

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee **Date:** Tuesday, 16 March 2021

Place: Virtual Meeting on Zoom **Time:** 7.00 - 7.40 pm

Members Present: H Whitbread (Chairman), N Avey, N Bedford, A Patel and J Philip

Other Councillors: S Heap, S Murray and D Wixley

Officers Present: D Fenton (Service Director (Housing Revenue Account)), R Hoyte (Service Manager - Development) and J Leither (Democratic Services Officer)

29. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman made a short address to remind everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the internet, and would be capable of repeated viewing, which could infringe their human and data protection rights.

30. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Cabinet Committee noted that there were no substitute members.

31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct.

32. MINUTES

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee meeting held on 08 December 2020 be taken as read and would be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

33. COUNCIL HOUSEBUILDING PROGRESS REPORT - PHASES 3-5

The Chairman, Councillor H Whitbread introduced Rochelle Hoyte to the Cabinet Committee and advised that Rochelle was the new Service Manager for Housing Development.

R Hoyte presented the Council Housebuilding Progress Report – Phases 3-5 and recommended that they be noted by the Cabinet Committee.

She advised that the report set out the progress that had been made across phases 3 to 5 of the Housebuilding programme that were either completed, on-site or were currently being procured.

Phase 4

Phase 4.1 consisted of 16 units which had been contracted and the start on site was all underway. Millfield, Ongar started on 30 November 2020 and Pickhill, Waltham Abbey had been added to Phase 4.1, the start on site was due in March 2021;

Phase 4.2 consisted of 22 units which had been contracted, the start on site was achieved in January 2021.

Phase 4.3 consisted of 15 units. The consent approval was received for Woollard Street, Waltham Abbey in February 2021, contract signing and possession was still to be achieved in March 2021, with start on site anticipated July/August 2021.

Phase 4.4 consisted of 28 units (an additional 12 units) were awaiting consent. Ladyfields, Loughton and Chequers Road (B), Loughton were still within planning and work was being undertaken to discuss how these can be progressed as quickly as possible. Since the approval of the APMS, it was anticipated that any schemes within the planning system would have reached a determination by May 2021 as planners had requested an extension of time until this period. The tender process will follow and a consideration may be needed for an interim committee approval as it was likely that the previous forecast of June 2021 would be missed, the tender process would follow in August/September 2021 with contracts and possession achieved in October 2021, with the contractor being able to carry out their Design and Build due diligence and discharge their pre-commencement conditions by December 2021 to continue with the plan to start on site in January 2022.

Councillor H Whitbread was pleased to report that Cyril Hawkins Close in North Weald had now been completed. She advised that she had visited the site and the new family homes looked really smart, residents had started to move in and there was plenty of parking.

D Fenton, Director of HRA Functions advised the Cabinet Committee that a planned street party to celebrate the opening of the road would be organised for July 2020.

Councillor J Philip asked if the Council had ever had a Council Housebuilding project that had come in under budget.

R Hoyte stated that she was not aware of the details of the previous phases 1-3, but advised that Cyril Hawkins Close came in over budget due to contamination and Covid-19 restrictions. She also advised that the Council had a new programme called ProVal, this was a financial viability tool which allowed you to appraise developments. The Council will be using ProVal on all schemes to see if the scheme was viable and therefore whether to take the scheme forward as a development project or not. This programme would give the Council better control over the finances of the scheme.

Councillor J Philip asked if the officers could prepare a report of all the Council Housebuilding schemes that had been done, the costs predicted for each scheme and how much the schemes actually cost. He recalled that almost every scheme that had been done come out over budget and this would mean that the budget was not being set properly.

Councillor Whitbread stated that some of the historic garage sites did lead to some issues with delays for contamination reasons and hopefully as we move into the later phases we will be looking at sites, other than garage sites and with the use of ProVal the predicted cost would be more accurate.

Councillor A Patel stated that the Council have started work on discharging the planning conditions on the garage sites in Buckhurst Hill and across the district and in terms of the displacement of the residents renting the garages, in the earlier stages of the House Building programme it was agreed that the garage residents would be offered other garages as close to those sites as possible, he asked what was next for the Council, although more garage and brownfield sites had been identified how long could the Council sustain the Council House Building Programme.

R Hoyte advised that in Phase 5 officers were looking at 14 sites in total with various development opportunities and each site would be looked at with a feasibility study for which we will use ProVal, our consultants will give us scope on what was possible to build. Regarding garage sites and displacement, Officers would identify if there were other parking facilities nearby and could anything be done about offering parking to these residents before we would continue with a garage site scheme.

D Fenton advised that there was a number of commercial assets that officers were looking at which belonged to the general fund and Rochelle and her team were working on those including a number of pubs which adds to the list. There were also a number of other larger scale opportunities that officers would be looking at but were not yet in a position to disclose those sites.

Councillor H Whitbread stated that she was pleased to see that other options were being considered as the Council House Building Programme was a great success and the Council want to see this programme continue to deliver affordable housing for the people of the district.

Councillor N Bedford referred to Phase 4.1 Queensway, Ongar (page 54 of the agenda) and expressed concerns under the heading 'Reports and Investigations' there was nothing flagged up for contamination of the ground, yet when you go to the next page under the heading 'Forthcoming Actions' in red it reads 'potential asbestos under slab'. If we compare this site to a North Weald site that ran approximately £400,000 over budget because of asbestos contamination. Taking this into account why does the Queensway site only have contingency budget set of £28,000.

R Hoyte advised that she had looked at sites that had already been started and stated that the contingency budgets should have been set much higher. Surveys were done ahead of the builder going onto site and things like contamination were not picked up as this was not found until the start on site digging had taken place and contamination was then uncovered. The contingency should cover these problems but unfortunately they were not set correctly, now the Council has ProVal this would enable a more cost effective plan with the correct contingency set. Going forward this was one of the top priorities to get the costings correct and therefore staying within budget for each site.

Councillor N Bedford stated that Officers should use North Weald as a benchmark of what the contingency should be for each site. The Queensway, Ongar site was about a quarter of the size of the North Weald site therefore a contingency around the sum of £100,000 should be set for Queensway and not the £28,000 that it was currently.

Councillor J Philip stated that he understood where Councillor Bedford was coming from but that he was not sure that it was applicable to all sites and that we should use the new ProVal system going forward and keep a track of how that system would work.

R Hoyte advised that not only new schemes were being run through ProVal but schemes that had already been completed were being put in to see what the difference was and help to influence decisions going forward.

Councillor S Murray asked if there were any plans for the official opening of the Joan Davis House, he realised this scheme was a while ago but due to Covid it had been cancelled.

He also stated that Ward Members should be consulted on sites in their wards before they were put into practice as they know the local areas and could advise on historical and local information on potential sites that may not be known to Officers.

Councillor H Whitbread agreed that an official opening of the Joan Davis House in Burton Road, The Broadway, Loughton should be marked as it was a good development and asked officers to look into arranging that post purdah.

R Hoyte advised that she was in discussions around having webinars with Ward Members so that schemes and sites could be discussed before that got to a planning status.

Councillor D Wixley advised that part of Burney Drive was in his Ward and he would like to know where the site was as he could not envisage a scheme going ahead in that area.

He stated that although the Kirby Close development was not in his Ward as a District Councillor it was as a Town Councillor. He had noticed that work was ongoing on that site and referred to a service road which run behind the site and informed the Cabinet Committee that the grass verges were being ruined by people parking on them or driving over them and asked officers if this was anything to do with the contractors.

R Hoyte advised that a number of the grass verges around Kirby Close have been covered up and the contractors were only using them for access and turning points and any damaged verges will be restored once the site was finished. She advised that she would visit the site and speak to the contractors and would get back to Councillor Wixley.

Councillor S Heap referred to the garage site in Hornbeam Close and advised that the area around that garage site was heavily populated and to remove these garages would have an enormous impact as at least 11 of the garages have cars parked in them and it would be an enormous detrimental impact to the area. He further advised that there was also an ongoing drainage issue in that area.

He further asked about the development in Pick Hill and added that there had been a huge amount of destruction of the trees being taken down and was that a part of the Councils development or was it a private developer.

R Hoyte advised that they were at the very early stages of looking at Hornbeam Close, to see what would work there, if anything at all was possible and that she would discuss any findings with the Ward Members.

D Fenton stated that Phase 5 of the Council House Building Programme was not just about building it was about creating great places where people wanted to live. The House Building programme were partnering with the Asset team, the Land team, Safer Communities and Communities and Wellbeing to create a place approach. For example Hornbeam Close, the aim was not just to build but to alleviate the parking

stress by creating more parking spaces and improving the area in terms of the environment and climate.

R Hoyte added that as well as a higher level of due diligence that her team would also be looking at landscaping and any play areas that could be built into the scheme. Near the site in Hornbeam Close there was an empty play area and that she was currently looking into who owned that site and if the Council could improve the play area. It was not only about new builds it was having regard for the residents that were already currently living there so they were as much a part of the community as any new residents that move to the area.

Councillor S Murray advised that play areas in the district were the responsibility of Town and Parish Councils and therefore if the Council were to get involved in some areas and not others this could have a detrimental effect on the Town and Parish Councils.

Councillor S Heap asked if Town and Parish Councils could be involved in the discussions as well as the Ward Councillors as they could bring far more knowledge about the local area sites that the Council propose to bring forward.

R Hoyte advised that they were looking at options regarding the play areas so as part of the development we could work with the Town and Parish Councils to maybe make a contribution towards such play areas.

She stated that she could see no reason why Town and Parish Councils could not be invited to the meetings of new schemes along with the Ward Councillors.

Decision:

- (1) That the contents of the Progress Report on Phases 3 to 5 of the Council House Building Programme be noted and presented to the Cabinet in line with the Terms of Reference of the Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee.

Reason for Decision:

Set out in its Terms of Reference, the Council House Building Cabinet Committee was to monitor and report to the Council, on an annual basis, progress and expenditure concerning the Council House Building Programme. The report set out the progress made since reported at the last meeting on the 08 December 2020.

Other Options Considered and Rejected:

This report was on the progress made over the last 12 months and was for noting purposes only. There were no other options for action.

34. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Cabinet Committee noted that there were no other matters of urgent business for consideration.

35. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Cabinet Committee noted that there was no business for consideration which necessitated the exclusion of the public and press from the virtual meeting.

CHAIRMAN