

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C/085/2007-08.

Date of meeting: 17 December 2007.



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Housing.

Subject: Rural Housing Scheme – Horsecroft, Abbess Roding.

Officer contact for further information: Alan Hall (01992-564004).

Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992-564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1) That, subject to the receipt of planning permission and funding from the Housing Corporation, the freehold of up to 0.31 Ha of Council-owned land to the rear of 1-6 Horsecroft, Abbess Roding be sold to Hastoe Housing Association, at a price equivalent to £17,000 per plot, for the development of a rural housing scheme of up to 11 properties, comprising a tenure mix of social rented and shared ownership; and

(2) That any capital receipt from the land sale be used to part-fund the proposed Open Market Shared Ownership Scheme referred to elsewhere on the Cabinet agenda.

Report:

1. The District Council has been working with its Preferred Rural RSL Partner, Hastoe Housing Association, and the two parish councils of Willingale and Abbess, Beauchamp and Berners Roding for a number of years, to develop a rural housing scheme within the parishes to provide affordable housing for people with a local connection with the parishes (and neighbouring villages).

2. The Council has facilitated 3 rural housing schemes to date, the last two of which have been in partnership with Hastoe Housing Association; these have been at Willingale, Fyfield and Matching Tye.

3. Rural housing schemes are developed with the benefit of planning permission granted on sites that would not normally receive planning permission for residential accommodation, on the basis that the occupancy is strictly controlled through planning policies to ensure that the properties are only occupied by people with a local connection. The Local Plan states that prospective occupiers for such schemes should be one or more of the following:

(a) Long-established local residents (i.e. those who have lived in the village for at least five of the preceding ten years) requiring separate accommodation;

(b) Immediate family dependents of long-established local residents;

(c) Former long-established local residents; and/or

(d) Households living elsewhere, where the main earner cannot otherwise take up an offer of a permanent, full-time job in a local service, or continue in such an existing job.

4. Furthermore, the Council must be satisfied that secure arrangements are made to ensure that the properties remain available to local households in need in perpetuity. This would be done through the Section 106 (Planning) Agreement. In order to confirm that there is a local need for affordable housing, the Council would expect a village housing needs survey to be undertaken and that the parish council(s) support the proposal and need.

5. Since sites for rural housing schemes are ones that would not normally receive planning permission, the land values are far lower than for land allocated for residential purposes within the Local Plan. Although the land values are usually more than, say, agricultural use value, they are at a level sufficiently low to attract social housing grant from the Housing Corporation and for rents or - in the case of shared ownership properties – purchase prices to be affordable.

6. Hastoe Housing Association has been seeking to identify a suitable site in the parishes of Willingale and Abbess, Beauchamp and Berners Roding for some time, since although the site must not be allocated for residential housing in the Local Plan, it must still be suitable for residential development, which has been difficult to source. However, Hastoe has now identified a site that appears suitable, which is in the District Council's ownership and held within the Housing Revenue Account, to the rear of 1-6 Horsecroft, Abbess Roding.

7. Hastoe originally carried out a Village Housing Needs Survey in May 2004, which it has recently updated. This has established an immediate housing need of 23 households with the required local connection. As a result, Hastoe and the Parish Council are proposing the development of 11 properties, with the following mix and tenure:

Size/Type	Rented	Shared Ownership
1 Bed Flats	2	0
1 Bed Houses	0	1
2 Bed Houses	4	2
3 Bed Houses	1	1
Total	7	4
	11	

8. The Director of Planning and Economic Development has considered this site and feels that subject to careful design and layout, enhanced landscaping, safe and appropriate access arrangements and catering for the current recreational use of the site, and subject to the views of the Area Plans Sub-Committee, the site could well be suitable for an exception to normal planning policies to enable a rural housing scheme to proceed. However, there has been some reservation expressed to Hastoe regarding the extent of the development specific to a sketch layout that has recently been prepared, but it is envisaged that a revised layout could overcome any concerns.

9. Hastoe has produced an indicative layout for the development and calculated the associated development costs. As part of this process, Hastoe has discussed with the Director of Housing the maximum amount it could pay the Council to purchase the site, assuming an appropriate level of social housing grant from the Housing Corporation. This has established that Hastoe could pay the Council £17,000 per plot, which for 11 properties would amount to £187,000. The actual total price will be dependent on the outcome of the planning process. Since some of the properties would be sold as shared ownership, it would be necessary for the land to be sold freehold.

10. It is suggested that, should the scheme receive planning permission and the development goes ahead, any capital receipt from the land sale be used to part-fund the proposed Open Market Shared Ownership Scheme referred to elsewhere on the Cabinet agenda.

Statement in Support of Recommended Action:

11. The sale of the land will enable a rural housing scheme to be developed to cover the two parishes of Willingale and Abbess, Beauchamp and Berners Roding, for which there is an identifiable need. The capital receipt from the sale will help fund another affordable housing scheme within the District.

Other Options for Action:

12. The other options for action are:

- (i) do not sell the land;
- (ii) sell a smaller area of land, for a lower price, with less properties provided;
- (iii) accept a lower amount for the land sale;
- (iv) seek a higher land value and increase the risk of the development not receiving funding from the Housing Corporation;
- (v) seek a different mix of property tenures and/or property types; or
- (vi) do not utilise all or some of the resultant capital receipt to help fund additional affordable housing schemes.

Consultation Undertaken:

13. Hastoe has consulted the parish councils, which are supportive of the proposal. The local ward member, Councillor Mrs. McEwen, has been consulted on the contents of this report and recommendation.

14. Councillor Mrs McEwen has commented that she has followed the progress of this scheme to accommodate local people and the discussions with the two parish councils involved, and that she supports the scheme. She initially commented that paragraph (3d) of the report, relating to prospective occupiers with an employment connection, did not appear to require a local connection. However, following discussions with the Director of Housing, she appreciated that this would only apply to applicants who either work or have prospective employment within the villages and would not be extended to employees in surrounding towns. She is therefore happy to support the proposal.

Resource Implications:

Budget Provision: Nil.

Personnel: Nil.

Land: Sale of 0.31 Hectares of Council-owned land.

Council Plan 2006-10/BVPP Reference: Meeting Housing Need.

Relevant Statutory Powers: Housing Act 1985.

Background Papers: Housing Policy File "Development – Rural Housing Scheme - Abbess, Beauchamp and Berners Roding.

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: N/A.

Key Decision Reference (if required): Not a key decision.