

Background

Appendix B

1. The Scrutiny Board Procedure Rules state that all Scrutiny Boards will act as a “critical friend” to the relevant Strategic Partnership Board and consider and report on the following areas:
 - What contribution the Partnership Board is making to tackle poverty and inequality, and the progress being made against this
 - How successfully the Board’s partnership arrangements are working
 - To what extent are significant benefits being seen from partnership working? How has partnership working ensured increased pace of change to address the issue in hand?
2. During March 2013, the Scrutiny Boards received a report from their relevant Strategic Partnership Board setting out their strengths and potential areas for development in respect of the three key questions above. The Scrutiny Boards were also given the opportunity to question the chair, members of the Partnership Board and support officers.
3. As the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Board is aligned to the Housing and Regeneration Partnership Board, the following representatives from this Partnership Board had attended the Scrutiny Board’s meeting on 26th March 2013:
 - Councillor P Gruen, Executive Member, Neighbourhoods, Planning & Support Services
 - Councillor R Lewis, Executive Member, Development & the Economy
 - Mr Martin Farrington, Director of City Development
 - Ms Christine Addison, Chief Regeneration Officer/Acting Chief Asset Management Officer, City Development
 - Ms Maggie Gjessing, Housing Investment Manager, City Development
 - Apologies were reported from Mr Neil Evans, Director of Environment & Neighbourhoods
4. This report summarises the observations and recommendations made by the Scrutiny Board during this meeting.

Issues Highlighted to the Scrutiny Board by the Director of City Development and the Executive Board Members

5. In the absence of the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods, the Director of City Development introduced the report and highlighted and commented on the challenge of achieving growth in the current housing market. He stated that 3,828 housing units had been delivered in 2008/09 but this had fallen to 1,700 in 2010/11 and had risen to 1,931 in 2011/12. However, the latest figure of 1,200 houses delivered in 2012/13 was only 52% of what the target was in the Council’s core strategy and therefore there were significant areas of improvement to be made. Whilst the Council had significant influence it was not within its power to deliver the homes required. As the Council is the lead agency, the largest land

owner and the planning and highways authority it has considered how it could facilitate housing growth. To this end it had developed a series of initiatives and mechanisms including the

- development of the brownfield land programme
- older peoples housing and care programme
- facilitation of self-build schemes
- reviewed its policies on affordable housing

6. Finally, the Director of City Development referred to the membership of the Housing and Regeneration Strategic Partnership Board and in particular to the importance of having building society representation on the Board as mortgage access was one of the key factors to housing growth.
7. The Chief Regeneration Officer gave the Board a brief update on the background and membership of the Housing and Regeneration Strategic Partnership Board. She stated that the strength of the Board was the range of its members but advised the meeting that it remained difficult to engage the private sector in its work. Specific reference was made to the
 - work of the board's Sub Groups, namely the East Leeds Regeneration Board and the Housing Forum
 - Council's City Priority Plan target for affordable housing in 2012/13 of 525 and the likely outcome of just under 500 affordable homes being delivered
 - target set for reducing the number of empty properties by 2,200 and the likely outcome being 2,300
 - various energy efficiency targets which would be met this year
8. The Executive Board Member for Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services stated that he was satisfied with how the Housing Forum was working and the fact that there was now one voice for housing in the city. It had good representation from the private sector and the Housing Associations. The meetings were not officer led and any Member of the Board could place items on the agenda and present reports. He then referred to the East Leeds Regeneration Board and acknowledged that it had taken sometime to reach an accord and clarity as to the direction it wanted to move towards. It was clear that any development in East Leeds was dependent upon having the necessary infrastructure in place. Finally, he referred to the difficulties of selecting representation from the private sector on the Board. It was clear that developers were often not without prejudice and pursue their development interests. He stated that membership remained an issue and that the group was still emerging and that further work needed to be undertaken to develop relationships further.

The Scrutiny Board's observations and recommendations relating to the Housing and Regeneration Partnership Board.

Acknowledging

9. Firstly,
 - a) Acknowledgement of the benefits that this Partnership Board had brought in terms of bringing together Councillors with other partners, including those from the voluntary sector.
 - b) Members noted that many of the views and recommendations of the Scrutiny Board on housing growth, re-development of brownfield sites, development of greenfield sites and

concerns over the SHLAA process had been acknowledged by the relevant Executive Members. A number of initiatives had been progressed and approved by the Executive Board which was supported by this Scrutiny Board.

- c) That any proposed changes to the Partnership Boards should be made in agreement with partners.

Other general observations

10. Clarification as to why there was no mention of the work of the North East Quadrant Forum in the report which included representation from East Leeds Parish Councils, local schools and ward members and was chaired by Councillor P Grahame. The Director of City Development responded and acknowledged the valued work that was being undertaken by the Forum.
11. Concern as to how brownfield sites could be redeveloped to reduce the pressure on greenfield sites? The Director of City Development referred to the development of the 10 year Brownfield land programme which would require more bespoke measures to make brownfield sites more attractive to developers. This could include attracting new house builders to the city and encouraging niche house builders more suited to developing smaller and more difficult sites.
12. Reference to the fact that whilst planning approvals had been given for a number of housing developments in East Leeds, they were subject to the development of the East Leeds Orbital Route (ELOR) and Manston Lane and other improvements in order to secure the 12,500 jobs on offer in East Leeds. The Executive Board Member Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services acknowledged the importance of getting the necessary infrastructure in place in East Leeds in order to unlock the land that already had planning approval for housing development. He stated that the Director of City Development was currently leading on a feasibility study on the financing of the ELOR.
13. Reference to the Carla11 judgement and the fact that despite phases 2 and 3 greenfield sites being released three years ago to provide 12,000 homes there were no sites 'shovel ready' for development.
14. The need to challenge developers to increase their build out rates on sites currently averaging say 30 to 40 homes per year per site to 60 to 80 homes per year.
15. Whether the Home Builders Federation would be more representative of the house builders on the Housing and Regeneration Strategic Partnership Board and Sub Groups. The Director of City Development agreed that this would be considered.
16. Whether decontamination of brownfield sites funded by the Council would be sufficient to make sites more viable for development. The Director of City Development stated that decontamination alone would not be sufficient. What was needed was a range of initiatives. He referred to the government decision to offer home buyers a 20% interest free 5 year loan that would provide buyers with a substantial initial deposit and make brownfield sites more viable.
17. Reference to affordable housing and the view that some officers were taking a firm line on the percentage of affordable homes required for developments within the 'golden triangle' and was none negotiable. This was of particular concern if developers had not had previous dealings with the Council and were put off at the first hurdle by such an inflexible

approach. The Director of City Development recognised this concern and agreed that every request required a proactive, considered and in depth response in order to achieve the best and most effective outcomes.

18. Concern that the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) has no democratic accountability and no formal decision making powers. Although there were planning approvals for 21,000 housing units the SHLAA had accepted the view of developers that 8,000 units were not achievable for development. The Executive Board Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services reported that a paper would shortly be presented to the Executive Board that reviews the membership, operation and terms of reference of this group. The Chair referred to the Scrutiny Board meeting on 30th October 2012 which expressed concerns as to whether the SHLAA was fit for purpose and welcomed the Executive Board Members intervention on this matter.
19. Members supported the approval of the Executive Board to accept a request from the Homes and Community Agency (HCA) that the Council transfer four Listed Buildings into its ownership at Tower Works, Globe Road, Holbeck. The transfer of the buildings would be accompanied by a financial dowry funded by the Department of Communities and Local Government and will result in the City Council and HCA working in partnership to bring forward the redevelopment of Tower Works and the wider Holbeck Urban Village

Conclusion & Recommendations

20. In conclusion, the Scrutiny Board would like to reiterate some of the key points that have been raised within this report, which are as follows:
 - a) That the Scrutiny Board will continue to monitor progress in delivering the development of the brownfield land programme which it strongly supports.
 - b) That the Director of City Development consider the Board's suggestion that the Home Builders Federation might be a more appropriate body to represent house builders on the Housing and Regeneration Strategic Partnership Board and Sub Group.
 - c) That the Scrutiny Board welcomes confirmation by the Executive Board Member (Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services) that the Executive Board would shortly consider a report reviewing the membership, operation and terms of reference of the Strategic Housing and Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA).
 - d) To note that the Director of City Development acknowledged the Board's concerns that some officers were taking a firm line on the percentage of affordable homes required for developments within the 'golden triangle' and were none negotiable and instead every request by developers ought to be proactive, considered and given an in depth response that would achieve the best and most effective outcomes for the city.
 - e) To support the initiative to bring forward the redevelopment of Tower Works and the wider Holbeck Urban Village.
 - f) That the Scrutiny Board's observations and recommendations would inform the wider Scrutiny report to Council in relation to the Strategic Partnership Boards.

May 2013.