

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet Member for Prosperity and Economic Regeneration

Date of Meeting: 5th November 2012
Report of: Strategic Housing and Development Manager
Subject/Title: Rural Housing Enabling Guide
Portfolio Holder: Councillor J Macrae

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 Cheshire East needs more homes that people can afford to live in and to own. This need is particularly acute in smaller rural settlements. The Rural Housing Enabling Guide (appended to this report) has been produced to support rural affordable housing in Cheshire East and help clarify where the priority areas for development are. The Guide aims to help local people and developers to work together to secure the new affordable housing that their communities need. This report outlines the purpose of the Rural Housing Enabling Guide and asks for permission for the Guide to be published.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Rural Housing Enabling Guide be approved for publication.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 To support rural affordable housing in Cheshire East and help clarify the priority areas for development

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

Affordable housing is built to standards contained within the Government's Code for Sustainable Homes. The Code for Sustainable Homes was developed using the Building Research Establishment's (BRE) EcoHomes System. It introduces minimum standards for energy and water efficiency at every level of the Code, therefore requiring high levels of sustainability

performance in these areas for achievement of a high Code rating. It also includes areas of sustainability design, such as Lifetime Homes and inclusion of composting facilities.

In addition providing homes in rural areas can help reduce carbon emissions as provision enables people to live nearer to their places of work or their support networks

6.2 Health

Housing is fundamental to the wellbeing and prosperity of the Borough. There is substantial evidence which identifies the links between access to affordable, sustainable housing and improved health and educational attainment.

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

7.1 The costs of producing the Guide have been met from existing budgets

7.2 The Guide proposes that up to date housing need surveys are conducted in the rural parishes of Cheshire East. The cost of these surveys equate to £1.20 per household based on an average return rate of 33%. Therefore the total cost of surveying the 24,252 residential households in Cheshire East in rural areas is £29,342.40. This would be over a 5 year period costing £5,868.48 per annum. The cost of these surveys is currently accounted for within service budgets

8.0 Legal Implications (authorised by Borough Solicitor)

8.1 There are no legal implications that place a duty on local authorities to produce a Rural Housing Enabling Guide.

8.2 The Guide explains the importance of section 106 legal agreements in ensuring the provision of affordable housing for local people in rural areas in perpetuity.

9.0 Risk Management Implications

9.1 The 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 for a varied audience to support collaborative working. There is no stipulation that the Guide must be adhered to but it has been developed with support from internal and external agencies who have helped produce the draft to ensure that the content is practical and helpful for them.

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 villages. One of the Council's corporate priorities is to increase the provision of affordable homes for local people where they are needed 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 work with them 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 rural areas of Cheshire East whilst ensuring that the approach was acceptable and practical to them.
- 10.3 The intention to produce a Rural Housing Enabling Guide was met with a very positive response as it will enable the Council to maximise it's 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 illustrate the recommendation made by the Audit Commission from their inspection in 2010 to improve consistency in our strategic approaches 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 information which supports rural affordable housing in Cheshire East with robust information about housing need and identifies those areas with the greatest housing need. Affordable housing need information is provided on the basis of the 15 areas evidenced in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment as primarily rural.
- 10.5 The Guide highlights five factors which can be used to measure sustainability and which are explained and illustrated within the maps provided with the Guide. The five factors are outlined below
- **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 playgrounds.
 - **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.

These factors combined with the housing needs information then help us identify which parishes have the highest need for affordable housing and are also the most sustainable location for it's development

- 10.6 When developing the Guide consideration was given to the local context and the importance 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 and the Cheshire East Rural Housing Enabler (RHE) has been a valuable resource to help the Council engage with communities.
- 10.7 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 useful flowchart to map the steps required to engage and consult with all interested parties is included in the Guide which should provide guidance especially to Parish Councils about the process to follow to progress development.
- 10.8 The Guide is able to illustrate how local communities are actively engaged in the decisions affecting their community. The Enabler contributes to this by carrying out local housing surveys to evidence local housing need through engagement with individual parishes. A number of local surveys have been surveyed over the past five years. As further surveys are conducted the Guide will become more effective.

11.0 Consultation

- 11.1 Initially a draft Guide was prepared and distributed for consultation to a number of parties. These parties included:

A number of internal Cheshire East Council departments including Spatial Planning, Development Management, Transport and Economic Development and Regeneration.

Cheshire Community Action

All Cheshire East Council Ward Members

All Cheshire East Rural Parish Councils (via Parish Council Clerks)

All the Registered Providers currently managing and/or developing housing in the Cheshire East rural areas

- 11.2 The consultation period was conducted between 22nd May and the 1st July 2012. During this period, as well as the distribution of the Guide, consultees were invited to attend one of two consultation events held at Crewe and Macclesfield. Any comments regarding the Guide could be submitted to the Strategic Housing and Development team in person, e mail, letter or telephone. In addition a 'survey gizmo' was used to collate responses.
- 11.3 All the responses received were collated and assessed and as a result a number of changes were made to the Draft Guide. The changes that were made provided further clarity on the contents of the Guide.

12.0 Access to Information

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

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