
REPORT TO:	HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 10
DATE OF MEETING:	8 th June 2004	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES	OPEN PARAGRAPH NO: NA
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	BEVERLY WAGSTAFFE Ext 5822	DOC:
SUBJECT:	RURAL HOUSING INITIATIVE	REF: BW
WARD (S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE: CS01

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 Members agree to join the Trent Valley Rural Housing Partnership to promote and assist in the provision of small-scale affordable housing projects in rural villages.
- 1.2 To select East Midlands Housing Association as the Councils preferred partner for delivering rural housing.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To inform members of the Trent Valley Rural Housing Partnership and to seek approval for the Council to join this partnership.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 For some time it has been recognised that in a number of areas more could be done with regards to the provision of affordable rural housing, and that more research and community work is the catalyst for this.
- 3.2 Rural Settlements are generally defined as those with less than 3,000 populations. Outside of the urban area of Swadlincote there are 50 parishes of which 46 have populations of less than 3,000 (see annexe A). The Countryside Agency points to the house prices in the regions countryside and subsequent affordability problems, coupled with the shortage of rented accommodation is providing acute pressures for people living in rural areas. Annexe A shows the number of people currently on the Councils' waiting list for accommodation.
- 3.3 The East Midlands Regional Housing Board has indicated that funding will be made available specifically to meet rural housing needs. However, robust, reliable information is needed to support bids for development funds. Building land is scarce in the rural parishes and it is likely that new affordable housing will need to be developed on exception sites. Again, the Local Planning Department will need evidence to support such developments.

- 3.4 In recent years only the parish of Repton has had a detail parish housing needs study undertaken. This resulted in 12 affordable properties being developed on an exception site.
- 3.5 Midland Rural Housing Association has looked at mechanisms and partnerships to increase the output of rural housing in the Local Authority areas of East Staffordshire, South Derbyshire, Rushcliffe and Newarke & Sherwood. They have met with a number of Housing Associations active in the area to establish the level of support from this sector for a partnership, Trent Valley Rural Housing Partnership, funded by each of the four main Housing Associations that operate over this area (1 for each district). The response has been positive. For South Derbyshire the proposal is for East Midlands Housing Association to be the preferred development partner. This proposal is to appoint a part-time officer for a 3-year period funded by the Housing Associations. Jointly they will contribute £20,000 each year.
- 3.6 The districts' Housing Strategy Manager has met both with Midland Rural Housing and East Midlands Housing Association to discuss these proposals. Concerns have been raised about the capacity a part-time officer will have working over such a vast area and that this proposal would only deliver a small number of surveys for the district. Reassures have also been given that this would not open the door for the other 3 Housing Associations in the partnership to commence development in South Derbyshire.
- 3.7 The need to address affordable rural housing has been identified by our Housing Strategy partners as a high priority and recently highlighted as a weakness in our Comprehensive Performance Assessment. With this in mind, Midland Rural Housing were asked to re-work the project costs based on South Derbyshire contributing to the partnership to enable all of the districts rural parishes to be surveyed over a 3-year period.
- 3.8 Midland Rural Housing has indicated that the Council will need to make a £10,000 contribution each year (£30,000 total). This would in affect result in a full-time officer being appointed, of which 2.5 days per week would be dedicated to working within South Derbyshire.
- 3.9 Members may recall that a service bid for funds of £45,000 was made earlier in the year to commence a programme of rural housing needs surveys. However, this would not guarantee all parish surveys being completed and would also involved resources in both appointing a consultant and selecting a preferred partner. Initial discussions with the Derbyshire Rural Housing Enabler have also indicated that they would not have the capacity to carry out all of South Derbyshire parish surveys.
- 3.10 In terms of East Midlands Housing Association being selected as the preferred partner. There are 3 main Associations that operate in the district. As well as East Midlands there is Trident Housing Association and Walbrook Housing Association. Neither Trident nor Walbrook are experience in managing rural housing. East Midlands have a vast amount of experience in managing rural housing across the East Midlands. Unlike the other two, the Housing Corporation recently assessed East Midlands as "green " with regards to delivering the approved development programme, (this is the highest level of achievement). For a number of years they have worked in partnership with the Council in delivering affordable housing. They currently 147 properties in the district.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 Option 1: Part-time post funded by the 4 Housing Associations – no cost to the Council. (Would only deliver a small number of surveys)

Option 2: Full-time post funded by the 4 Housing Associations and South Derbyshire District Council - £10,000 for 3 years (£30,000 total). (Would guarantee all surveys completed in a 3-year period)

Funding of £10,000 per year has already been secured by pooling existing resources from Housing, Planning and Private Sector Housing.

5.0 Corporate Implications

5.1 This project fits within the Corporate Plan and Housing Strategy. The need for robust rural parish surveys was highlighted in the recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

6.0 Community Implications

6.1 This project is required to deliver much needed affordable housing in the rural communities.

7.0 Conclusion

7.1 Entering into such a partnership demonstrates South Derbyshire's commitment to addresses rural housing needs. It fits within a number of Strategies including the East Midlands Regional Housing Strategy and with the Governments Office wish to see more cross-boundary partnership working. It offers good value for money compared to South Derbyshire going alone and will guarantee all the rural parish surveys are completed with 3-years.

