

SHELTERED HOUSING CONSULTATION GROUP MEETING

Monday 20 September 2004

MINUTES

Present: -

Steve Deakin	ECC	Mrs S Banwell	Southlands
Tony Bodgin	ECC	Mrs G Tyrrell	Globefield
Louise Barnden	TACT@DOME	Mrs S Bath	Nelson Close
Margaret Matters	Senior Warden		
Mrs B Staddon	Bodley Close		
Mrs J Smith	Rennes House		
Mrs T Burrow	Toronto House		
Mrs Zelent	Aldens Road		
Mrs G Kirby	Aldens Road		
Mrs JE Welham	Aldens Road		
Mrs V Phelps	Teazle Court		
Mrs P Stoneman	Grandisson		
Mr K Murray	Grandisson		
Mr Tait	Grandisson		
Mrs Lancaster	Magdalen		
Mrs Chisholm	Southlands		

Apologies: -

Mr W Bell, Darcy Copp, John Sutton, Mrs Winham.

Introduction

The meeting opened with a general introduction from Tony Bodgin.

Sheltered Housing Strategy

The group were provided with an excerpt from the draft of the Exeter Older Peoples Housing Strategy in a letter before the meeting. The 3 page excerpt was provided because the Exeter Older Peoples Housing Strategy is quite a large document so key points were picked out which are relevant to the Sheltered Group.

The Priorities and Recommendations show the projected requirements and the problems the city faces for the future. Exeter has an aging population which is projected to carry on increasing over the next ten years. There is also a significant number of elderly living in the most deprived wards in the city.

The supply of Sheltered accommodation in the city is inconsistent with demand and work is ongoing to find out what is required. For example, there are too many sheltered units in some parts of the city and other areas where there is no provision at

all. Some of the units are difficult to let due to the number of stairs, size, location, lack of facilities etc., whilst other units are in very high demand.

The high and sometimes long-term empty property rates for the unpopular units are a real problem with regard to lost revenue. One possible solution would be to de-designate the sheltered status of the hard to let accommodation. However, This could cause problems during the transitional period when sheltered tenants would be living alongside younger, general needs tenants.

Coupled to this, the council must bring all its sheltered accommodation up to the standards laid out in the 'Proposed Standards for Existing Sheltered Housing Projects (Supporting People Devon)' document (a copy of which was included in the handout). The proposed standards – if agreed – will need to be met by the year 2010, the same time as the Decent Homes Standard.

For this reason the Older Peoples Housing Strategy needs to be linked in with the Options Appraisal process to ensure that the cost implications for meeting the standard are taken into account when looking at which Option will deliver the finances required to make the chosen option a viable proposition. This needs to be linked in by 2005 when the five year plan for implementing the Supporting People Strategy for Sheltered Housing has to be presented to Government.

Tony Bodgin has agreed to clarify the standards and a survey of sheltered tenants will be carried out to reflect the findings. The Wardens will assist in ensuring that vulnerable tents are reached when conducting the survey. The costings for the above will need to be reflected in the 2010 spending plan.

Options Appraisal

Following on from this discussion Louis Barnden, the Independent Tenants Advisor (ITA), was introduced to the group to give an update on the Options Appraisal process and to ensure they were aware what stock options were all about.

There are several options available:

The council could retain the housing stock – if it can afford to do so,
Transfer the stock to a new or existing Housing Association,
Set up an Arms Length Management Organisation, or
Enter into a Private Finance Initiative.

It is most likely that only two of the available options will be suitable for Exeter. These are to stay as we are or transfer to a Housing Association.

An Insight Group has been set up to look at each option, the Decent Homes Standard, the current situation and how this all works at the moment. The Insight Group has already been given presentations by representatives from Housing Management and Housing Services. Housing Strategy will be the topic at the next meeting with a presentation by Ron Mayers, the Principal Housing Partnership Manager. Steve Partridge, the Councils Independent Financial Consultant will be attending a future Insight group meeting to discuss the financial details of the options appraisal.

Louis stressed the importance of getting the message out to tenants who are showing a reluctance to be involved in the process. The RoadShow was poorly attended and the response to the tenants survey was also poor. Events planned for the future are an 'Open Day' on the 20 November, to be held at the Thistle hotel and three evening meetings the week before at locations around Exeter.

Towards the end of the year the tenants view will be pulled together and these will be put to the council. The council will then make a decision for the future of the housing stock based on the results of the tenant consultation with objectives that reflect tenants priorities

Change is generally scary so it is important that tenants make a decision that is well informed and based on the facts rather than one based on a fear of change.

An information pack is to be sent to all tenants along with a message from the tenant board members inviting people to attend the Open Day and evening meetings and also to provide information to those who do not wish to attend

Recycling from Home

Paul Marten the Senior Recycling Officer gave a presentation to the group. In Exeter we are still throwing away far too much rubbish. Last year in Exeter there was 39,887 tonnes of waste produced. This trend has been going up but last year for the first time saw a reduction from 42,000 in 02-03 a reduction of almost 3,000 tonnes due mainly to the introduction of the Recycling from Home scheme. The scheme offers a good kerbside service and Exeter is the only authority to collect mixed plastics.

In order to help meet the target of diverting 25% of landfill by 2010 there is a new European directive to force manufacturers to cut down on the amount of packaging they use on products.

Most of the waste produced in the UK goes into landfill sites. These are usually holes in the ground left after mineral extraction but these resources are not finite. The cost of disposing of rubbish in landfill sites now costs around £15 per tonne for the tax alone. This figure is set to increase annually in £3 increments, which will have to be met by taxpayers. On top of that, the site operator charges a gate fee, so the real cost of disposal is nearly £40 a tonne (£38.70 to be precise).

The Recycle from Home scheme alone will not meet the new target set by Government, which says we have to recycle 30% by 2006.

It is hoped that the new Garden Waste scheme will help us to achieve this target. The garden waste will be composted and supplied to local farmers and is hoped to reduce the amount of chemicals used in the soil.

There was wide consultation in developing the service, talking to community groups, holding focus groups and community forums and using Wavelength (citizens panel), to gather views.

There were 2 options put to the consultation groups with regard to paying for the scheme. To make a direct charge for the service or to increase Council Tax by around 4% in order to cover costs. The consultation groups decided on a charge for the service because a charge would not be fair on people who do not use the service.

There are still people who deliberately contaminate the recycling waste by putting non –recyclable waste into the recycling bins. Paul Marten pointed out that it is a criminal offence to contaminate the recycling bins and this could lead to a prosecution.

Next Meeting

The criteria laid out in ‘Proposed Standards for Existing Sheltered Housing Projects (Supporting People Devon)’ will have major cost implications for Exeter City Council (everyone received a copy of this prior to the meeting). It was decided that another meeting be scheduled before the December meeting because this needs to be discussed before the tenants preferred choice is put to the council in December.

However, I am pleased to be able to tell you that the council has agreed to set aside £1 million into next year’s budget to deal with upgrading works to sheltered blocks to achieve the Supporting People Sheltered Housing.

The proposed meeting on the 8 November has therefore been cancelled and the next meeting will be held on: -

**Monday 6 December at the Buckerell Lodge 1.00 pm start.
Don’t forget, wine, tea, coffee and a buffet Christmas lunch
will be available**

Anyone requiring a taxi should, as usual, phone ZCARS on Exeter 422888.

On the agenda next time: -

- Options Appraisal – the Independent Tenants report to the council
- The Older Persons Strategy
- If anyone has any issues they want raised at the next meeting please contact Steve Deakin on 265698, but make sure you allow enough time to organise a response.