

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet Member for Prosperity

Date of Meeting: 30th April 2012
Report of: Strategic Housing and Development Manager
Subject/Title: Rural Housing Enabling Guide
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Jamie Macrae

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 Cheshire East has a shortage of affordable housing. This need is particularly acute in smaller rural settlements. The draft Rural Housing Enabling Guide has been produced to support rural affordable housing in Cheshire East and help clarify the priority areas for development. The Guide aims to help local people and developers work together to secure the new affordable housing that their communities need and identifies those areas where we are able to support development. This report outlines the purpose of the draft Rural Housing Enabling Guide and asks for permission to consult further.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 To grant permission to carry out formal consultation on the draft Rural Housing Enabling Guide.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 To allow for wider stakeholders and Parish Councillors to comment on and contribute to the draft Guide

4.0 Wards Affected

- 4.1 All rural wards

5.0 Local Ward Members

- 5.1 All rural ward Members

6.0 Policy Implications (including carbon reduction and health)

- 6.1 Carbon Reduction

Providing homes in rural areas can help reduce carbon emissions as people will not have to travel to seek childcare and/or healthcare if this can be provided by family members who live close by.

6.2 Health

Housing is fundamental to the wellbeing and prosperity of the Borough. There are direct connections between access to affordable, sustainable housing and health, educational attainment, carbon reduction and care for vulnerable and older people

7.0 Financial Implications (authorised by Director of Finance and Business Services)

- 7.1 There are no financial implications. The costs of producing the Guide have been met from existing budgets.

8.0 Legal Implications (authorised by Borough Solicitor)

- 8.1 There are no legal obligations on local authorities to produce Rural Housing Enabling Guides.
- 8.2 Legal Services will review the Rural Housing Enabling Guide and comment prior to it being finalised. It may be necessary or prudent to include disclaimers and protections for the Council for example to mitigate against claims such as misrepresentation or legitimate expectation and the Council should make the usual statement that is not fettering it's discretion as a planning authority.

9.0 Risk Management Implications

- 9.1 The draft Rural Housing Enabling Guide has been designed to help developers and communities to better understand the impacts of affordable housing in rural settlements of Cheshire East. It does this by providing information which can be used to assess the sustainability of areas that have been identified in the 2010 Cheshire East Strategic Housing Market Assessment as primarily rural. The Guide has been developed for use by a varied audience to support collaborative working. There is no stipulation that the Guide must be adhered to but the draft has been developed with support from internal and external agencies to ensure that content is practical and helpful for them.
- 9.2 This document will not have unanimous support as provision of new housing and particularly affordable housing in rural areas can be contentious. However the aim of producing this Guide is to enable wider understanding of the priorities and aims of the Council in provision of affordable housing in rural areas. Widespread consultation on the Guide including the need for affordable housing in rural areas should help minimise the risk of opposition

10.0 Background and Options

- 10.1 Cheshire East Council has enabled the provision of many new affordable homes across the Borough but the current economic down turn has impacted on delivery at a time when affordable homes are needed more than ever. Affordable homes are essential to the continued vitality of our towns and villages. Increasing the provision of affordable homes for local people is one of the Council's corporate

priorities and in response we are promoting a range of initiatives to maintain a supply of affordable homes for local people.

- 10.2 In 2011 Cheshire East Strategic Housing Services began a process of engagement with a number of internal and external agencies to produce a good practice Guide which would meet the priority of improving the strategic approach the Council takes to delivery of affordable housing in the most rural areas of Cheshire East
- 10.3 The intention to produce a Rural Housing Enabling Guide met with a very positive response. Partners felt it would enable us to maximise our resources for the provision of new affordable housing in rural communities and be clear about which locations the Council prefers to support proposals for new development. The Guide will help implement the recommendation made by the Audit Commission to improve consistency in our strategic approach to ensure all aspects of housing strategy are fully informed by partners.
- 10.4 Contained within the body of the Rural Housing Enabling Guide is housing need information which identifies the priority areas for development of affordable housing. These elements of sustainability are recorded in a needs matrix which is appended to the Guide.

The matrix has been collated to help identify those parishes where development is a priority. The Guide details local services which are considered to be fundamental to the sustainability of a rural area and illustrates the availability of these in the form of maps appended to the draft Guide.

The fundamental services are detailed as follows:-

- **Service accessibility** which includes access to amenities. These services include such facilities as health surgeries, village halls, faith centres and leisure areas such as children's play grounds.
 - **Public transport** which includes regular weekday bus services, community bus services and railway stations.
 - **Educational establishments** includes primary schools, nurseries and colleges but does not include private schools
 - **Retail establishments** includes general stores, post offices, public houses and convenience stores attached to garages
 - **Employment** which highlights the ratio of people of working age resident in an area in relation to the number of people employed in that area.
- 10.5 The Guide includes consideration of partnership working with communities and neighbourhoods which is integral to the positive approach to rural development. The Guide is designed to meet the housing needs of local communities which is facilitated through the work of the Cheshire East Rural Housing Enabler (RHE).

- 10.6 The role of the Enabler is to work with rural communities providing independent advice and support. Therefore it is important to ensure that a consistent process is demonstrated for enabling rural housing schemes. A flowchart to map the steps required to engage and consult with all interested parties is included in the Guide. This will provide guidance about the procedure to follow to progress development to all interested parties.
- 10.7 The Enabler organises local housing needs surveys to evidence local housing need through engagement with individual parishes. A large number of local surveys have been carried out over the past five years. It is intended that further surveys will be conducted and prioritised based on the evidence the need matrix provides and these parishes are listed in the Guide.

11.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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