

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Minutes of the Housing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on  
Thursday, 1 August 2013 at 5.30 p.m.

Portfolio Holder: Mark Howell

### **Councillors in attendance:**

Scrutiny and Overview Committee monitors: Bunty Waters

Also in attendance: Nigel Cathcart, Kevin Cuffley, Alison Elcox and David McCraith

### **Officers:**

Jenny Clark	Lands Officer
Anita Goddard	Housing Operational Services Manager
Stephen Hills	Affordable Homes Director
Peter Moston	Under Occupation Officer
Schuyler Newstead	Housing Development & Enabling Manager
Ian Senior	Democratic Services Officer
Heather Wood	Housing Advice and Options Manager

## **1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Alison Elcox declared a personal interest by virtue of being a South Cambridgeshire landlord.

Councillor Mark Howell declared a personal interest as an employee of the Papworth Trust, a charity that includes a Registered Social Landlord.

## **2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Housing Portfolio Holder signed, as a correct record, the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2013.

## **3. ASSET MANAGEMENT POLICY**

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered a report seeking his endorsement in principle for the adoption of a new HRA (Housing Revenue Account) Asset Sustainability Policy.

The Director of Housing commended the draft Policy for adding clarity to the process. However, Councillor Nigel Cathcart expressed concern about the implications of some of the new arrangements outlined in Appendix B to the report. The Portfolio Holder instructed officers to arrange a formal presentation open to all Members of Council.

The Housing Performance Improvement Team Leader recognised the concern about sales to South Cambs Limited and said that paragraph 5.6 of the Policy would be amended before it went to Cabinet to require the consent of the Secretary of State and read as follows:

### **“Sale to South Cambs Ltd**

There is an acute lack of affordable private rented accommodation in the District. Through South Cambs Ltd, the Council is well placed to become a key contributor to the supply of good quality affordable private rented accommodation. Through this policy, the Council may identify opportunities where there is a robust business

case to sell properties at best price to the company to enable properties to be let at a private market rate. For example, properties purchased under the Empty Homes Scheme but no longer required for temporary accommodation or where the decision has been made to sell Council property on the open market.

**Decision Process:** The Director of Housing has authority to approve sale of properties to South Cambs Ltd with the agreement of the Executive Director acting as the S.151 Officer; subject to the approval by the Housing Portfolio Holder and the Finance & Staffing Portfolio Holder. Secretary of State consent will need to be sought prior to any sale to South Cambs Ltd in accordance with Section 32 of the Housing Act 1985 (General Housing Consents 2013).

**Consultation:** Local Member(s)"

The Housing Portfolio Holder **recommended to Cabinet** (for onward recommendation to Council if necessary) the adoption of the new Housing Revenue Account Asset Sustainability Policy (Disposals and Acquisitions) attached as Appendix A.

#### 4. UNDER-OCCUPANCY POLICY

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered a report seeking his approval for the adoption of a policy covering how the Council should respond to customers faced with a reduction in Housing Benefit and additional financial hardship due to Welfare Reform changes introduced in April 2013.

The Under-Occupation Officer summarised the Policy, focussing on the Support to Move scheme (paragraph 7.2) and the relationship between the Housing Management Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments. He said some people simply needed help in *arranging* their house move. Questioned by the Portfolio Holder, the Under-Occupation Officer assured him that, for the time being at least, there were sufficient funds available to operate an effective Support-to-Move scheme.

The Director of Housing explained that the Under-Occupation Policy was closely related to, but nevertheless separate from, the Discretionary Housing Payments Policy, a report on which would be presented to the Housing Portfolio Holder meeting in October 2013.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **approved** the 'Under-occupation Policy' as set out in Appendix A.

#### 5. BASSINGBOURN: DISPOSAL OF GARAGE SITE OFF MILL LANE

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered a report seeking his approval for the disposal of the Council's garage site off Mill Lane, Bassingbourn as outlined red on plan. This matter had been deferred from the meeting in March 2013 (Minute 33 refers) to allow time for interested parties to put together a business case for the site and the former public house adjacent to it to be redeveloped for use by the community of Bassingbourn.

The applicants, Nigel Howard and David Chamberlain, attended the meeting. Mr Howard spoke enthusiastically about his plans to reopen the pub, and assured those present that he was keen to preserve and enhance the facility for the benefit of the entire community. He confirmed that he had no intention of building houses on the site.

Officers confirmed that the difference of £10,000 between the original site valuation and the sum of £30,000 now being offered was equivalent to the estimated cost of demolition

of a site of this size and safe disposal of asbestos.

Councillors Nigel Cathcart and David McCraith (the local Members) both supported the recommendation set out in the report from the Director of Housing. Councillor Cathcart noted that the transaction would include a clawback clause by which the Council could recover all or part of any financial benefit accruing to the purchaser as a result of the contract of sale.

Those present discussed the rumour that the new owners might change the pub's name. There were conflicting views on this point and, although Councillors Cathcart and McCraith were very keen to preserve the name of 'The Pear Tree'. The Housing Portfolio Holder said he would leave this aspect of the debate for resolution at local level, and would not make it a condition of sale.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **agreed in principle** that the site be offered for sale to the purchaser of the adjacent pub site at the price of £30,000 plus legal costs, for use as a parking and garden area to serve a new pub on the pub site, subject to planning permission and an uplift clause. Existing rights of way over the site to be retained. (Option One).

#### **6. TENANT PARTICIPATION GROUP**

There was no report or discussion under this heading.

#### **7. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Housing Portfolio Holder noted his Work Programme and reminded those present that the Tenant Participation Group would be presenting a report at the meeting in October 2013.

#### **8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Those present noted that the next Housing Portfolio Holder meeting had been scheduled for 16 October 2013, starting at 5.30pm.

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**The Meeting ended at 6.40 p.m.**

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