

**Neighbourhood Plan**  
**Notes of Seventh Housing Topic Group**  
**Morpeth Town Hall, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2013**

**1. Present:**

Cllr. David Parker (MTC and Chair), Ian Campbell (Consultant to MTC), Simon Cox. Hugh Edmundson, Alan Jones, Anna Jones, Martin Laidler, Tim Nichol, Cllr. Alan Sambrook (Pegswood Parish Council), Peter Scott, Leslie Starkie, Joan Tebbutt, Henry Warne (GMDT). Also in attendance were Alan Sears of the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and Lewis Rimington of ISOS.

**2. Apologies for Absence**

Ed Campbell and David Holden.

**3. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2013**

Unfortunately Charles Robinson had only e-mailed some proposed changes to the notes after 5pm tonight. It was agreed to postpone approval until the next meeting. JT will incorporate any changes required and send to DP.

**4. Matters arising**

- Re item 4. Re Housing Objectives and Development Principles, SC indicated that the amendments had been incorporated and circulated to the working group. They will be included in the document to be produced and circulated again to the whole group.
- Re item 8. SC asked for an update on how the documents would come together. DP indicated that we are nowhere near that point yet. Each Topic Group is to produce its own paper and there are a few more weeks to go yet. Then the Steering Group has to work out how to bring the various Topics, Cross Cutting themes, 3 workshops and the Planning Aid work with hard to reach groups e.g. young people, into an Issues and Options paper in the summer. Yesterday (18<sup>th</sup> March), the Steering Group discussed Cross Cutting themes. IC will convene a meeting to which representatives of all groups will be invited. IC said that he had invited a representative of Northumbria Water to talk about the existing sewerage network and their plans.

**5. Question and Answer Session with Alan Sears of the HCA**

AS is based in Gateshead and deals with the future of the St George's Hospital site. He made the following points:-

- The HCA went through an external procurement process and Galliford Try were selected as the preferred development partner. This is for Phase 1, the older Victorian complex. The development capacity is possibly for 300+ properties served by the existing infrastructure. Beyond that is linked to delivery of the MNB.

- A contract is given to the preferred partner as a lease to agree a masterplan before the HCA release the site. Design and quality have been left open and it is up to Galliford Try to bring forward a quality scheme. An engagement strategy will be looked at when work on design has been done. The HCA are working with the design team and the earliest time for an application to be placed is the back end of the summer.
- The HCA is a government agency. It is in the national interest to bring public sector unused land to delivery. The right product is needed for the site.
- AS does not anticipate a start on site until spring 2014 and there will be a 6 year development period with 35 to 40 homes delivered per year. HCA are looking at 30% to 40% affordable homes, which compares well to the NCC proposed average of 30%.
- There is a previous Planning permission and there has been a lot of debate between the HCA and NCC re demolition or new build. They are looking with Galliford Try to retain some of the buildings. They are not listed so financial viability of using the exterior structure to provide town houses is being looked at. It was the Place Maker aspects of Galliford Try's approach that appealed.
- Asbestos clearance is required and relates to whether conversion is possible.
- The HCA does not want to see Phase 1 isolated from the rest of the site, so they are looking to incorporate Phase 2 (where the wartime buildings are) and come up with a masterplan, but this will need access from the MNB. It is unclear where the Core Strategy is re numbers of homes required and also how the development process for the MNB is going. The HCA may put in an outline application for Phase 2 or just use it as scene setting.
- Galliford Try do not have an option on Phase 2 and the HCA would have to go to external procurement process again.
- The MNB is to have a roundabout and a spur road to Phase 2 and there is also a 3<sup>rd</sup> party land owner issue. This has to be considered along with highway constraints before a decision is taken about how to proceed.
- The HCA has land beyond the built footprint of the hospital and outside the town settlement boundary. Subject to the Core Strategy numbers and the Neighbourhood Plan process the HCA could make it available for development as Phase 3, which would again be dependent on the MNB. It would however mean shared infrastructure costs and the income from earlier phases providing income.
- Dungait own land and have responded to the Core Strategy consultation. There is a need to work together in order to gain access for Phase 3.
- So, there are a number of deliverability issues but a potential for 1000+ homes and more if Dungait release the land.
- The HCA worked with NCC as part of the bid for funding for the MNB. Based on the housing numbers used in the Lock report the site would offer a sustainable

neighbourhood in that part of the town and could deliver community facilities e.g. a primary school, shops, community centre etc. Phase 1 & 2 may not have the capacity to deliver that so it is of benefit to look at the wider neighbourhood extension with a view to making that a spatial strategy and a key location.

- The MNB could provide the inner boundary of the green belt extension.
- The HCA will seek to make the land available and work with the landowner to bring forward the development.
- A key driver of the HCA is to bring forward surplus land for housing and to bring forward affordable housing by providing grants. There are also market interventions such as addressing financial matters with developers where there are stalled sites and shared equity finance to get things moving. For St George's site however there is no financial help so the land value is the subsidy. There will be Section 106 agreements and the CIL, so viability issues arise. There is a significant infrastructure requirement and Galliford Try will engage with NW re sewerage issues so there may be other off site obligations.
- The HCA is commercially minded but not in terms of money for shareholders, just a duty to provide public best value. There is a separate contractual agreement with the Department of Health to whom a deposit was paid, so the HCA must maximise receipts but want best quality design.
- JT referred to the mention of a new First School. AS responded that, for a new neighbourhood a school would be useful and it is recognised that this should be near to the rest of the town, however delivery would only be possible if Phase 3 were also to be delivered.
- AJ asked about ensuring that development blended with the landscape in relation to the main accesses into Morpeth. AS said that it was use of the right design principles regarding using place and landscape that had attracted the HCA to Galliford Try. They have no set house types but relate aesthetics to the site. As a landowner the HCA is conscious that the right development will complement the town.
- Re screening, investment in woodland, existing tree belts, openness and use of the natural environment, the design process will test this out. The HCA owns parts of Bluebell Woods and Howburn Woods and can look at how these assets can be used.
- DP pointed out that the HCA does not own all the land available for development and are proposing a significant extension to the town, so they must work with other owners to avoid piecemeal development. There is a need for sympathetic integration at the edges of Morpeth. He pointed out that the NCC responsibility is to provide housing numbers but it is up to the Neighbourhood Plan process to decide future location. The HCA masterplan needs to look at internal arrangements of the site and relate it to the rest of the town. AS said the HCA believe this is a more suitable and

sustainable option than looking at fragmented development as it can deliver a neighbourhood.

- AS confirmed the HCA have a map showing land ownership.
- ML asked about affordable housing and the property type/tenure mix. No decisions have been made yet and so it is still open to meet the needs as per the housing needs survey. A range of housing would include single bedded homes because of the welfare benefits issue. Shared equity will be looked at. The HCA did not want the developer to bring a social housing provider with them as this will be brought into the equation at a later date.
- Re time scale, AS thought about 20 years but much depends on sales rates. They do not want to flood the market but have steady delivery. They may look for a consortium of development partners if the larger site is used to offer greater variety.
- Re public transport, the site will have to be served if there are over 300 properties. This is dependent on service viability and a roadway through the different phases.
- The main road in is the existing road and part of the design process is to look at the road and the junction together with NCC. The proposal of 300 units is based upon highway and junction capacity rather than density of development. A technical solution is required because of the new supermarket and the Health Centre and this may be a mini roundabout.
- HE suggested that 300 homes may support a small shop and that small commercial usage could be on the ground floor. The hall could maybe be a community asset. If more homes are built there could be a neighbourhood centre.
- IC asked about ongoing liaison. AS will lead on this re planning strategy with the masterplan and will liaise with MTC re the engagement process when looking to bring forward proposals, but Galliford Try will lead on the application and community engagement. The HCA has submitted a generic representation to the Core Strategy re their ownership of available land and the urban extension potential. They have also contributed to the evidence base for the SHLAA etc.

## **6. Question and Answer Session with Lewis Rimington of ISOS**

LR is the Localism Officer for ISOS. He covered the following points.

- CMBC's transferred over 2,000 former council houses to Castle Morpeth Housing in 2008 as a large scale voluntary transfer. CMH later became part of the much bigger ISOS in 2011. They therefore have a lot of social housing in and around the town and include what was previously Nomad E5, Castle Morpeth Housing and Milecastle, covering up to Berwick, down to Thornaby and west to Carlisle. They have approximately 6,000 properties in Northumberland and are in the top 5 social housing providers in the North East region. They have a strategic plan that goes forward to 2020 and are looking to expand, being an ambitious provider and financially secure.

- As regards differences since 2010 LR gave the following statistics:-
  - Grant rates prior to 2010 were 50% government and 50%PFI, but post 2010 20% government and 80% PFI.
  - The grant has been curtailed nationally by 60% so house builders' output has decreased by 40%
  - ISOS is able to charge rents at up to 80% of market value, so typically before 2010 they were £85 per week for a 3 bed home, and after 2010 this rose to £105.
- ISOS take their lead from the Northumberland Housing Needs Survey. The survey states the average annual delivery is 181 homes per year, with 67% being rented and 33% intermediate. They are aware of needs and can endeavour to meet it.
- ISOS is linked to the HCA and is responsible for an affordable housing programme to 2015. They are committed to deliver 340 new homes in that time and hope to deliver a further 105 in that period.
- As regards challenges in Morpeth, finance is the key issue because of the drop in grants and limited land availability. ISOS would be interested in working at St George's and have been interested in working at Loansdean too. Development can be delivered without grant because of planning obligations but it is more difficult. It costs an average of £100,000 to £110,000 per property to build so a grant makes a big difference. Local Authorities can grant land free and ISOS would be interested in such an offer.
- ISOS have been involved in providing new homes at Lesbury (Town Foot development), Corbridge and Beadnell. They primarily provide homes for rent and shared equity. The Home Buy initiative is helpful for first time buyers. Community Land Trusts provide initiatives that are of interest too.
- ISOS have a new Community Investment Strategy and are piloting areas to develop community initiatives e.g. Stobhill. Their "My Community" Fund can award grants from £50 - £10,000.
- LR's understanding is that ISOS will look at conversions and not just new builds.
- In answer to a question re meeting priority needs in Morpeth LR said there had been few opportunities in Morpeth, but ISOS would be interested to work with partners across the board, not just re family homes. Traditionally they have been involved in regeneration, but less so now. ISOS is a broad provider and includes sheltered housing.
- In relation to welfare changes, it would be difficult to move tenants around because smaller properties are not available. The changes are likely to have far reaching consequences but ISOS is being proactive in providing support and advice to tenants. 1 bed homes are within the ISOS portfolio, however most homes consist of 2 or more bedrooms. Universal Credit plans for payment direct to tenants may cause problems.
- ISOS is a charity, so all profits go back into the housing stock as reinvestment.
- In response to a question regarding ISOS partnering with Northumberland County Council to further development opportunities, LR responded by saying ISOS works with Local Authorities as development partners and is always keen to embrace new opportunities.
- LR is the link person within ISOS for parish/town councils and is happy to help in anything further is needed.

## **7. The Technical Report Working Group and the way forward**

SC reported that he is convening the group. They have had 2 meetings in the town hall for transparency and the next on 28<sup>th</sup> March will be in Storey Park Community Centre. There is a lot of information to take in. At the first meeting the group worked on the guiding principles, which are now updated and are the core fundamentals. The Alnwick and Denwick paper is a good example. It was agreed that around 17 pages are expected from each Topic Group and these will be put together. The Technical Paper is not for public consultation, but is an evidence base. The Neighbourhood Plan process is not light touch.

HE has produced tables from the SHLAA that DH has put onto Excel. The group will look at location in the wider context not specific sites. JT has started a document and the group have allocated issues to each member to prepare text by next Wednesday and then on 28<sup>th</sup> they will meet again to review. It will be in a raw form so will require editing before bringing to the full group mid April.

IC pointed out that this is the Issues and Options stage, we are not providing answers just putting open questions. The information will allow the public to make informed decisions.

DP thought the group was getting on well with the task. When the Technical Paper is agreed the Topic group's role will be complete for the time being, then the wider group has the task of putting it all together. The cross cutting themes raise other questions to be considered. DP referred to the Education presentation to the Steering Group the previous day, where the issue of proliferation of Free Schools was raised. There appears to be no strategy re education and we need to take hold of it. TN thought, on the basis of previous plans, that nobody comes up with the money. However DP said the different dimensions have to be honoured and reflected in the final policy document and it is up to us to make it work by weaving all the strands together. We are in a market led system so a community led plan could be the vehicle to deliver the strategy for education. AnJ said it would be helpful to include some graphics rather than just words and the group agreed to take her up on her offer!

## **8. Meeting with NCC**

HE and IC met with NCC re the SHLAA and have sent the notes prepared to NCC for agreement. When they are returned they will be circulated. The SHLAA will not be completed until late summer and no figures are likely at an early date. NCC were very cooperative.

## **9. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting is at 7pm in the Town Hall on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> April.