

**Swindon Forum**  
**Steam, Museum of the Great Western Railway**  
**25<sup>th</sup> November 2008**

Swindon Borough's Future Approach to Affordable Housing Provision

*Facilitated by Emma Barnett*

Mike Ash from SBC's Housing Services provided a summary of Swindon's affordable housing position. He confirmed that there were 8,000 households on the housing waiting list, 500 in temporary accommodation and over 2,000 on the transfer list. The Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) demonstrated a higher level of need including those that are homeless or on the cusp of becoming homeless.

The HNA, which was carried out at the end of 2006 with a 5-year horizon, demonstrates a shortfall of affordable housing of 800 units a year. SBC currently deliver 300 units a year however the net increase is often lower due to the impact of the right to buy policy.

The Group discussed the Housing Market Area Strategy (HMAS) in terms of its relationship with planning policy. It was agreed that as with the HNA, the HMAS forms a key part of the evidence base for the Core Strategy.

*Affordable Housing Target*

In terms of the affordable housing target for the Borough, the Group acknowledged that the target in the RSS is 35% and therefore this should be the minimum target in the Core Strategy. The tenure mix could be altered to take into account current economic conditions with a stronger push for social rented as opposed to shared ownership. It was widely acknowledged by the Group that there was a risk associated with the provision of shared ownership homes in a recession in terms of home owners not being able to keep up with payments. Although the proportion of equity could be reduced, this has implications for Housing Associations in terms of their returns and the requirement for cross subsidy. The Group questioned whether there was a clearly identifiable intermediate need in Swindon however they concluded that shared ownership does have a role to play, although the primary need was for social rented housing.

*Affordable Housing Threshold*

The Group discussed whether the current 15 dwelling threshold was still fit for purpose. It was generally agreed that this should be treated as a minimum threshold in order to ensure sites still come forward. Some members of the Group felt that a lower threshold would affect the viability of sites, which would ultimately affect delivery. The issue of different thresholds for different types of sites was discussed however the Group felt that it was better to leave the threshold at 15 dwellings and negotiate the provision of affordable housing on a site specific basis.

One member of the Group requested further information on affordable housing delivery in the last 2 years as a way of assessing the appropriateness of the current

affordable housing policies. It was noted that sites coming forward from Housing Associations are for 100% affordable housing.

The Group agreed that the affordable policy approach should aim to achieve a balance of tenure in an area. This need not be restricted to the application site itself, but could also take into account the tenure mix of the wider area. It was suggested that local lettings policies should also be balanced to avoid mono-tenure on sites.

It was agreed that the precise requirements for affordable housing should be negotiated as part of the planning application process. This should take into account the viability of the development, whether the site is Greenfield or previously developed, the tenure mix of the locality as well as any other S106 requirements. Such an approach would enable a policy to be applied flexibly and therefore capable of responding to changing circumstances.

### *Special Needs / Older Persons Housing*

It was acknowledged that special needs housing falls partly within the affordable housing agenda and partly within the market housing agenda. It was generally accepted that the need for nursing homes, care homes etc needs to be taken into account particularly as C2 uses such as these often cannot compete in the open market and therefore special provision is needed.

It was suggested by one member of the Group that there was a specific need for elderly persons housing and that such a need could be best met in a purpose built complex. This would release larger houses currently occupied by elderly people that would be more suitable for families. It was noted that mobile caravan parks fulfilled this need however they are now classified as normal housing rather than affordable /special needs housing.

### *SPD – Affordable Housing*

The Group noted that the Council already had an affordable housing SPD and that it was generally helpful. This would need to be revised to reflect the affordable housing policy in the Core Strategy. The level of detail in the current SPD was considered to be appropriate.

### *Rural Areas*

The Group discussed the approach to affordable housing in rural areas and commented that sustainability considerations such as access to facilities, do need to be taken into account, however the provision or survival of these facilities may be dependent on the provision of a level of affordable housing. House prices are often higher in rural areas, which can preclude young families from accessing the housing market. This in turn threatens the viability of facilities such as schools, shops etc. The relationship of villages in the rural areas to Swindon should also be taken into account.

It was agreed that housing need in rural areas should be considered in a different way from urban areas. It was suggested that community or village plans would be a good way of establishing the need for affordable housing. It may be appropriate to consider the need arising from a cluster of villages.

It was noted that it was often very difficult to meet the affordable housing threshold in rural areas and therefore the rural exceptions approach was favoured.

### *Lifetime Homes*

The Group agreed with the 50% target of lifetime homes however it was noted that this was not always achievable. Much of the current stock does not conform to lifetime homes standards as it was not originally intended as affordable housing and therefore is not built to Housing Corporation standards.

### Red Group Members:

Michael Ash	Swindon Borough Council
Emma Hardman	Jephson
Lila Haracz	Swindon Borough Council
JH Williams	Graham Singer Chartered Surveyors
Catherine Jackson	D2
Holly James	CGMS
Amanda Donaldson	Aster Group
Lucy Heath	Green Square
Bob Walton	Swindon Policy Architectural Liaison
Martha Parry	Mechanics Trust
Peter Hall	Haydon Wick PC
Graham Smith	DPDS
Frank Richards	Resident
Adrian Hares	Hares Architecture
Adam Griffin	Pine View Parks Ltd