

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2nd July 2013

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor David Bush (Chair), and Councillors Roger Bennett (substituting for Councillor Gay Hopkins) Andrew Brazier, Simon Chalk, Carole Gandy, Andrew Fry, Alan Mason and Yvonne Smith

Also Present:

P Finnemore (Commissioning Manager: Young People, Worcestershire County Council)

Officers:

R Cooke, C Felton and J Staniland

Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and M Craggs

MINUTE 16

HOUSING DENSITY TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT

The Chair of the Housing Density Targets Task Review, Councillor Bush, delivered a presentation on the outcomes of the review. During the course of this presentation the following matters were raised for Members' consideration:

- The group had consulted widely including with: relevant Officers; the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration, Economic Development and Transport; local estate agents; a representative from the local Asian community; and a local housing developer.
- A questionnaire had been circulated for the consideration of local estate agents. Key points raised by the estate agents in their completed responses included concerns that there were limited numbers of three and four bedroom properties in the Borough and limited numbers of bungalows.
- Estate agents were able to provide examples of individuals and families leaving the Borough to live in neighbouring districts due to a greater number of larger properties that would meet their needs and expectations.

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Chair

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- Existing rules regarding housing density frequently deterred developers from building multiple bungalows on sites, due to the space required for bungalows.
- Self-build properties provided an opportunity for people to build houses to a size that would meet their needs. The Chair suggested that the option to secure larger self-build properties would help to attract more businessmen to live permanently in the Borough.
- Self-build properties had been found in other parts of the country to have a beneficial impact on the local community and residents were often keen to remain in these homes years after they had been built. Also these residents found that they developed new skills as a result of participating in self-build projects.
- Many members of the local Asian community lived in inter-generational households. Often families struggled to purchase properties in the Borough suitable for inter-generational living, and a significant number of the larger houses that met this requirement were located near the town centre and were not high quality buildings.
- Developments on large sites were eligible for discounts on road infrastructure. Similar discounts for road infrastructure were not offered for developments on smaller sites.
- Small, local housing developers, who often employed local people, struggled to compete with larger developers.
- The group had considered suggesting that the first measure Members were proposing should be applied to sites less than 0.5 hectares. However, the group had discovered that this would not have been realistic as it could have had a detrimental effect on the council's ability to meet housing targets. The Task Group had been advised that the same requirement for sites less than 0.16 hectares in size would not have the same impact.
- Officers had been fully consulted during the course of the review and had expressed support for Members' proposals prior to the Committee meeting.

Following delivery of the presentation the Committee debated the findings of the review. There was general consensus amongst Members that more bungalows were required in Redditch, particularly to meet the needs of an aging population. This would also potentially help to increase the number of three and four bedroom properties available to families further down the housing ladder, as elderly people would be moving from previous family properties.

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A Member noted that when the review had been launched Officers had suggested that there was already flexibility within the local planning policy framework to adapt housing density requirements for developments as and when required. However, the group expressed concerns that under existing arrangements Planning Officers tended to be minded to enforce the housing density rules.

The proposal regarding self-build properties was discussed in detail. Reference was made to paragraph 4.9 of the report, where the Task Group had suggested that more land should be allocated to self-build properties. Officers explained that the Council could not allocate land to self-build properties, partly because it would not be possible to enforce construction of self-build properties following the granting of planning permission, Officers remained supportive of the aim to increase the number of self-build properties. Concerns were expressed that the issue of allocation had not been raised prior to publication. However, it was agreed that references to allocation should be reviewed with a view to suggesting that self-build should be encouraged.

The number of developments that would be influenced by the group's recommendations was discussed. Some Members in particular commented that the group's proposals appeared to have focused on particular social groups within the population, rather than on the needs of all residents. However, other Members commented that these proposals would help to attract residents who would live in larger, more expensive properties and pay higher levels of Council tax. There was also the possibility that these residents would be encouraged to establish businesses in the area, to the benefit of the local economy. Furthermore, over 90 per cent of developments in the Borough were for larger sites and would not be affected by the proposals.

The potential impact of the proposals on the availability of affordable housing in the Borough was also considered. Some concerns were expressed that larger executive homes would not meet the needs of families on low incomes or young people seeking to get onto the housing ladder. However, Members were advised that requirements remained for a specific proportion of properties built as part of a larger housing development to be social housing. This would ensure that a supply of affordable housing remained available in the Borough.

RECOMMENDED that

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Policy 5 of the emerging Draft Borough of Redditch Local Plan No. 4 be revised as per Appendix 1 (*to the report*) to incorporate the following headline points:

- a) **all new housing developments within the Borough on sites less than 0.16 hectares should be exempt from the Council's housing density requirements;**
- b) **all new self-build housing developments on sites larger than 0.16 hectares within the Borough should meet a minimum housing density requirement of 15 dwellings per hectare; and that**
- c) **all new bungalow developments within the Borough on sites larger than 0.16 hectares should meet a minimum density requirement of 15 dwellings per hectare.**

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.30 pm