

Somerset Strategic Housing Framework Review 2017

Stakeholder Engagement Event

Workshop Summary

Workshop A- Housing Delivery/ Affordability

Issue 1

A home that people can afford to live in. A requirement for more low cost housing relative to income and need.

The need for rents to be set realistically at a truly affordable level for its intended tenant/ occupant is recognised. However, there was a struggle to understand the relationships between the different rent regimes and the actual 'buying power' of those in need. The effect of the affordable rent regime is to ape the distortions of the market (the margin between social and affordable rent being greater in higher value areas such as desirable villages) which leads to significant differences in outcome rents from one locality to another. The Local Housing Allowance (which effectively caps Housing Benefit) was however set according to average prevailing rents in a broad housing market area (often similar to district in size) and now frozen! In other words, it is a blunter instrument.

Solution

- Accept the nationally set parameters and ensure that new affordable housing always comes within the Local Housing Allowance.
- Attempt to establish a Somerset Rent Standard, taking into account local variations between incomes and prevailing market values.
- Lobby the Homes & Communities Agency to invoke the 'up to' 80% part of the definition of Affordable Rent more often.
- Expand the South Somerset 'Hybrid Rent' model.
- Continue to ensure that the majority of new rented homes delivered through planning obligations is on the social rent regime, as per the Strategic Housing Market Assessment.

Issue 2

Sufficient housing of all tenures to meet the needs of the population, in both rural and urban areas.

Recognition of the dynamic tension between producing housing that is truly affordable for the intended occupants and the need to produce as much as possible. Maximising the numbers of affordable housing, whether through planning obligations or through stretching grants further, will more quickly address the outstanding need, although it may do so by forcing applicants into constrained choices over location and cost of occupation. More housing available for purchase at accessible prices will further reduce the demand for

'affordable' housing. The entire County is now covered by an in-date adopted Local Plan which allows for the overall numbers of all tenure required, but it is not necessarily the case that all 5 district have a 5 year land supply.

Solution

- Increase off site construction to address skills shortages and speed up the take up of planning permission.
- Identify sufficient land to achieve 5 year land supply across the County.

Issue 3

Strategy to deliver through partnership the provision of viable and deliverable sites for development.

It is acknowledged that no one sector has all the solutions and that there needs to be effective partnership working in order to take up opportunities swiftly. Not all sites will be viable and the districts, as planning authorities, need to be flexible in their approach to addressing viability issues.

Solutions

- Brainstorm for methods to collectively encourage the small and medium sized enterprises.
- Brainstorm for methods to make Housing Associations work more collaboratively.
- Review of the actual outcomes on sites where the Community Infrastructure Levy has been applied. What effect has this had on overall delivery?

Workshop B- Rural Housing/ Affordability

Issue 1: Rural housing needs

Affordable housing is essential to the vitality and sustainability of our rural communities. There is increasing shortage of social housing and escalating house prices. The affordability gap is most pronounced in rural communities. Average house prices are higher in rural areas, making it increasingly unaffordable to people on lower local incomes. Limited opportunities to work locally, fuels unfulfilled economic potential. Families are forced to move away from the communities in which they both grew up in and or work, losing the strong social connections. It is therefore important to understand the range of housing needs to support more housing delivery in rural areas.

Solutions

- Improve or foster better and stronger relationships with Parish Councils to promote more affordable housing in rural areas. Encourage the use of Parish Councils Steering Groups to provide a strategic direction for supporting local housing delivery and capacity building.
- Promote the use of Housing Needs studies, to ensure the right tenure is delivered to meet the needs of each community.
- Support and develop more Social Rented homes. Consider the development of new rental models such as Joseph Rowntree

Foundation's (JRF) 'Living Rents model' which pins costs to local earnings.

- Work closer with the Homes and Communities Agency to secure more rural investment, particularly for rented accommodation. Seek to work more innovatively, to address the housing issues for under-35s and need for one-bedroom dwellings, in response, including the impact of recent Welfare Reforms.
- Addressing all housing needs for long term sustainability of rural settlements, including the size and type of any market homes needed to help facilitate the delivery of affordable housing.
- Housing to help recruit and retain staff for rural employers.
- Working with registered housing provider and partners to provide the right type homes for older and more vulnerable people so as to enable downsizing from larger family homes.
- Collaborative working within and across Local Authority teams (housing, planning, economic development) to enable flexibility to different ideas and approaches e.g. locally managed 'Help to Buy'.

Issue 2: Resistance to Developments

Affordable housing is often a controversial and sensitive issue, and can often excite negative responses. Managing social stigma and social expectations for new housing in rural settlements can be a significant challenge. Some communities or individuals can be resistant to change.

Solutions

- Encouraging Community-led Plans or Neighbourhood Plans to identify community housing needs can lead to identification of land and sites for future housing. Community Land Trusts can also facilitate community engagement and promote open mindedness and flexible thinking.
- Identifying key people within Local Authorities or Rural Housing Enablers to work with communities to keep the focus on issues and effect change. Acting as independent brokers to facilitate the often lengthy and complex process of developing, providing reassurance and confidence to communities, in accepting new housing.
- Provide bulletins or updated information on affordable housing. Also to organise roadshows or rural forums to raise profile of rural housing and the long-term health, housing and investment benefits.

Issue 3: Land availability

Availability of sites in rural communities, particularly rural exception sites, for local affordable housing is a long-standing issue. Encouraging land to come forward, in the right place and at a value that enables the identified need for affordable homes to be maximised, can be an arduous process. However, landowners have strong multi-generational ties to their communities and are often local employers and so are well-placed to help increase the supply of affordable homes.

Solutions

- New policy approaches in Local Plans that can help incentivise land to come forward.
- Prudential borrowing to enable Local Authorities to buy a portfolio of sites in rural settlements.
- Publicity and promotion to bring forward land at rural exception site values – incentives can include nomination rights for landowners.
- Engaging with local rural employers and landowners to enable work retention and joined up thinking.
- Avoiding stalled sites through providing incentives for landowners and farmers in the way of ground rent income. Developers pay annual price, worked out by each acre for affordable homes in perpetuity.
- Use of low interest loans or deposits to potential purchasers.

Workshop C- Age Matters- Housing for the Young

Issue 1: Affordability of Housing

Young people face many challenges such as lower wages, zero hour contracts, impact of welfare reform on Local Housing Allowance and the ineligibility for the housing element of Universal Credit. The challenges limit access to low quality accommodation. Young people also face limited employment, education and training options if low skilled. This is in part linked to their inability to travel in part due to limited rural transport options. Affordability is therefore not solely about accommodation but its interrelationships with broader societal issues.

Solutions

Utilise initiatives such as the Social Impact Bond to enable Local Authorities, Housing Association and Private Landlords to build links with Employment Education & Training initiatives such as Somerset Employment & Skills Steering Group.

Issue 2: Providers Risk Averse to Challenging Tenants

- Access to and sustainability of tenancies remains a key issue due to the availability of properties in the wrong location, especially if one has additional needs and a history such as arrears or anti-social behaviour.
- Access to social housing should be broadened to include catering to those with broader societal needs.

Solutions

- Flexible rent support ('should be as easy and obvious as 'dial-a-pizza').
- Young people's panel (around local planning).
- Housing First.
- Improve Exit Planning.
- Contingency Plans for those in Supported Accommodation.
- Research into reasons for tenancy failures.

Issue 3: Availability of Single Bed Accommodation:

Housing has now become an 'investment' rather than a home, the very root of the housing crisis. There are now 2,000 Hinkley workers with 40% living in

shared accommodation, thus reducing the availability of single bed accommodation for young people due to the Shared Accommodation Rate. Further, building of single bed accommodation is seen as unviable by developers.

Solutions

- Further develop existing Hinkley mitigation projects.
- Increase housing of multiple occupation, built in the correct format.
- Build more one bed accommodation or accommodation that suits shared housing needs.
- Improve the private rented sector.
- Remarket Homefinder to young people through colleges etc, social media.

Workshop D- Age Matters- Housing for the Elderly

Issue 1

Occupants choosing to 'age in place'. How do we facilitate and help with this?

Solution

- List and make available local services available to support a person in their own home.
- Supporting agencies to appoint people to help.
- Empowering communities and the Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise to help.

Issue 2

Inadequate supply of suitable properties.

Solution

- What is the definition of an older person?
- Consult with older people to ascertain the type of housing needed.
- Create or release available accommodation for downsizing.
- Encourage different tenure options for supported and extra care through Housing Associations and Private Enterprise.
- Encourage new build housing in rural locations that offer opportunities for downsizing and are easily adaptable.
- Be creative about the solutions- annex building, advance planning and further support of families to activate the 'big question'.

Issue 3

Safety of homes for people and its link to isolation, loneliness and the rise of dementia.

Solution

- Better links made to the Home Improvement Agency services.
- List and make available local services available to support a person in their own home.
- Supporting agencies to appoint people to help.

- Empowering communities and the Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise to help.

Workshop E- Hinkley Point C- Mitigating the Impacts

Issue 1

Mismatch between planning for housing pressures and what is occurring in reality.

Solution

- Off-site manufacture as the biggest impact is on the private rented sector. The sector needs to be made more robust through creating additional bed spaces in the sector.
- Seek to consider strategies used by Bristol and London authorities for the lessons learned from the impact of Olympics 2012 (although the infrastructure is different).

Issue 2

Displacement of local people priced out of local housing market.

Solution:

Building of the campuses should be a major mitigation measure. The mismatch between campuses coming on stream and the arrival of workers (particularly the lower paid trades) is a big factor that must be addressed e.g. shorter timescale for campus construction.

Issue 3

Labour inflation caused by Hinkley Point C.

Solution

Increase training schemes & apprenticeships that will benefit the local labour market.

Workshop F- Health & Housing

Issue 1

Provide a coordinated approach on 'up-stream', prevention and community based solutions in order to deliver more effective interventions between health, social care & housing.

Solution

- Evidence gathering (profiling, asset mapping, service mapping, and co-production).
- Consider place-based approaches/sharing of resources (including pooled budgets).
- Need to work with the community as equal partners.
- Pilot work being developed by the Somerset Academy should assist.

Issue 2

Developing better links between town planning and the health and housing system.

Solution

- Linking major developments and opportunities (e.g. Taunton Garden Town) to the Health and Wellbeing agenda (especially prevention), in order to address inactivity levels (better integrated use of public open space, play and sustainable transport options)
- Delivering lifetime homes; space standards; providing a range of supported housing for elderly and the vulnerable.
- Using imaginative design to tackle social isolation and deliver community cohesion.
- Leadership is critical.
- Need to reconsider governance arrangements on how these systems inter-relate.

Issue 3

Delivering coordinated interventions to tackle fuel poverty, cold and damp, hazards and overcrowding as part of housing standards measures.

Solution

- Partnerships.
- Funding.
- Coordinated activity (e.g. to tackle geographic concentrations of poor standards within the PRS).
- Working to deliver improved referral systems to health/support services.

Workshop G- Welfare Reform

Issue 1

How can housing providers continue to meet the needs of benefit dependant under 35 year olds whose housing cost entitlement will be limited to the Shared Accommodation Rate?

Solution

- Work with social housing providers to develop a shared accommodation offer which can be let via Homefinder Somerset.
- Ensure all commissioned supported housing working with under 35s have a focus on assisting people into work with set targets and Key Performance Indicators to enable performance monitoring.
- Assess option for developing new provision at Local Housing Allowance Shared Accommodation Rate through Housing Delivery Partnerships.

Issue 2

How can we assist families living in social housing to prepare for the dual impact of Welfare Reform and the Local Housing Allowance rent cap?

Solution 3

- Work with the Department for Work & Pensions and others to identify those whose income will be most affected by welfare reform and rent cap and target an awareness campaign signposting to early intervention services.
- Social Housing Providers to share best practice and work together in assisting residents to improve credit ratings and reduce the risk of doorstep lending.

Workshop H- Homelessness & Rough Sleeping

Issue 1

Limited Resources

Solution

- Seek to engage agencies and housing associations to seek common grounds, identify areas of responsibility to be owned and adopt a joined up working style with client as the focus.
- Partnerships should also be reviewed regularly.

Issue 2

Tackle the Cause

Solution

- Lack of suitable accommodation and support.
- For clients to be empowered, support and time is needed.
- For landlords to be agreeable, exit strategy from the outset should be agreed.

Issue 3

Comprehensive Engagement

Solution

Seek to have a shared communication strategy that involves ALL partners and addresses crucial issues such as universal credit.