



## Rural Area Working Party 13 March 2013

### Rural Profiling Pilot

#### 1. Summary and Reasons for Recommendation

- 1.1 Affordable housing need in rural areas has historically been evidenced by carrying out local housing needs surveys and evidencing local housing needs has allowed Registered providers to get planning permission on sites outside of the development boundary under the exception policy. The grant that Registered Providers receive for developing affordable housing was significantly reduced in the last spending review making it harder to provide affordable housing particularly in the rural area. Therefore, to be in a position to respond to the growing need for affordable homes in rural areas, it is important to ensure that the affordable homes to be built in the future make the best use of grant funding that is available and to look for new opportunities for providing homes.
- 1.2 In March 2012 the Working Party considered Report C394 which recommended carrying out a pilot project to look at broadening out the way housing need was evidenced to include, for example, whether the best use is being made of existing stock and whether existing homes met the needs of their occupants. The pilot also proposed working with local communities to identify ways of meeting need that was less reliant on Government funding.
- 1.3 The pilot was subsequently approved by Cabinet. Agreement was also given for the pilot to utilise £10,000 of funding already approved for carrying out housing needs survey work.
- 1.4 Stephen Hill from C20 Future Planners attended the Working Party's meeting on 24 January 2013 to illustrate what other communities had achieved, in terms of meeting local housing need via community land Trusts, self build projects and co housing. Following his presentation there was a facilitated discussion on the profiling pilot and it was resolved:  
  
'That a report be submitted to the Working Party meeting on 13 March 2013 identifying a list of villages in the categories of large, medium and small which are appropriate for inclusion in the Pilot Project, along with costings for carrying out the work involved, and in the meantime those villages identified be the subject of informal approaches to establish whether they are willing to participate.'
- 1.5 This report is in response to those actions and identifies a list of suggested villages.

## **2. Recommendation**

2.1 Members are asked to consider the report and endorse the list of identified villages for the Pilot.

## **3. Corporate Priorities**

3.1 The recommendation meets the following, as contained within the Corporate Plan (working together for strong, healthy and diverse communities):

- (a) Increase the availability of low cost homes;
- (b) Improve life opportunities; and
- (c) Improve peoples physical and mental health.

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#### **4. Background**

4.1 Affordable housing need has historically been evidenced by carrying out local housing needs surveys. The intention of the pilot is to go beyond the scope of housing needs surveys and look in broader terms at housing need. There are a number of drivers for this including:

- (a) Localism Act;
- (b) Changes in the way affordable homes were funded; and
- (c) Suffolk County Council's Flexicare policy.

4.2 The pilot is about ensuring that the Borough Council has the right information to make informed choices about future residential developments and the affordability of housing options available. Principally the pilot is about identifying need in terms of housing and solutions to meet those housing needs. However housing can not be looked at in isolation and the pilot will also look at needs beyond housing, which are associated with wider community needs, such as care and support and space for home/community working.

4.3 Stephen Hill of C20 Future Planners facilitated a discussion at the Working Party's meeting on 24 January 2013 and provided examples of where local communities themselves have led on developing housing solutions to meet need within their localities.

4.4 Crucially the pilot is about empowering the local community to shape their own solutions.

#### **5. Villages to be included in the Pilot**

5.1 Taking into account discussions at the Working Party's meeting in January and views expressed during the 2031 Rural Vision consultation it is proposed that the following villages are considered for inclusion in the pilot to provide a range of rural locations in terms of size and spread between the north and south of the Borough.

- (i) **Key Service Centre**  
Ixworth – has indicated that it is willing to remain part of the pilot
- (ii) **Local Service Centre**  
Wickhambrook – still to be contacted, Parish Council has the provision of affordable housing as one of their priorities.  
Hopton – recently carried out a housing needs survey  
Great and Little Thurlow – still to be contacted
- (iii) **Infill village**  
Chevington – initial contact made, confirmed it may be interested  
Coney Weston – still waiting a response
- (iv) **Countryside**  
Hawstead – still waiting a response

## **6. Outcomes of the pilot**

6.1 The following case study illustrates the outcomes that can be accomplished:

6.1.1 Stradishall, whilst not included in the pilot, is worthy to be highlighted as an example of the type of neighbourhood planning this pilot is aiming to inspire and provides a good case study. The work in Stradishall has been facilitated by Foundation East and followed a similar process to that proposed for the pilot; the key difference is how information on need is gathered at the beginning of the process.

6.1.2 In Stradishall, homes were transferred from the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) into private ownership several years ago, since which time the infrastructure has not been maintained and is now in a poor state of repair. The community working with Foundation East held a referendum and have agreed to form a Community Land Trust (CLT). Foundation East on behalf of the community are in negotiations with the MOJ and are hopeful they will transfer other land to the CLT. The community will work with a Registered Provider (RP) to provide affordable housing on the land transferred to meet locally identified need. Transferring the land to the RP will generate a small capital receipt for the CLT, sufficient to carry out essential repairs to the infrastructure, the community will then pay a 'service charge' to the CLT who will be responsible for maintenance in the future.

6.1.3 The community has a business plan in place, has received funding from the National Community Land Trust Network to assist in formally setting up the CLT. Representatives from the community with support from Foundation East have liaised with the Local Planning Authority and the Homes and Community Agency, have indicated that once the scheme has planning permission it will be considered for funding subject to funding being available in the Community Land Trust allocation (part of the affordable housing programme).

6.2 Completing a housing needs assessment alone would have identified a housing need, however, it would not have generated a potential solution to the needs of the wider community. The solution was progressed through community engagement, facilitated in this case by Foundation East. Providing information on needs is the first stage of the proposed pilot, using the information to assist communities to progress solutions to meet that need, are the more crucial second and third stages.

## **7. Breakdown of tasks and costs of profiling pilot**

The Rural Profiling Pilot will be broken down in to 3 key stages the details of key tasks and costs for each stage are set out below:

### **7.1 Stage 1 - profiling of the village**

This would be a 'desktop exercise' undertaken using available data and this would allow a strategic view on need both current and future needs to be established. This would then provide a starting point for an informed discussion with the Parish Council regarding needs and the way they might respond to them.

Using the data available at a sub-regional level, County Council (Suffolk

Observatory) it would be possible to establish the following key facts for each village in the pilot:

- (a) population age profile;
- (b) household composition;
- (c) private rent levels;
- (d) stock profile all sectors;
- (e) stock turn over all sectors;
- (f) housing demand for all sectors;
- (g) compare housing demand with price people can afford to pay;
- (h) unemployment rates; and
- (i) social economic status.

Information from St Edmundsbury Housing Register would supplement the information on housing demand.

The outcome of this stage would be a short report presenting this information with conclusion about likely need.

### **Costs for stage one**

It is anticipated that this work for the pilot would largely involve officer time, no additional costs are anticipated.

## **7.2 Stage 2 – Work with the Parish Council to understand the needs and how best to respond to them**

This is a pivotal stage of the pilot and will involve working with the Parish Council to interpret and understand the information provided by the profiling work in Stage 1 and begin to map out the scope of future actions. This work would begin the process of building solutions to identified needs and initial actions required to take them forward.

The key task during this stage would be meeting with the Parish Council to:

- (a) discuss and debate profiling information, and the Parish Council to decide its response to it;
- (b) map existing amenities and social space in the locality;
- (c) Parish Council to identify a range priorities to be addressed;
- (d) consider gaps in profiling information and whether there is a need to commission additional work to collect the missing data;
- (e) explore how to 'test out' priorities identified and take them forward with the wider community. Begin to think about what might be possible, possible delivery mechanisms, gauging the likely level of local community support, potential sources of funding etc; and
- (f) agree next steps.

The outcome of this stage would be the Parish Council taking a decision whether to pursue matters further and if so what their priorities are and the actions required to take them forward.

## **Costs for Stage 2**

The costs for carrying out Stage 2 will largely be officer time required to progress the key tasks above. This may involve up to three meetings with Parish Council, depending on the needs identified and the response to them. If the Parish Council decided additional surveys were required this would need to be costed separately and the Parish Council would be responsible for meeting those costs.

### **7.3 Stage 3 – engagement with the village to take priorities forward**

This is the crucial stage of the pilot and is about working with the local community to take ownership of the work and to actually deliver solutions to meet identified needs. In terms of parameters for the pilot it is suggested that this stage would include identifying priorities and proposals for meeting them. Work to support the village take the proposals forward would be outside the scope of the pilot and could take several years to complete. During this time work may require the input of officer time in terms of the enabling role etc.

It is important that at this stage the local community take responsibility for driving forward potential solutions, the role of the Council would be to support them in this work.

The key tasks during this stage are likely to be around taking the initial work of the Parish Council to the local community to test out and take forward ideas generated. This could be achieved by facilitating a workshop for the community. An important element of this work is assisting the community to see what is possible in terms of meeting those needs, rather than to be constrained by what they know. Traditional methods of meeting need for example working with housing associations to meet the affordable housing need may be part of the answer, but there may be other options available such as self-build or co-housing depending on the local communities appetite to take the lead. To bring this work to a conclusion in terms of identifying options may take more than one meeting to achieve or involve other approaches such as focus groups.

The outcome of this stage will be to hand responsibility for taking any proposals identified forward to the local community.

### **Cost for Stage 3**

This stage of the pilot may involve bringing in an external facilitator with the appropriate skills for any meetings, this is such a crucial stage of the pilot and it is vital to get this right. Initial estimates for the cost of a workshop and preparation time would be in the region of £1,500 if external facilitators were used, plus officer time.

### **7.4 Beyond Stage 3 – web-based ‘guide’**

If the pilot proves successful it will provide key information on local needs, stimulate a positive response in finding solutions to the identified needs and empower the local community to take ownership for moving forward to finding solutions.

If the pilot is to have a lasting legacy in addition to delivering solutions in the villages taking part in the pilot, an option would be to develop a web-based 'guide'. This guide would be available to other communities to use in the future and would involve information on the information available as well as case studies of successful community led solutions, for example Community Land Trusts, co-housing and self-build.

Costs for creating a web based 'guide' would need to be investigated further.

**8. Community impact** *(including Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and diversity issues)*

8.1 General

This pilot will allow the Council to identify local housing need and work with the local communities to respond to that need and identify a range of potential solutions.

8.2 Diversity

It is intended that the pilot will extend the range of possible affordable housing solutions, which will potentially be more inclusive to all members of the community.

8.3 Sustainability

This would need to be a consideration for any housing solutions identified and would need to be looked at that stage as part of any planning application.

**9. Consultation**

9.1 The Working Party has been consulted regarding the pilot. Parish Councils agreeing to take part in the pilot would be fully consulted as would be the communities they represent.

**10. Resource implications** *(including asset management implications)*

10.1 The pilot will require a substantial amount of office time at all the stages. It may be necessary to bring in additional resources to ensure that this does not detrimentally impact on other priorities and commitments, this could be funded from the £10,000 already approved.

10.2 The cost of developing a web based 'guide' would need further investigation and it should be possible to contribute to the costs from the funding already allocated, it may also be possible to look for contributions from other partner organisations.

**11. Risk Assessment** (potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)

11.1

Risk area	Inherent level of Risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual Risk (after controls)
Funding for future affordable housing in rural locations will continue to be limited, significantly reducing ability to provide new affordable homes, to meet demand.	High	Continue to develop affordable housing, including in partnership with Registered Providers  Work with the community to identify alternative solutions to meeting housing need.	Medium  Medium

**12. Legal or policy implications**

12.1 The Borough Council has, as part of its strategic housing function, to ensure there is sufficient affordable housing in the Borough to meet the needs of its residents.

<b>Wards affected</b>	Rural
<b>Background Papers</b>	None