

South Lakeland DC Housing Advisory Group

Minutes to Meeting Held 10.00 a.m., Thursday 31 October 2013

Georgian Room, Kendal Town Hall

1. Welcome & Apologies

Present: Jonathan Brook – Housing Portfolio Holder SLDC (Chair)
Tony Whittaker – SLDC
Dave Pogson – NPS Group
Dan Hudson – SLDC
Simon Anstey - SLDC
Judith Derbyshire- CRHT
Julie Jackson - SLDC
Anne-Marie Willmott – Impact HA
Phil Houghton – Story Homes
Peter Thomas – South Lakes Housing
Duncan Peake – Holker Group
Julie Grey – Riverside Group
Helen Irving – SLDC
Anne Hall – SLDC and LDNPA
John McCreech – South Lakes CALC
Mike Henry – Applethwaite Ltd
Mark Loughran – SLDC

Apologies: Lynne Campbell (SLDC), Paula Allen (LDNPA), Graham Hale (Cumbria CC), Martyn Nicholson (Russell Armer), Greg Denwood (Two Castles), David Stubbs (South Lakes Housing)

2. Lancaster co-housing development – Dr Jan Maskell

Dr Maskell gave a presentation on the environmental co-housing development, Forgebank, in Halton, Lancashire. This is a development of 41 homes with low environmental impact both during construction and use. They were built using the standards of the Code for Sustainable Homes (code 6) and Passivhaus.

The vision was for a scheme which was inter-generational, ecological, to encourage social interaction, cutting edge, an example of sustainable design and living with close links to the wider community.

The scheme included communal space and facilities which enabled residents to live in smaller individual houses. 35 properties are leasehold in the scheme community with 6 freehold, slightly detached from the community.

The brownfield site was purchased alongside River Lune in 2009 and an architect experienced in this type of development was used. The project came in under budget.

Target prices were set based on local market prices. Total scheme cost was £8.2m, 1% grant and 99% house sales. Separate grants were acquired for energy solutions.

The next open event is on 24 November 2013 with regular monthly open sessions should anyone like to visit.

3. Right to Buy in Rural Areas – Peter Thomas South Lakes Housing.

Half of South Lakes Housing stock is in the Lake District National Park, of which 82% is eligible for Right to Buy. PT advised that there is a serious problem with this in that it is very difficult to replace homes that are being bought and it is unsustainable to try to keep doing this. As a result the stock of housing available will keep diminishing.

PT feels that there is a case for exemption for RTB in the LDNP. He feels that there is some political support after conversations with Tim Farron MP. Also the Cumbria Housing Group has met with NHF to discuss the National Park's case.

PT is keen to co-ordinate his approach and wants to seek the support of local parties.

TW suggested that Right to Acquire in settlements over 3000 (e.g. Windermere and Ambleside) could also be included.

JD said that Cumbria needs to retain younger employable people in rural areas as population is aging and will require more local support as well as economic growth.

JMc emphasised that economic growth is essential to include in PT's case.

PH suggested that PT addressed the LEP, next meeting 20 November.

JB summarised that the view of the meeting was that PT could be assured of support of all those present.

ACTION: PT to coordinate lobbying.

4. Affordable House Price Review 2013 – Tony Whittaker, SLDC

TW presented statistics showing that both median incomes and median house prices had fallen over the past year. Although the income to house price ratio had marginally improved, he recommended that the current Affordable House Prices as used by SLDC remain the same and there is not sufficient evidence to justify a change.

JB agreed that the data backs TW's suggestion and the meeting endorsed the proposal.

ACTION: TW to report to Cabinet in December on this basis.

5. Tenant Strategy Monitoring – Julie Jackson, SLDC

JJ presented key findings from a monitoring review of the South Lakeland District Council and Eden District Council Tenancy Strategy that was published in January 2013. The Tenancy Strategy stipulates that it will be regularly monitored in relation to flexible tenancies, rent levels and incomes, allocations, affordable rents and homelessness. JJ circulated a CIH report which echoes the local picture particularly in relation to flexible tenancies and affordable rents. Data for the monitoring report had been provided by registered providers, CORE data and other sources. JJ advised that 4 new recommendations were outlined under 4.0 and that she would welcome feedback and comments.

AW commented that Impact has not been asked by HCA about levels of convergence for the latest bids.

PT advised that a 'speed dating' session had seemed to work well for people wanting to swap houses, although it is unclear how many actual swaps will result.

PT commented that the effect on voids and arrears has been significant following introduction of the 'bedroom tax'. In this area particularly, one effect had been to introduce less flexibility to the detriment of local communities.

JD suggested that perhaps 3 bed houses could be used for house shares where demand had reduced due to under occupancy concerns.

TW suggested that PT could include the 'bedroom tax' issue could be included in his lobbying and rather than lobby for its removal, suggest that under occupancy for one bedroom be permissible without any financial penalty.

The new recommendations were accepted.

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6. AOB

Update from DH –

The Council expects to learn the outcome of The Inspector's report into the Independent Examination of the Local Plan shortly. This will not be available in the public domain until after fact checking. The report will be made available once the final version is received from the Planning Inspectorate. The Inspector's Report will then be reported to full Council. Provided that the Inspector finds the plan sound, Council will then be able to consider adopting the plan as Council policy.

PH raised on behalf of Martyn Nicholson that he didn't feel response times to pre-app responses had improved in SLDC, which could hold up delivery of sites. ML acknowledged that there had been difficulties.

Action: ML said he would report these comments back to Mark Shipman.

PH said that the Cumbria Housebuilders' Group is due to meet on 6 November and it would be useful to have a response for that meeting.

7. Date of next meeting

13 February 2014, 10am – Georgian Room Kendal Town Hall.