



## Rural Area Working Party 26 March 2014

### Rural Profiling Pilot Project Progress Report

#### 1. Summary and reasons for recommendations

- 1.1 The Rural Profiling Pilot is being carried out by the Housing Team in partnership with nine villages and aims to provide parish councils with data to allow them to make informed decisions primarily about housing need and how they address it.
- 1.2 The pilot is about empowering parish councils to make informed decisions by providing quality data and assistance.
- 1.3 This report follows E67 which was presented to the Working Party in July 2013 and provides an update on progress since that date and the outcomes.

#### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Working Party is asked to:
  - (1) note the progress with the profiling data and to provide comment on the draft interactive maps, as detailed in Section 4.1 of Report E333; and
  - (2) approve that West Suffolk (St Edmundsbury Borough Council and Forest Heath District Council) use this data to work proactively with villages where there is evidence of significant housing need by approaching parish councils with the evidence, as detailed in Section 4.5 of Report E333.

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### **3. Strategic priorities**

3.1 The recommendation meets the following, as contained within the West Suffolk Strategic Plan:

Priority 3: *'Homes for our communities'*

### **4. Key issues**

#### **4.1 Profiling data**

4.1.1 Working with Cambridge Housing Sub Region, profiling data has been produced for the nine parishes participating in the pilot. We now have the data for all parishes across West Suffolk, this information is up to date (January 2014) and will be updated at agreed intervals still to be determined with Cambridge Housing Sub Region.

4.1.2 The data covered the age profile, household composition, tenure and size of properties, affordability of housing and demand for social housing. This broad range of indicators gives us a holistic profile of need and allows need to be assessed across all tenures.

4.1.3 Parish councils accessed this information via SharePoint. Some parishes experienced difficulty accessing the data via this route and were sent an excel file to overcome the problem.

4.1.4 Parish councils have found the data informative in terms of understanding local needs. The main request for further information has been housing register applications with a local connection to their particular villages. This information has been sourced and is covered in detail in the next section of this report.

4.1.5 A feedback exercise has been carried out and to date we have had three responses, all have confirmed the usefulness of the data and that they understand the purpose of the rural profiling pilot project. Two of the responses have expressed a desire to deliver more housing in their village but have reservations due to lack of availability of land. This has given us a steer as to how we can assist these villages and the next steps.

4.1.6 As requested by the Working Party, the data is now available on an interactive map for West Suffolk. This has not yet been shared with parishes but will be provided to them once Members have commented following this meeting. One of the main advantages of presenting the information in this way is to easily see areas of high demand. The interactive maps will be presented in more detail at the meeting.

4.1.7 The data can be viewed by [clicking here](#) or by typing in the following website address: <http://atlas.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/Housing/WestSuffolk/atlas.html>

#### **4.2 Local connection**

4.2.1 Parish Councils in the pilot have all requested information on local connection for housing register applicants. This information was not available at the time of putting the profile data together and required an additional piece of work.

4.2.2 It is not possible to make local connection criteria a mandatory question as part of the housing application process, in order to do this we would be asking

applicants to complete over a hundred additional questions on the application form and this is not realistic. An online survey has been carried out of all applicants on the housing register requesting to live in a village, to identify their local connection. This data can provide the evidence of local connection required to support an exception scheme, should the parish wish to proceed down this route, and has now been reported back to parish councils. This data presently is only available for St Edmundsbury, although this information will be sourced for Forest Heath in order to have a complete overview for West Suffolk. This gives us a good indication of numbers and in our experience, once a parish starts to discuss a local housing scheme more people with a local connection who are not currently registered with West Suffolk come forward in housing need.

4.2.3 Listed below are housing applicants with a local connection to villages within the pilot:

Villages	No with local connection
Ixworth	27
Wickhambrook	6
Great and Little Thurlow	4
Chevington	0
Coney Weston	0
Hawstead	4
Risby	4
Stansfield	5
Lidgate	1

4.2.4 In addition, we have identified applicants on the register who have requested specific parishes as their preferred location to live and those who have ticked multiple parishes as their preference, this will also assist in forming a picture of local need.

4.3 This was the first stage of the pilot and is now complete. The profiling data has been gathered and set up on a comprehensive database and will continue to be developed and updated. This information will provide parishes with a profile of their village and allow them to make informed decisions regarding need.

4.4 The profiling data is now in regular use by strategic housing officers to inform discussions on housing need across West Suffolk with planners, developers as well as parish councils. It has, for example, been used to update information from earlier housing needs surveys for rural exception schemes at Clare and Great Barton.

#### 4.4 **Stage two of the pilot - Working with Parishes to understand need**

We have now met with all parish councils involved in the pilot and had discussions regarding the data and the purpose of the pilot. We have also provided additional information on local connection as requested to assist in evidencing local housing need. Parish Councils are now having discussions regarding the next steps they would like to take.

#### 4.5 **Outcomes of the Pilot Project**

4.5.1 The pilot project has provided:

- (a) Comprehensive profiling data that will provide a picture of local needs and evidence to support local housing schemes.
- (b) It has been well received by the Parishes and they have found it informative.
- (c) Provided data in one place that the housing team can utilise to inform future developments across West Suffolk.
- (d) The innovative approach has been recognised beyond West Suffolk, for example the housing team presented the Project at the regional Chartered Institute of Housing conference and received excellent feedback.
- (e) West Suffolk in partnership with the Cambridge Housing Sub Region have begun discussions about rolling the Rural Profiling data out to all Parishes across the sub region.
- (f) Interest in accessing the data has been expressed by parish councils outside of the pilot following the Parish Conference last November.

4.5.2 There are a range of parishes in the pilot in terms of size and status in planning terms. The Working Party is asked to approve that the housing team use this data in future to be proactive with villages where there is evidence of significant housing need by approaching parish councils with the evidence.

## **5. Community impact**

### **5.1 Diversity and equality impact** *(including the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment)*

#### **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.

#### **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.

#### **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.

## **6. Consultation** *(what consultation has been undertaken, and what were the outcomes?)*

- 6.1 The Working Party has been consulted regarding the pilot; Parish Councils agreeing to take part in the pilot have been consulted, communities would be consulted if Parishes decide to progress matters further.
- 6.2 Parishes councillors at Hawstead have uploaded the parish profile data onto the village website, to stimulate some local discussion. This will be followed up at a series of local consultation events through the 2014. This will be monitored and if successful would be replicated in other Parishes.

## 7. Financial and resource implications *(including asset management implications)*

7.1 The pilot requires officer resource. If additional resource is necessary, it will be funded from the £10,000 already approved.

7.2 Expenditure to date is £4,000, leaving £6,000 uncommitted.

## 8. Risk/opportunity assessment *(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)*

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

## 9. Legal and policy implications

9.1 The 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.

## 10. Wards affected

10.1 Rural Wards:

Bardwell  
Barningham  
Barrow  
Cavendish  
Chedburgh  
Clare  
Fornham  
Great Barton  
Horringer & Whelnetham  
Hundon  
Ixworth  
Kedington  
Pakenham  
Risby  
Rougham  
Stanton  
Wickhambrook  
Withersfield

## 11. Background papers

11.1 The background to the pilot is detailed in previous reports, D257 January 2013 and D324 March 2013.

## **12. Documents attached**

12.1 None

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