

Council Meeting – 20 March 2019

Report of Councillor Stephen Martin-Scott – Housing Services

Section 1 – A Memorable Year

1.1 As this is the final Full Council of the current financial year, it seems appropriate to identify the number of significant events achieved, an enduring legacy of this Council, its Members and – in particular – the former Housing Enabling and Development Team, for which our staff should be thanked and congratulated – particularly during a period of considerable change.

1.2 I am delighted to report that we have this year:-

- Once again exceeded our target of delivering 200 affordable homes for Taunton Deane. At the time of writing we have 205 completions, with a further 26 likely to be completed by the end of this financial year. Assuming no slippage we will have added 231 new affordable homes, plus a further 10 open market buy-backs which go some way to replacing the stock we lose every year through Right to Buy.
- Completion of Parmin Close, Taunton - the planned 66 unit extra-care scheme and 12 homes for those with learning disabilities (delivered by LiveWest, working in close partnership with the Council).
- The continued success of the Council's own new build development programme, delivering 26 new affordable homes at Weavers Arms, Rockwell Green, Wellington. This includes the sale of the Council's first two shared ownership properties.
- Completion of the 12 Moorland Close, Taunton development to provide the new, improved community space for the Link Centre which facilitates their support within Halcon. The scheme also provides 3 one bed flats of which two are for general needs and one offers temporary accommodation. Elsewhere on Outer Circle the contractor selection process has been started to develop 4 x one bed units where the Link Centre was originally sited.
- We have also concluded the 12 month resident consultation in North Taunton and the new project team are working on the implementation of the Woolaway Project following its unanimous support by Members in February. This is alongside the continuation of the Council's newbuild development programme.

Section 2 - Other Affordable Housing Developments

2.1 As well as those mentioned above, we have also progressed:-

2.2 **Weavers Arms, Rockwell Green, Wellington** - 13 homes were handed over by the developer [WRW Construction] on the 29 November 2018 and the remaining 13 homes will be handed over by the end of this April. The first properties should already be on Homefinder Somerset by the time of this meeting, with the balance being listed shortly thereafter.

- 2.3 **North Taunton Woolaway** - Progress with this major project was reported to this month's Shadow Full Council. A verbatim of the information provided at that time is appended to this report.
- 2.4 **Oake** - A pilot project for a detailed analysis of options to undertake repairs of Woolaway buildings is being undertaken to help inform the overall Woolaway Programme.
- 2.5 **Laxton Road, Taunton** - The contractor tender selection – to deliver 8 x one bed newbuild flats – is due to conclude in mid-April, and we expect to be starting on-site this summer.
- 2.6 All in all, over the past five years we have delivered over 1,000 affordable homes through our strong Taunton Deane Affordable Housing Partnership. We have seen our own development programme deliver new Council homes, purchase further homes on the open market, develop an 'active elderly' scheme, a new office hub and new community space. We have also provided environmental improvements through car parking improvements and installing scooter stores. This was alongside a detailed and complex resident consultation to develop an exemplar estate regeneration scheme in North Taunton to reflect the needs of our residents, providing high quality, energy-efficient homes within a sustainable environment that fosters independent living within a strong and thriving Garden Town Community.

Section 3 - Somerset Housing Strategy

- 3.1 The Somerset Housing Strategy Stakeholder Launch Event, on 6 March 2019, attended by many of the public housing 'movers and shakers' from across the county, was organised by Taunton Deane. It was probably the most interesting and informative Housing event – featuring a range of excellent, engaging speakers – I have ever attended. If this is an area that interests you, I recommend you visit our website:-
- <https://www.tauntondeane.gov.uk/housing-and-community/housing-strategy/>
- 3.2 All the slides used by the speakers at this event will be available on this webpage later this month.
- 3.3 One of the most interesting speakers was Councillor Keith House, Leader of Eastleigh Council who opened his section by saying "If you want any money from Government to build houses, all you have to do is ring up the Treasury, say you are representing 'so and so Council' and tell them you want to build some houses. The answer will be 'How much? – and when do you want it?' – Sounds simple... However as Councillor Williams stated at the recent Shadow Full Council, what we are really short of is suitable land. Nevertheless this is a very encouraging framework within which to create ambitious targets, something which I look forward to progressing.

Section 4 – North Taunton Woolaway Project

- 4.1 ***verbatim* of the Report by the Executive Councillor for Housing, Stephen Martin-Scott, to Shadow Full Council on 21 February 2019**
- 4.2 **ITEM 13 - The North Taunton Woolaway Project** The houses that we refer to as 'Woolaways' are houses of a non-traditional construction type built during the late 1940s and 1950s as a means of increasing the post-war housing stock. In the early 1980s it became apparent that certain non-traditional construction methods which contained prefabricated reinforced concrete did not provide the lifespan expected and were deteriorating as they aged. In 1984 the Government designated some as inherently defective, including Woolaways. This did not identify Woolaways as unsafe; it simply banned any more being built.
- 4.3 Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC) has approximately 240 Woolaway properties across the Borough with the main concentration being in north Taunton. In order to extend the life of the Woolaway properties and to bring them up to current standards of occupier comfort and to meet thermal efficiency targets TDBC undertook a programme to clad the houses with external wall insulation which gives the homes a distinctive look of pebbledash panels on the ground floor and grey tiles to the upper floor. And before the word 'cladding' raises concerns, given Grenfell, the type of cladding used on these properties is very different specification.
- 4.4 In 2013 a survey of our Woolaways across the Borough was carried out. This survey was necessarily limited as the homes were occupied and some insulation was in place restricting inspection. Tests were undertaken and the results showed that the prefabricated reinforced concrete elements – key structural elements – had deteriorated further and this deterioration would continue. The engineers' recommendation was that, over a period, all Woolaways should be replaced, given their inherent limited lifespan.
- 4.5 Accordingly, in 2016 TDBC began a redevelopment in Rockwell Green, Wellington, that allowed us to take a more detailed examination of the houses during the demolition process. The discovery of further degradation of the structure elements within the buildings confirmed the earlier findings and reinforced the need to plan for a wider replacement of the Woolaways.
- 4.6 In February of the following year, TDBC had the opportunity to bid for funding from the then DCLG that allow the appointment of a Master-planning Team to consider how to best manage the whole of the council's Woolaway estate. The aim of this funding was to engage with the community living in the largest concentration of Woolaways, in the North Taunton area, and to work with them to bring forward a phased regeneration scheme to a planning application stage.
- 4.7 Accordingly, in September 2017 a letter was sent to residents to advise them that they were living in a property known as a Woolaway, that it had a limited lifespan – but was currently quite safe – and invited them to attend a public

consultation so they could learn more about their homes and could discuss matters further.

- 4.8 There are 212 Woolaway homes within the North Taunton Woolaway Project area of which almost 80% (167) are owned by the Council with the remainder in private ownership.
- 4.9 Over a 12 month period there were 4 Public Consultation Events to which all households affected by the project were invited – an Introduction to the project and an explanation of Woolaway construction; an Exploration of the site constraints/ opportunities; followed by an intro to how decisions would be made regarding the area; thereafter an exploration of the 3 options for the area and explained how they had been developed. The final event showed the preferred option for the area and explained how it had been arrived at. It also identified how the project would be phased.
- 4.10 To ensure there really was good understanding of the project an exhibition was held in early February featuring planning drawings and a detailed 3D model of the redevelopment proposals, with Master planning Team members and council officers attending. Many of these elements were then featured in the subsequent area Newsletter.
- 4.11 Throughout the consultation process, three redevelopment proposals were considered. The one preferred by the community consists of predominantly new-build housing – with a small percentage of refurbished properties – in two locations. The proposed plan is a mix of housing that reflects the needs of the current community and ranges from 1 to 5 bed properties including flats, bungalows and 2 and 3 storey houses. The identified scheme will proceed in 5 phases, A-E.
- 4.12 An outline planning application for phases B-E was submitted in December 2018 together with a detailed planning application for phase A. Both these are planned to go before TDBC Planning Committee for consideration at the planning committee on the 27th March 2019. If planning permission is granted, we will start progressively relocating residents and procuring a build contract for phase A with the intention of starting construction in early 2020.
- 4.13 The project received unanimous support at the recent Tenant Services Management Board, at Shadow Scrutiny and by the Shadow Executive. I hope that now – as we move to the Recommendations, those endorsements will be repeated. It is so important to those affected, living in North Taunton.

Councillor Stephen Martin-Scott