

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND
REGIONAL HOUSING BOARD**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 14 MAY 2007

Present:

Board Members

Cllr Elizabeth Cartwright
Sheila Drew Smith
Ian Coates
Douglas Horner
Cllr Keith House
Cllr John Goddard
Ann Santry
Cllr Gillian Brown

Regional Assembly (Chairman)
Housing Corporation
GOSE
Regional Assembly
SEEDA
Regional Assembly
Regional Assembly
Regional Assembly

Officers

Martin Tugwell
Cath Stubbings
June Cass
Kate Dallip
Pat Tempany
Steve Kethero
Chris Woolf
Leigh Herington
Graeme Hough
Dominick Veasey
Sharon Smith
Alison Bailey
Fiona Cruickshank
George Summers

In attendance

Peter Williams
Ricky Taylor
Chris Kenneford
Andy Barton
Lesley Van Dyke
Catriona Riddell

1. Apologies and Substitutions

- 1.1 Apologies were received from David Ashworth and Lee Amor. The Board was advised that David would, in future, be English Partnership's representative. The following substitution was declared: Ian Coates for Howard Ewing.

2. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 2 March 2007

- 2.1 An error was noted at 8.1. This should read Open Market Homebuy not Open Market Homeline.

3. Matters Arising Not Elsewhere on the Agenda

Point 3.3.1

The Director of the Housing Corporation gave an update on the Seaside and Country Housing Scheme referred to in the London Regional Housing Strategy. She advised that at the moment there is no proposal to take this forward.

Point 4.7

The Housing Team Leader (GOSE) advised the Board that they had received seven applications from local authorities to receive a proportion of the £40,000 available in Planning Delivery Grant from the current financial year. On the back of this they had submitted a submission to CLG and six applications had been supported with £7,000 each already having been paid. GOSE will keep the Board updated on how the money is used.

Point 4.9

The Director of Development suggested that the Board consider the issue of the needs of older people as part of its review day to be held in the autumn.

Sheila Drew Smith informed the Board that the Audit Commission is about to go out to consultation on its national studies and one topic is Housing Older People. The consultation will run for three months.

Point 5.5

It was confirmed that Howard Ewing had provided a letter from CLG clarifying the inconsistencies in paragraph 46 and 50 of PPS 3 with regard to developing housing density policies and also paragraph 20 in consultation document PPS Planning and Climate Change.

4. Presentation by Ricky Taylor, National Housing and Planning Advice Unit.

- 4.1 Ricky Taylor, Principle Researcher at the NHPAU, explained that the Unit had been set up in response to one of the recommendations arising from the Barker review of housing affordability.
- 4.2 The objective of the Unit is to advise Government and the regions on the implications for affordability arising from the level and broad distribution of future house building. The role of the Unit is to enter into dialogue, spread best practice and provide the region with tools to understand the potential impact on affordability. He stated that the Unit will use the Reading Model of Affordability as a starting point on which to build evidence.

Key outputs will include:

- Advice and guidance to policy makers and practitioners in the Region
- A contributor to the RSS and Examinations in Public
- An evidence and research base
- Regular reports and papers
- A strong advocate for affordability

The Unit will be formally launched on 7 June.

- 4.3 The Chairman opened the meeting to questions. The Director of Planning noted that the Assembly had made a strong case at EIP and to Government that affordability is just one part of the argument. There is concern that the Unit has been set up on the back of Barker to promote a case for additional house building. She also noted that the basis of the Reading model had been questioned and that consultants had placed a number of substantive caveats on its work; caveats that appeared to have been ignored by the Government.
- 4.4 In response Peter Williams stated that the unit was aware of the sensitivities around the EIP. While accepting that affordability is only one part of the issue he emphasised the importance of seeking to address the issue.
- 4.5 In response to questions from the Board the following comments were made:
- i) While the presentation had been based on national statistics, the Unit's remit is to look at the regional level. Consideration is currently being given as to whether to drill down to sub market level
 - ii) Inter-regional relationships will be considered. The Reading model is capable of looking at such issues.

5. Regional Housing Strategy Review – Consultation Analysis

- 5.1 The Director of Development advised the Board that the consultation had received twice as many responses as the consultation on the previous version of the RHS. There had also been good input coming out of the workshops and the opinion polling. This meeting was an opportunity to reflect on the key messages and provide advice to the Project Team in the preparation of papers for the Board's consideration at its next meeting.
- 5.2 He indicated that the covering report outlined three issues that the Project Team had identified as points on which a Board discussion would be useful. These have been summed up as distribution, type and tenure. Distribution is around looking at how to align investment closer with strategies at a regional level and looking at the relationship between rural and urban. Type is about building the right type and size of housing. The issue of tenure has been given further impetus by the Hills Report; this had raised the question as to whether the emphasis should be on building social housing or should be on helping people into home ownership.

- 5.3 Cllr Goddard commented that within Oxford City there had been a net loss of three bedroom houses; an issue that they were addressing through the preparation of planning guidance on the matter. He supported the need to provide an increase in the number of larger family sized housing units. He also supported the suggestion that the emphasis should be on providing for people not chasing a housing number. Emphasis should be given to meeting identified local needs rather than seeking to impose a particular solution from the regional level.
- 5.4 Ann Santry referred to paragraph 3.4 of the covering report and made the point that delivering rented accommodation in the region without grant is virtually impossible. The letter from CLG in terms of what they are looking for highlights the importance of taking demographic trends into account.
- 5.5 Douglas Horner emphasised the importance of looking at need; where dwellings are needed, what type and not just immediate. He questioned whether the Board had the full picture in terms of statistics for addressing affordable housing: what is the stock available; what is the strength of the asset balance sheet.
- 5.6 The Planning Manager informed the Board that work is in hand to improve the monitoring information on housing supply. Fiona Cruickshank reminded the Board that the Corporation provides a regular report at the end of the year. Information is also collected through the yearly returns from investors. She referred to a piece of work entitled 'Unlocking the Door' which looks across the whole country at financial capacity of organisations the Corporation has invested in to see how these could improve.
- 5.7 Ian Coates (GOSE) emphasised the importance of using the evidence base collected through the consultation process to identify the key priorities and to ensure that these are reflected in the submission to Ministers.
- 5.8 Cllr House referred to the issue of size and stated he felt that looking at square meterage had moved the balance away from three bedroom housing. There is a need to look at the bigger picture, SE Plan, RES, sustainability. These all point towards targeting the funding towards private sector renewal.
- 5.9 Fiona Cruickshank stated that it is a myth that delivering affordable housing in rural areas is more expensive. She stated that as far as tenure is concerned this was 55% social rented 45% low cost home ownership (which includes Open Market Homebuy), but if you exclude this and only look at newbuild it is 65% social rented and 31% intermediate. She therefore cautioned against increasing further the level of intermediate housing.
- 5.10 She raised a concern regarding strategic sites emphasising the importance of understanding the basis on which the list has been compiled. The Planning Manager stated that the Assembly is currently working with local authority colleagues to update the list of strategic sites. The updated list would form part of the submission to Ministers.

- 5.11 The Director of Development stated that a draft submission will be brought to the next meeting for the Board to debate and consider that reflects discussion at this meeting. Any particular issues which cannot be addressed will be put into a draft letter to CLG.

The Board AGREED to:

1. **Note the contents of the Minister's letter setting out the format of the advice to be submitted to Government**
2. **Note the successful completion of the consultation on the Regional Housing Strategy review.**
3. **Request that the Project Team take the findings of the consultation into account in preparing a draft submission to Government for consideration by the Board at its meeting on 20 June.**
4. **Request the Project Team to take its comments into account in preparing the draft submission.**
5. **Consider the issues identified in section 4 as part of a discussion on the future work programme at the Board review day in the autumn.**

6. Housing Type and Size in the South East

- 6.1 The Planning Manager introduced the report which summarised the outcome of the research undertaken on how and why the type and size of housing has changed, if this matters and what needs to be done. The report concluded that recent trends in house building show a trend towards building smaller units and a greater proportion of flats. In the open market this is not of immediate concern, unless the pattern changes. In the affordable sector, there is evidence of a higher proportion of smaller homes and flats being built and this is much more of a concern.
- 6.2 The consultants made fifteen recommendations; of these, seven related to the work of the Board.
- 6.3 Cllr Goddard stated that he thought the recommendations were useful and supported them. Ann Santry stated that the report was saying that reporting data was not being collected and questioned if this was an action for RSLs. The Planning Manager informed the Board that the Assembly will collect this data as part of the Regional Monitoring Report. Douglas Horner pointed out that recommendation 4 which refers to need could be read as geographic whereas in fact this is not the case.

The Board AGREED to approve the actions and priorities proposed in the annex to the report.

7. Private Sector Housing Renewal Funding – Programme 2008-11

- 7.1 The Housing Policy Manager (GOSE) updated the Board on progress since its last meeting with the proposal to move away from a grant culture towards one that encourages equity release. The principle of moving towards a criteria based approach for the allocation of funds had been agreed by the Board at its previous meeting.
- 7.2 He stated that the proposed journey from a grant based to loan based culture starts in April 2008 and he asked for the Board's guidance on how much emphasis to put on loans during that three year period.
- 7.3 The Director of Development stated for clarification that the word 'sub regional' should be replaced by the term 'cross boundary'. It was not the intention that the process should exclude areas outside the sub-regional areas identified in the South East Plan.
- 7.4 Ian Coates pointed out that the second bullet point in paragraph 6.1 of the covering report highlights at least part of the judgement about value for money and it could be either made a sub consideration within value for money judgement (bullet point five) or in terms of projects and programmes the principle judgement that needs to be made. He added that the third bullet point about past performance and the last bullet point about the delivery plan for the future, should be brought together to show a particular focus on how this project or programme can be delivered and as part of that maybe something on past track record.
- 7.5 Cllr Goddard commented that he felt the criteria in paragraph 6.1 were in the right order as energy and thermal comfort need to be at the top of the list.
- 7.6 Douglas Horner suggested that the first bullet point is about the rationale and needs to be at the top, the next few are about identifying the market and design followed by the delivery plan. He expressed concern that the delivery plan was weak and it was important to highlight the simplicity of dealing from a client's point of view.
- 7.7 The Board agreed to delete the word 'strongly' from the final paragraph on the second page of the draft letter to Yvette Cooper.

The Board AGREED to:

- 1. Support the criteria based process described in the report for allocating funding for the 2008-11 funding period for improvements to private sector housing.**
- 2. Support in principle the introduction of a Board sponsored kitemark or regional champion brand for those local authorities evidencing high achievement or innovation in private sector renewal.**

3. **Endorse the content of the letter in Annex B and agreed to submit it to the Minister.**
4. **Agreed to further work by the Project Team to develop the application form, a bid round prospectus and assessment criteria template.**

8. Gypsies and Travellers Site Provision

- 8.1 The Gypsy and Traveller Lead (GOSE) stated that this is the third element in the two year cycle of site funding for Gypsies and Traveller sites. £10m had been made available in the region over the two year period to support proposals for new pitches or for refurbishment of existing ones in 2006/08. £4.7m had been through the first two bidding rounds. He explained that twelve bids had been received in the current round. If these are approved there would be £2m available for the fourth, and final, round of the two year programme.
- 8.2 The Board noted the clarification provided by Howard Ewing on the Board's role in advising Ministers on the allocation of the funds. It was noted that the number of bids was likely to increase following the completion of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments. The Director of Development advised that when the assessments had been completed the evidence base for the allocation of funds will be clearer and prioritisation will be easier.
- 8.3 The Board expressed its disappointment at the quality of the information submitted as part of the bid process.

The Board AGREED to:

1. **Note the expectations in relation to its consideration of bids for funding for Gypsy and Traveller sites; and**
2. **Approve the latest bids submitted for funding.**
3. **Stress to Local Authorities its disappointment at the quality of information submitted in support of the bids and highlight its expectation that this will be addressed in future bids.**

9. East Midlands Regional Housing Strategy – draft for consultation

- 9.1 The Board noted that the East Midlands have a region-wide model that enables them to identify the locations of vulnerable households in non-decent homes. The Board requested that the Project Team investigate this work further and report back as to whether it might have application in the region.

The Board AGREED to support the approach set out within the consultation document.

10. Items for Information.

- 10.1 The Chair of the Regional Housing Forum reported that the Forum met on 30 April. The Group had received a presentation from Reading and Wokingham on a method for defining key workers. Jeff Hanna of Reading is preparing information on the model for the Project Team. The Forum had also looked at type and size; received a report back on the RHS consultation and were updated on the changes to Disabled Facilities Grant, as a result of the submission to CLG by the Chair of the Forum.
- 10.2 The Board noted the other items for information.

The meeting closed at 4:30 p.m.

Date of next meeting: 20 June 2007