

**BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**FROM: Head of Legal & Administrative Services**

**REPORT NUMBER    **E69****

**TO: COUNCIL**

**DATE OF MEETING    26 July 2005**

**QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS**

1. (a) QUESTION FROM MR R E KEMP TO THE CHAIRMAN OF STRATEGY COMMITTEE

1.1 This Council in about 1998 set up a working party to examine “underused land” and under-utilised assets belonging to this Authority. I believe the working party met twice and then nothing further as far as I am aware has happened.

Other nearby Authorities have been successful in utilising underused land for Housing use.

Would the Chairman of Strategy please advise me what the latest position of this Authority is in relation to identifying any such hidden assets.

1.2 Response from Mr Ridley:-

Affordable housing is one of the Council’s Corporate priorities and is also a priority within the 2004 to 2009 Housing Strategy approved by Council in Paper C179 in November 2003. This requires that the Housing Strategy action plan should continue to identify any small plots of land owned by the Council for the delivery of new affordable housing. In response to this the Housing Service has instigated a range of initiatives. These include:

- Establishing a new Housing Enabling Team, whose target is to deliver 700 affordable homes over the next 5 years.
- Reviewing the Council’s housing stock to identify where dwellings can be converted or re-designated in order to meet the needs of those most suited to the accommodation on offer, and who most need housing. For example, the conversion and modernisation of Sandringham Court, Sudbury.
- The identification of Council stock that is in low demand, in poor condition, or on an underused site, which can then be converted or redeveloped for new affordable housing designed to meet current housing need. For example, the bungalow site at Uplands Road, Sudbury.
- Reviewing the Council’s land holdings in order to identify sites suitable for the delivery of new affordable housing. For example the sites already developed at Rotheram Road Bildeston and Mill Lane Layham, producing 16 dwellings.

- Encouraging closer working with Planning and Environmental Health colleagues in order to facilitate the more efficient delivery of affordable housing and create a seamless service for the Council's partners.

Members have already agreed the progression of new affordable housing on a number of Council owned sites throughout the district. Council policy allows these to be sold at up to 100% discount in order to ensure the financial viability of the schemes.

Officers of the Housing, Planning, Environmental Health and Technical Services Divisions have been asked to report any potential sites that they know of or identify, to the Housing Enabling Team in order to continue the process of identifying Council owned land with development potential. The Housing Enabling Team will then work with the Council's Architectural and Planning Teams to progress their potential.

To date 35 Council owned sites have been identified across the district. Each site is assessed for its development potential in liaison with the Council's Estates, Architectural and Planning Teams. To date schemes are being progressed that may deliver up to 131 dwellings:

- 2 sites have been developed at Ansell Close, Hadleigh and Rotheram Road, Bildeston producing 12 dwellings.
- 5 sites are under development at Uplands Road, Sudbury, Mill Lane, Layham, Rockalls Road, Polstead, Stratford St Mary & Gravel Pit Lane, Brantham producing 28 dwellings.
- The Poplar Road Great Cornard site has planning permission for 41 dwellings and development of the site is due to commence in summer 2005.
- Plans are being drawn-up by our Architectural Team for 6 sites at Green Lane, Cockfield, Tawneys Ride, Bures, Homefield, Boxford, Rotheram Road, Bildeston, Lawshall and Woollards Gardens, Long Melford, with the potential of producing about 50 dwellings.
- Nine sites have proven to be unsuitable for development due to access and other planning considerations.
- The remainder are currently being assessed.

(b) QUESTION FROM MR D C ROSE TO THE CHAIRMAN OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

- 2.1 In light of the articles written by our Chairman and Chief Executive in the latest edition of Babergh Matters, praising the Council and Members for listening to residents, I would like the Chairman of the Development Committee to explain the reasons why the Committee approved the proposals for the development of H M S Ganges contrary to the advice of the Head of Planning (Control), against the recommendations of Suffolk County Council, against the views of nine Parish Councils on the peninsula and against the wishes of the majority of residents on the peninsula.

## 2.2 Response from Mr. Thake –

There was a very great deal of listening done about this application. Officers attended numerous meetings with parish councils and others on the peninsula over the time the application was under consideration; we gave it the widest degree of publicity we could, including, for the first time, posting details on our web site, we took the Committee to Shotley, rather than meeting in this chamber and we extended the amount of public speaking that was permitted at the meeting.

Whilst the views of the public are taken into consideration when related to planning considerations, we additionally have to look at policy, government guidance and a whole host of other issues, which the planners refer to as "material considerations". Moreover, we have to take our decisions in the interests of the whole district and not just one area.

I believe Development Committee felt that they should grant permission in this case (despite the recommendation of the Head of Planning (Control), despite public opinion and despite the objection from Suffolk County Council) because:-

- They considered that the weight to be attached to the traffic argument was not sufficient to justify refusal of the application.
- They did not believe the development would be unsustainable and the benefits to Shotley and the district as a whole of developing this large brown field site at risk of increased dereliction outweighed any decrease in sustainability.
- They felt that measures could be taken to address concerns about impact on wildlife.
- Other comparable large developments elsewhere had attracted similar objections and these were not sustained, and
- Conditions could be applied and mitigation achieved through a Section 106 Agreement to ensure that the development proceeded in an orderly manner and would take an acceptable form.

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