

**CABINET RESPONSE TO CALLED-IN DECISION REFERRAL: PROVISION OF HOUSING PRIMARILY FOR RENT ON THE COUNTY COUNCIL'S PORTFOLIO**

*To:* **Cabinet**

*Date:* **4<sup>th</sup> March 2014**

*From:* **Head of Finance and Head of Strategy and Estates**

*Electoral division(s):* **Queen Ediths**

*Forward Plan ref:* **2014/019** *Key decision:* **Yes**

*Purpose:* **To reconsider Cabinet's decision of 28<sup>th</sup> January 2014 on the Provision of Housing Primarily for Rent on the County Council's Portfolio, in accordance with the recommendation made by the Resources and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2014.**

*Recommendation:* **Cabinet is recommended:**

- a) To thank the Resources and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee for its recommendations.**
- b) To agree to confirm its original decision.**

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## **1. BACKGROUND**

1.1 The meeting of Cabinet held on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2014 considered a report on the provision of housing primarily for rent on the County Council's portfolio. Cabinet resolved:

- 1) To declare surplus both the parcels of land for circa 350 homes at Newmarket Road, Burwell and 230 homes at Worts Causeway, Cambridge
- 2) To delegate authority to the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance in consultation with the Head of Finance to agree detailed terms with appropriate parties where needed for the taking forward of planning applications in respect of the above sites
- 3) To delegate to the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance in consultation with the Head of Finance the agreement of detailed terms for the sale of all or part of either of the above sites or dwellings constructed on them
- 4) To agree the development of a Full Business Case to be considered by Cabinet in respect of the above named sites which if attractive can be taken forward as the first large scale schemes where the County develops housing to generate long term income streams.

1.2 This decision was called in by three members/substitutes of the Resources and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillors Mason, I Manning and Taylor. Councillor Taylor is also the local member for the Worts Causeway site.

1.3 The Resources and Performance Committee considered the call-in at its meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2014 and agreed to refer the decision back to Cabinet for reconsideration, making the following points:

- The Committee did not wish to criticise the way in which Cabinet had handled the process and was satisfied that with the part of the Cabinet decision that dealt with the Burwell site, having no issues on that point: the issues raised related solely to the Worts Causeway site.
- The Committee felt that it was premature to declare the Worts Causeway plot of land surplus and to prepare a full business case for housing development with a view to submitting a planning application, whilst Cambridge City Council's Local Plan process was still incomplete and the Green Belt designation of the site remained in place.
- The Committee also felt that it was important that if development on the Worts Causeway site went ahead and the County Council was the developer, the percentage of social housing should be maximised.

## **2. CABINET RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 Cabinet recognise that housing development on Green Belt land around the City can be an emotive issue, particularly for local residents.

- 2.2 The City Council is of the view that its housing growth targets cannot be met without limited Green Belt releases, hence its decision to propose allocations GB1 and GB2, GB1 being privately owned and GB2 being County Farms estate land.
- 2.3 Work on the Cambridge Local Plan is at an advanced stage. The Proposed Submission version has just been approved at a special meeting of the City's Full Council and is about to be submitted to Government for Independent examination. As a Local Plan process moves forward, more weight is attached to the policies in the emerging Plan and at this advanced point is not unreasonable to assume that a landowner might wish to submit a planning application in advance of adoption of the Local Plan. This was the scenario at Alconbury, where a planning application for 5,000 dwellings and associated development has been determined, subject to a S106 Agreement, in advance of the final round of consultation on the emerging Huntingdonshire Local Plan.
- 2.4 Both the City Council and the County Council are keen to see any planning applications for GB1 and GB2 comprehensively master planned, having full regard to the proposals for the other allocation particularly as, from the County Council's perspective, it makes planning for associated educational need easier.
- 2.5 Officers therefore wish to be in a position where they can work with the owners/agents for GB1 if they choose to bring forward a planning application in advance of the adoption of the Local Plan.
- 2.6 Without being able to do this the development of the two sites, which are of similar scale (circa 230 and circa 200 dwellings respectively), could be fragmented.
- 2.7 The Committee's desire for the amount of affordable housing to be maximised if the County does choose to develop the housing is noted and the Full Business Case will look at a number of scenarios as regards the amount of social housing to be provided.

### **3. ALIGNMENT WITH PRIORITIES AND WAYS OF WORKING**

#### **3.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all**

The construction of new open market rental or sale housing together affordable housing (shared equity and rental) all built to 'Lifetime Homes' standards is a multi-million pound investment and will generate local work both for professionals engaged in the planning/development process and jobs in construction, together with jobs associated with the management and maintenance of the dwelling stock. In addition an increase in the supply of housing for rent will provide homes for the employees of expanding business and public services in the area.

#### **3.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives**

The provision of new affordable and private sale or open market rented housing that is built to Lifetime Homes standards will allow occupiers to live healthy and independent lives without needing to move.

### **3.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people**

The Council is committed to ensuring that any specialist housing needs within Cambridge or the wider Cambridgeshire community is addressed within the site where the location is deemed suitable.

### **3.4 Ways of working**

- 3.4.1 By using some of its considerable land resources close to settlement to help provide much needed housing, and by committing to support the early delivery of affordable housing in accord with Local Plan policies, the County is taking an innovative and important leadership role in helping to grow the local economy, as well as generating sustainable long term income streams and/or capital receipts. Presently, most market rental housing is provided by small Buy to Let investors but at Worts Causeway there could be scope to deliver the first large scale provision of some 250 plus high quality private rented homes.
- 3.4.2 The Council is committed to working at a local level and through existing partnerships and the emerging City Deal it is seeking to work collaboratively with partners including the City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council for the benefit of all.

## **4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS**

### **4.1 Resource and Performance Implications**

The LGSS Capital Budget has £500,000 available in 2014/15 and 2015/16 for the development of planning applications to support this project and then £4.25m available for the building of dwellings in each of the years 2016/17 through to 2019/20.

### **4.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications**

There are risks associated with the Council assuming the role of master developer or acquiring completed new housing stock from a development partner and these will be considered fully along with mitigation measures as a Full Business Case for the site is worked up.

### **4.3 Equality and Diversity Implications**

There are no significant equality and diversity implications.

### **4.4 Engagement and Consultation Implications**

The proposed allocation of the Worts Causeway site in the City Council's Local Plan has been subject to extensive consultation already and in submitting a planning application there will be further extensive public consultation. The Council is committed to acting in accord with the principles laid down in the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth.

## 4.5 Public Health Implications

Building good quality homes that are capable of accommodating the changing needs of the occupiers is very positive for attaining the maximum health benefits.

Source Documents	Location
Plan showing proposed allocations of land at Worts Causeway (GB1 & GB2) Cambridge	Room 317 Shire Hall