

# Briefing Note



## Community and Housing Scrutiny

### Non-Regeneration Council House Building Programme – Pre-planning Processes

Will Rysdale and Neil Sainsbury  
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#### Purpose

The Community and Housing Scrutiny Committee has asked and raised concerns about the identification of sites for small scale council house development, how these projects are brought forward to the planning application stage, the raising and management of residents' expectations, and the length of time it is taking to get projects to the Planning Development Brief stage. It has been claimed that the time the current process takes is unpredictable and, in some areas, causing concern for local residents.

This brief report will highlight the process that is currently in place and make recommendations on how officers believe that it can be improved.

#### Pre Planning Engagement

The council already has an adopted protocol to guide the preparation of development briefs for land owned by Milton Keynes Development Partnership (MKDP) and MKC (Appendix A).

Development briefs are documents that guide what will eventually be built on sites by setting out the relevant current planning policy and design principles for new development. They will help enable a high quality development that delivers placemaking benefits in terms of social, health, environmental and economic value.

A period of formal consultation is included and the Brief is then approved by the Council. On this basis they will then be afforded planning weight when determining planning applications for the site.

Currently each development brief is prepared in accordance with an adopted protocol which identifies a level of stakeholder engagement, including with local ward and town/parish councillors, at each stage of the process.

The purpose of this is to enable stakeholders to give their views on proposals early in the process so that issues raised can be considered before planning applications are submitted and decisions made.

Identifying stakeholder issues and expectations early on helps to speed up the planning process and create a greater level of certainty for both investors and the community.

Officers believe that overall this process is still effective, but accept improvements can be made which will help ensure we are able to progress our pipelines of new homes.

### **Recommendations**

The first recommendation is for officers to gain a more detailed understanding of the site in question. A detailed site constraints survey should be undertaken in order to highlight all underground utilities etc that may affect viability of site development. Alongside this a capacity study that reflects planning policy should be completed.

Following these steps work must be completed on an early site financial viability appraisal, before any engagement is undertaken. This will not only help ensure only deliverable sites are progressed in a timely manner, but will help keep stakeholders informed and to manage expectations. It is important that expectations are not raised to levels that are not deliverable.

The housing delivery team will undertake an outline financial appraisal of the site, making use of the Proval system. This financial appraisal will make use of recently agreed global financial parameters, which are pre-agreed with finance.

It will also be a requirement that the Housing Delivery Team engages with internal stakeholders across the council to gather an understanding of the requirements and restrictions that may impact on any potential new scheme. Officers are already undertaking these procedures as new sites progress.

Once these new steps have been completed and the initial financial appraisal demonstrates that the site may support development (at an approved value for money level) officers would engage with their relevant Cabinet Member followed by local ward and town and parish councillors in order to discuss the principle of council housebuilding on the specific sites.

If both ward and parish/town councillors are supportive about the principle the site will progress to the development brief stage mentioned above with wider stakeholder engagement to follow.

We would also recommend that development briefs for new council home sites are taken on sites under 10 homes, which is the current recommendation.

### **How Potential Sites are selected**

Sites on existing and future Council Housebuilding Pipeline lists will normally come through as a by-product of work undertaken for the SHLAA (current pipeline lists) / HELAA (future pipeline lists) and the Open Space Assessment as part of the Local Plan evidence base – with 6 criteria key to site selection:

- Ready vehicular access
- Minimal constraints (above ground that is, in terms of site shape and levels and extent of ecological value)
- Standards of provision in the local area – is there an oversupply when assessed against the open space standards?
- Perception/evidence of usage
- Sustainability of location

Where development of the site can address an urban design problem e.g. back gardens facing the public realm

MKC's property team also meet with Housing, Planning and the UDLA on a quarterly basis to discuss any potential site that maybe considered for disposal or appropriate for transfer into the HRA.

### **How are they progressed to the Planning Development Brief Stage**

Currently Development Briefs are only prepared for 10 or more homes. As previously referenced in this report officers recommend that this should be amended to include potential council house delivery sites of any size.

## **How and when resident engagement takes place**

This could take place at 2 stages in the preparation of the development brief:

- Up front before commencement of the development brief when residents are asked for their views about the site and any site issues we should be aware of (we wouldn't ask them for their aspirations as this could lead to aspirations that we cannot accommodate). Their feedback would, where appropriate, inform the preparation of the brief.
- Once a draft development brief has been prepared, formal consultation will take place. Residents can comment and where appropriate the brief will then be amended to reflect their comments.

## **How can we help ensure residents' expectations can be managed?**

Residents' expectations should be managed via the engagement mentioned above. Introducing an early financial appraisal before a brief is commenced will help to manage these expectations as the brief should only include what officers recommend is deliverable and financially viable.