

West Kent Partnership – 24 January 2008

Richard's response to issues raised in Jon Rosser's presentation

- **Public land disposal – example given of new PFI hospital in Tunbridge Wells**

CLG would expect that the Kent and Sussex hospital site will be captured by 'rules of engagement' on disposal of public sector sites in that 'best public value' rather than 'best price' should prevail

- **Key worker shared ownership requirement that if move on from job forfeit eligibility for scheme**

CLG is actively looking at this issue

- **Code for sustainable homes**

A programme of incentives is being introduced to reach level 6 (zero carbon) on all new homes by 2016. This is to encourage builders and developers to meet a higher level than that required under building regulations. Milestones between now and 2016 – currently all homes built with either Government money or collaboration are required to deliver at level 3. Berkley Homes has just announced that all their new build private or public sector, will be at level 3.

- **Clarification on status of housing associations**

The new social housing regulatory body is Offtenant. Government will seek to clarify status of housing associations and are aware of concerns but have no intention to seek to reclassify housing associations as public bodies. Consideration is being given as to whether it will be necessary to introduce any amendments to the Housing and Regeneration Bill to clarify this.

Questions for Richard McCarthy

Question on behalf of Kent Partnership – Rob Hancock

Kent's Local Area Agreement (currently being negotiated) will contain an indicator and target on the delivery of new housing numbers for the next three years. Given the short duration of the Agreement, the timescale inherent in enshrining any increase in housing numbers above those contained within the SE Plan and as draft changes to the SE Plan have yet to be announced by Govt would he agree that it is premature to include in the LAA a housing numbers target other than that agreed via the statutory process in the SE Plan. This could be extremely contentious in many Districts of Kent.

Panel report numbers are now available but currently new house targets are being exceeded and this stretching is positive and demonstrates a level of delivery that is being achieved.

David Phillips, Wealden District Council

1. Infrastructure provision and improvement is the key issue for us in terms of housing delivery. In this regard can I ask:

- (a) if the Government could be persuaded to require, through the Planning Bill, not simply that stakeholders be required to “engage in a timely manner” with LPA’s in the LDF process, but that they be legally required to engage in the delivery of infrastructure requirement through the alignment of their budgets and work programmes?

There are no plans to strengthen the Bill further. However, Government is thinking across the piece and PCTs, The Highway Agency and the Police are required to engage and have a duty to co-operate to determine targets in Local Agreements. It is important to draw together all the provisions not only in the Planning Bill but in the Planning Policy Statement 12 and the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act.

It is an issue of concern that Highway Agency schemes costs, such as A21 are escalating so dramatically and this is reflected also in other areas. Each PSA Board has a Transport representative on the Board

A recent example of good partnership working across agencies is the granting of outline planning permission to develop Eastern Quarry adjacent to Bluewater. This will have no car access and in the past the Highways Agency would have blocked such a development. However through early dialogue with the developers the Highway Agency was able to input into the planning application and created conditions for the developers to adhere to. This is good practice in delivering on a shared strategic objective to deliver sustainable transport options to a new development.

- (b) whether the Community Infrastructure Levy proposed in the Planning Bill, augmented by any specific S106 contribution, could be subject to annual incremental increases through the life of a planning permission at a level to encourage early delivery?

A document will shortly be released for consultation on the detail of how this will work. Some developers would rather pay more than incorporate the provision of affordable housing.

- (c) whether Government could evaluate the benefit of introducing a levy on land which had the benefit of outline planning permission but where no significant housing delivery had occurred?

Difficult to compel developers to commence work in a timely fashion

and there will always be developers who obtain planning permission and then sell site on. Ideas invited on what powers LAs could be given to address this

David Candlin, Head of Economic Development and Regeneration, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

The Sub National Review, LABGI consultation and Business Rate Supplement all place an economic development focus on the counties and unitaries, effectively focusing resources at a county level. This not only ignores local economic issues and the work that has been led by district councils but based on past historic working with county will see yet more resources sucked out of prosperous areas such as West Kent to address poor economic delivery elsewhere. Significant issues of deprivation and infrastructure at a local level which in many respects continue to hold back West Kent from making an even more effective contribution to the UK economy are not a priority at the County or Regional level.

The SNR is intended to deliver economic development at the right level and is focused on sub regional working. Where duties and opportunities exist there should be delivery and this would not necessarily be at County level. Economic development links to local decision making on housing and planning and is part of the local dynamic strategy. The message to local authorities is that whilst there are powers at County level, the local planning power is very important and it is important to have an understanding of economic matters to unlock the planning role to deliver jobs and housing. In two tier areas all planning powers will be kept at local level.

The Community Investment Fund Levy will be raised at District level and this is a card to play with County and other economic stakeholders. There is opportunity to build a vision to attract resources from the RDA in locations to reflect opportunity. The evidence is that it is important to build on economic success as well as tackling economic needs. The pockets of deprivation in West Kent are an important issue. All encouraged to become involved in the consultation on SNR Framework and identify opportunities for Economic Development in West Kent.

Gilian Macinnes, Head of Development Services, Sevenoaks District Council

Sevenoaks District is extremely constrained by landscape designations and this is reflected in the low level of new housing required in the South East Plan. Historically, Sevenoaks has consistently delivered new housing through windfall but you have indicated that authorities have to prove that their 5 year supply is deliverable. Sevenoaks is keen to include windfalls to achieve its targets. Planning is an expensive business and the level of housing and therefore Planning delivery grant should be based on SE Plan numbers not provision above stock.

The numbers for Sevenoaks District reflect local conditions. Go back and really show in your evidence base that you cannot provide the housing without windfalls. Important to recognise that this is a five year requirement and the evidence base is key. Every year there is an opportunity to adjust plan so it will be possible to capture windfall as the plan rolls. Suspect that there is more capacity

Alan McKendrick, Chief Executive, Aylesford Newsprint

The importance of a joined up approach to the economy including the role of education is important. The Minister for the South East, speaking in Thames Gateway made the point that alongside the demand for housing, there are youngsters facing difficulties when they leave school without qualifications. Is there a link that can be drawn between builders/developers and these young people to train them as ultimately they will be living in some of these new developments?

The PSA Board will have a representative from the Department of Children, Schools and Families. Certainly is some locations around large sites planning authorities do manage to engage on delivering training opportunities as part of a development scheme. However, need to keep an eye on reality and whereas this approach is sensible in the Thames Gateway, the reality for West Kent is that it needs to have skills across a broad range to fit the needs of the local economy. The local authorities can play a role in encouraging public policy makers, nationally and locally to recognise the needs of the locality.

Pat Smith, Head of Housing, Sevenoaks District Council

Given the constraints to new development in Sevenoaks District and the requirements of the Housing and Planning Bill in respect of affordable homes, could we look at utilising existing housing stock to meet targets, particularly in the private sector? The local authorities would welcome a partnership approach with Government to address this.

Yesterday, Terms of Reference for a review of the private sector were released for consultation, so feed in comments. Government is looking at these issues. The development of the private rental sector is an area not looked at in some time but it is a sensitive area. Local authorities have power under PS3 to set Empty Property Management orders.

Barbara Thorndick, Chief Executive, West Kent Housing Association

Affordable housing can focus more on smaller units and there is a need for more family homes. One way of addressing this is to incentivise older people in larger homes to move into smaller properties. However, the deal has to be attractive with aspirational homes for older people being built and a decent cash incentive offered to make the move.

These ideas are very interesting and the time is right to feed in as smart use of public funds. Some pilots schemes to address over-crowding are already underway.

David Petford, Chief Executive, Maidstone Borough Council

On the issue of disposal of local authority land, Maidstone supports the provision of affordable housing but with other demands on the budget it is difficult to release funds from the sale of assets straight back into housing.

Assets used to provide affordable housing under shared ownership schemes will deliver a good return as occupiers staircase into full ownership.

A plea for a more simple system for the LDF. Maidstone has been thrown off course this year by a proposal for a freight terminal which will impinge on LDF. Resources have had to be switched to deal with the proposal which is costing £400,000 of LA resource to process at a cost to the developer of only £25,000. How can we deal with these issues – is a more open relationship possible with the planning inspectorate?

ATLAS, a planning advisory service is there to help local authorities in the planning process (confirmed subsequently also available for large applications) Government will not penalise or criticise local authorities who may fall behind on LDF as a result of having to manage a big application and suggest that liaise with GOSE throughout who will in turn keep CLG informed.

Roy Bullock, Leader, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

As housing numbers are being stretched, a plea not to judge potential growth on just the last 3 years.

Planning fees are set centrally but local authorities would welcome far more freedom to set own fees.

There is a need for consistency and a fair framework. There could be a tendency for some local authorities to use higher fees as a disincentive to applications and hence development.

Government states that local authorities cannot carry a surplus in building control fees, but the market could stand more.

Not aware that this was prescribed and will take this back. Interested in whole approach and there is inconsistency across the country.

Merle Bigden, Head of Community Development, Sevenoaks District Council

Could not Community Investment Fund Levy be used in part to support community development and encourage cohesion around new developments?

We all genuinely want to ensure that existing and new places work cohesively and that people are comfortable, safe, welcome and have access to facilities. There are issues around Government prescription and local priorities. Fiscal limits also impact. Wait to see what Government say around some softer level provision in the CIF levy. There is a need to recognise that what capital is available relates to fees and charges around the public sector and the developer and ask the question to what extent should people pay for themselves.

David Marlow, Rother District Council

The place shaping role of the core strategy is welcome, however, there are a number of tensions around the recent emphasis on housing supply meaning that there can be

- A tendency to move away from core issues to wider land use issues
- A time pressure around windfall sites
- A loss of emphasis on regeneration and sustainable growth

Rother want to build homes but the delays in key infrastructure programmes means risk of unsustainable growth if continue with housing programmes. What confidence does Government have in their infrastructure plans?

Government have invested in regeneration in Rother. Housing growth is linked to economic development and regeneration. CLG is engaging with Highways Agency on major schemes and trying to work co-operatively. The increased costs of A21 dualling is hard to understand and will be taken up with Highways Agency. The importance of infrastructure in underpinning regeneration plans is understood but at a local level it's a juggling act –do what can be done and keep the focus on what still needs doing.

Mark Worrall, Leader, Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council

What can you do and in what timescale to improve communications with Network Rail?

Network Rail is a private body. CLG can influence through its Regulator and the Government Department for Transport. If there are specific strategic issues which restrict economic growth for West Kent, happy to receive these and pass them on through these channels.