

**At an Extraordinary meeting of the REGENERATION AND COMMUNITY REVIEW COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on WEDNESDAY, 29<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 2009 at 2.30 p.m.**

**Present:-**

Councillor J. Scott in the Chair

Councillors Ball, Copeland, M. Dixon, M. Forbes, O'Connor, S. Watson and D. Wilson.

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Heron, Peter Maddison, J. Stephenson and Vardy.

**Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)**

Item 4 – Renewal Area Update – Castletown, Hetton Downs and Middle Hendon

Councillors Ball and D. Wilson declared personal interests in the item as Council appointed representatives on the Board of Gentoo Sunderland Limited.

**Housing Strategy – Implementation Update**

The Director of Health, Housing and Adult Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with an update on the implementation of the Housing Strategy 2006-2011 in accordance with the recommendations arising from the Review Committee's 2006 Study "Investigation into Housing Strategy within the City of Sunderland".

(For copy report – see original minutes).

To complement the report, David Smith, Housing Strategy Manager, provided Members with a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation which highlighted:-

- i) the primary purpose of the Housing Strategy together with roles and responsibilities;
- ii) the aspirations and priorities of the Housing Strategy;

- iii) key achievements to date;
- iv) the regional and sub-regional housing agenda;
- v) key areas of work for the future.

Members raised the following questions and comments on the report and presentation:-

- Concrete improvements did not appear to be being made as quickly as hoped.
- How often was the rough sleepers survey undertaken?
- Shouldn't the Affordable Housing Policy have been in place by now? Have we established what housing provision is available in the City in relation to housing need?
- What is the main focus of the Local Housing Company?
- Concern that the City was running short of social housing and nothing was being done to address need. The Housing Strategy would need to be flexible enough to cope with the projected long term economic downturn.
- Concern that the Regional Housing Strategy would prove detrimental to the City with Sunderland unable to access its fair share of 'the pot'.
- Will the formation of the Local Housing Company preclude other housing providers from building in Sunderland?
- When was the Doxford Park masterplan agreed?
- The really good work undertaken with regard to housing in the City should not be overlooked. Things were certainly not looking as bleak as they did two years ago and the Housing Team should be congratulated in this regard.

Mr. Smith advised that the Rough Sleepers Survey was carried out without warning once a year in accordance with communities and Local Government guidance. The ratio of housing provision against housing need would be established through the Housing Market Assessment.

A full report on the Local Housing Company would be submitted to the Committee in due course. Sites had been identified on Council owned land on which 2,500 units could be built. Work was being undertaken with different agencies regarding provision which would involve a mix of property types and a mix of tenure. The key issue currently being addressed was the financial appraisal of the sites available in the City. Mr. Smith confirmed that he would check the position as to who would retain the interest in the land.

With regard to the regional and sub regional agenda, Mr. Smith advised that he had written the Tyne and Wear Housing Strategy on behalf of the Tyne and Wear Partnership. He was therefore able to ensure that all Sunderland's priority areas were included and that its voice would be heard.

With regard to the Doxford Park Masterplan, Alan Thompson of Gentoo advised that the Masterplan had to be agreed and in place before development commenced.

Mr. Smith advised that through the Homes for Life Programme, £21 million of investment would be coming to the City. A key achievement had been the delivery of the extra care agenda which the Leader and Councillor Trueman were keen to take forward. The new refuge in Houghton had been held up as a national example of best practice. The service wanted to ensure more affordable homes were built in the City, it being a key aim for the future. There was a need to ensure that strategies were in place as they were hooks on which external funding could be hung.

The Chairman having thanked Mr. Smith for his report and presentation it was:-

1. RESOLVED that the report and the progress made in delivering the Housing Strategy 2006-2011 be noted.

### **Renewal Area Update – Castletown, Hetton Downs and Middle Hendon**

The Director of Health, Housing and Adult Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated Members on progress in respect of the Council's designated Renewal Areas.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The report was presented by Alan Caddick, Head of Housing, together with Derek Welsh, Housing Renewal Manager, following which Ian Porter updated the meeting on the progress of renewal work within Gentoo's purview and Stephen Croft, Housing and Development Manager, Back on the Map, did likewise with regards to Hendon.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Copeland, Mr. Thompson advised that put simply, the cost of the total Gentoo renewal plan amounted to £400 million, £200 million would be recoupled from sale income, £100 million would accrue from rent leaving a shortfall of £100 million. The shortfall would need to be covered either via grant or subsidy. It needed to be made clear that there would be no social units available without homes for sale. The Hahnemann Court homes would all be for rent, there would be no grant funding therefore Gentoo would need to cover the shortfall themselves.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor M. Dixon, Members were informed that the Home Buy Direct Scheme was not yet up and running in Sunderland, although the wheels were in motion. The scheme would need to operate through a Government appointed agent.

With regard to unsold new Gentoo properties being made available on short term tenancies, the meeting was informed that this was being investigated. The last thing Gentoo wanted was to have units lying empty.

Councillor Dixon referred to a Back on the Map brochure from 2001 regarding proposals for Salem Street and Salem Street South and questioned why no progress was apparent. Mr. Croft advised that progress had been slow because properties in the area were in multiple ownership. It had only been recently that Back on the Map had been able to buy up land.

Councillor Wilson stated that the main problem with Castletown had been the number of irresponsible private landlords and asked what could be done to ensure it did not happen again. Mr. Caddick replied that everyone had a Right to Buy and private landlords couldn't be prevented from doing so. What was important was how the situation was managed. An enforcement policy would soon be submitted to Cabinet. Selective licensing was punitive but was an indication that an area had gone beyond the pale.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Wilson, Members were advised that wildlife and conservation laws had been made much tighter recently. All Councils had a duty to carry out bat surveys and could face prosecution if bats were harmed when a building was altered or demolished. Delays were inevitable as there was a shortage of people qualified to carry out the surveys and their services were in demand.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Forbes, Members were informed that Gentoo had carried out 2,250 demolitions and there were 470 pending. There had been no compulsory purchases. Mr. Porter advised that demolitions were carried out as soon as possible. Delays had been encountered in Ryhope because of ongoing legal proceedings regarding ownership. In some areas such as Doxford there were long terraces and not all properties were owned by Gentoo.

The Chairman having thanked Mr. Caddick and Mr. Welsh for their report and Messrs. Porter, Thompson and Croft for their attendance, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

### **Housing, Regeneration and the Credit Crunch – Feedback From Conference**

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with feedback on the above conference held on 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2009 and attended by Councillors Ball, J. Scott and S. Watson.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Jim Diamond, Review Coordinator, presented the report highlighting the main points addressed by the 8 key speakers at the Conference.

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

The Chairman then closed the meeting, having thanked Members and officers for their attendance.

(Signed) JOHN SCOTT,  
Chairman.