing housing for 'local' people, and the Authority's attempt to introduce such a policy in the Joint Unitary Development Plan. In considering questions of viability, explanation was given of the Three Dragons Toolkit which was used by several Authorities in Wales. It was also suggested that Members invite a representative from the banking/financial sector to a future meeting.

#### **4. Future Work Programme**

Having clarified their understanding of affordable housing, Members recapped the list of those organisations and individuals who could usefully provide evidence to, or further the understanding of, the Committee. The following were suggested and officers were asked to arrange for them to be invited to future meetings of the Committee:

- PCC Housing Officer, Lyn Hambidge
- Developers who had negotiated levels of affordable housing on sites (those with positive and negative experiences)



- Landowners or estate agents
- Housing Associations
- Mortgage lender/financier
- Sue Essex
- Other similar Authorities which were obtaining higher rates of affordable housing provision, depending on the results obtained by the Head of Park Delivery.

With regard to the format of the meetings, Members agreed to write a brief to explain the process and indicating the sorts of information invitees would be asked to provide. They would also be asked to provide information in advance of the meeting to help Members' prepare their questions. It was anticipated that much of this work would be done by exchange of e-mails. Members would also start to identify questions which could form the basis of a public questionnaire to be circulated later in the year.

Finally one Member also asked whether the Committee could be circulated with the results of the Welsh Government Inquiry into the provision of affordable housing in Wales which had been carried out in October 2011 as this might provide useful background information, particularly if responses had been submitted by some of the organisations they wished to interview.

