

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SAUGHALL PARISH RURAL HOUSING WORKING GROUP held on 9 December 2002 in the Parish Room, Fiddlers Lane, Saughall

In attendance: Councillor A Bailey (Part)
Councillor RA Storrar (in the Chair)

Mrs A Amesbury, Chester City Council (Part)
Mr S Lewis, Forward Planning, Chester City Council
Mr B Holmes, Rural Housing Enabler, Cheshire Community Council

16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Mrs JE Storrar and Mrs J Young.

17 MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT

No Declarations of Interest were received.

18 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Working Group held on 25 September 2002 were **AGREED** as a correct record.

19 CHESTER DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN PUBLIC INQUIRY

At the last meeting of the Working Group it had been recommended that the Parish Council give consideration to the Inspector's findings and submit any comments to Chester City Council – the Planning Authority. The Council declined to formulate comments until a copy of a written report detailing the results of the Public Inquiry was received.

Mr Lewis informed that Chester City Council's officers intended to present a report incorporating the Inspector's findings and recommendations to their Council meeting in March 2003. The consultation process would get underway in April/May 2003. It was expected that the Local Plan would be ratified by the City Council in the Autumn 2003.

The meeting **NOTED** the situation and it was requested that the Parish Council formulate comments as a consultee at the appropriate time following receipt of a copy of the report written for Chester City Council's consideration.

20 SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS

Councillor RA Storrar informed that it was proposed that there would be two S106 Agreements in respect of any affordable housing built on Lodge Lane in respect of:

- (1) The occupancy
- (2) Access through Parkway

Mrs Amesbury told the meeting that everything that needed to be covered must be included in the S106 Agreements and it was **NOTED** that the Parish Council wanted to be consulted on them. It was **AGREED** that the full Parish Council would consider the proposed S106 Agreements and submit any comments/suggestions to Chester City Council at the appropriate time.

Local allocations policy would form part of the supplementary planning permission on affordable housing. The Parish Council hoped that there would be further consultation on how the S106 Agreement in respect of occupancy would be applied. It was **SUGGESTED** that when property became available the Parish Council could be informed and asked if it knew anyone in housing need. If no name(s) was/were put forward the Housing Association would allocate from its own list using its own records. A “cascade” approach would be used where priority would be given to people in the first catchment area. There would be a “ring fence” – local need would outweigh other considerations. Specific named rural Parishes would be considered in priority order and when they were exhausted consideration would be given to those in the urban area in need.

The City Council’s draft policy, which outlined the “cascade” approach to allocating properties i.e. properties will be let in the first instance to people in housing needs who live, work or have close family in Saughall Parish. Once this list of people has been exhausted, if there were still vacancies, then the properties would be allocated to people in housing needs and who lived, worked or had close family in adjoining rural parishes and so on in ever increasing circles until all properties had been let or sold.

Although this policy was at present in only draft form, it was intended that it would form part of the Supplementary Planning Guidance for Affordable Housing and the City Council hoped to consult on the whole draft policy within the next 3-4 months.

Again although the policy was only in draft form, the City Council had used the “cascade” approach in Section 106 Agreements across the Chester District for the past 6-8 years in respect of both urban and rural schemes. This approach was used to ensure that new Affordable Housing was occupied by local people in housing need.

The Parish Council could be involved in developing the details of the “cascade” policy. It could be included in the first level of allocations, the length of residence that constitutes a local connection, what constitutes a close family connection, the parishes to be included in the second level of allocation, etc.

The Parish Council could also be involved in providing local information and publicity to ensure that local people were fully aware of the new properties and the allocations policy.

It was important not to confuse this “cascade” approach for local people with the Council’s usual Housing Register Policy which allocates some points for local connection, but which allocated properties solely on housing needs. This Housing Register Policy was used to let 75% of the vacancies of Chester and District Housing Trust and 50% of the vacancies of other Housing Associations in the District. It did not apply to new houses built with planning permission restricted by Section 106 Agreement.

It was also **SUGGESTED** that the Clerk could be given a list of names, that could be monitored and examined at a distance and controlled by audit process.

21 AFFORDABLE HOUSING TO MEET LOCAL NEED
- PROPOSAL IN RESPECT OF LODGE LANE, SAUGHALL

(a) Background

In April 2001 the then Grosvenor Housing Association was successful in obtaining planning permission for an Affordable Housing development on Lodge Lane in

Saughall, subject to signing a Section 106 Agreement. This was the result of the close involvement of both Chester City and the Parish Councils. They were supportive of the proposals as a way of meeting the housing needs of local people.

Cheshire County Council advertised the sale of the site and the Grosvenor Housing Association was the successful bidder. Grosvenor followed normal development procedure and carried out site investigations. These revealed that there were considerable unforeseen costs involved in developing the site and so the Housing Association reduced its offer for the site. This reduced offer was unacceptable to both the County and Parish Councils. The Parish Council was extremely unhappy with the reduced offer because it meant that it would have to pay more for the remainder of the site which it wanted to purchase for the local community's recreational use. Agreement on a new price was not reached and the Social Housing Grant subsidy for the development was lost because it had not been spent within the required timescales.

(b) 2002

Arena Housing (formed following a merger between the Grosvenor Housing Association and the Liver Housing Association) and Cheshire County Council recommenced discussions about the site and reached agreement over the principles of the valuation of the land. Arena Housing also submitted bids for funding to the Housing Corporation and Chester City Council. Cheshire Community Council's Rural Housing Enabler and Chester City Council officers met with Parish Councillors in this forum on two previous occasions.

(c) Issues still to be resolved

- (i) The Parish Council needs to be satisfied that the properties will be allocated to local people.
- (ii) The Parish Council needs to be satisfied with Arena Housing!
- (iii) Cheshire County Council and Arena Housing need to reach agreement on the price to be paid for the site.
- (iv) Arena Housing needs to secure Social Housing Grant funding for the development.
- (v) A Section 106 Agreement needs to be signed by Arena Housing and Cheshire County Council in order to activate the planning permission.

(d) Arena Housing

Arena Housing was one of Chester City Council's 3 Housing Association partners chosen to develop new Affordable Housing in the District. All three partners were selected because they had a commitment to the Chester area as a whole and provided good quality, Affordable Housing developments.

Mrs Amesbury reported that Grosvenor/Arena Housing had followed the same procedure of any developer and had made an initial offer for the site based on what they could afford and what they thought the site was worth. Following more detailed site investigations, it became clear to them that there would be additional costs associated with developing the site and so they had amended their offer accordingly. Any other

developer, house/land buyer or Housing Association would follow exactly the same process. It was particularly important for a Housing Association to do this so that the properties could be kept affordable. Arena Housing was a not-for-profit Registered Social Landlord, registered and closely monitored by the Housing Corporation.

(e) The Proposal

Arena proposed to build:

6 No 3 bedroom houses for rent

6 No 3 bedroom houses for sale on a shared ownership basis

(f) The Site

The site was an area of Lodge Lane owned by Cheshire County Council. It was a site on the edge of the village which was not allocated for any purpose in the Local Plan. This made it an “exceptions” site, which could only be built upon if the properties were provided by a Housing Association for the housing needs of the local people, in perpetuity.

This requirement kept the value of the land low because the occupation was restricted through the planning permission and the site could not be developed speculatively for market housing.

It was **AGREED** that County Councillor David Rowlands would be invited to attend the next meeting of the Parish Council scheduled for 6 January 2003 to provide a progress report on negotiations to purchase the land on Lodge Lane for Affordable Housing and so that the Parish Council could make any representations it considered appropriate in respect of the proposed scheme and the price of the land in question.

The Parish Council be **RECOMMENDED** to hold a Special Meeting in mid-April 2003, if Arena Housing was successful in attracting Social Housing Grant, so that it can receive a presentation on the proposed scheme and discuss and clarify the situation with its representatives.