

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 11th November 2014
Report of: Strategic Housing Manager
Subject/Title: Macclesfield Town Centre Housing Strategy (Ref CE 14/15-14)
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Don Stockton, Housing and Jobs

1. Report Summary

- 1.1 Housing and the sense of Community have been widely accepted as being of central importance to the success of any town or city in the UK. This view has been acknowledged within the Macclesfield Town Centre vision for which will ultimately position the town for the challenges of the 21st century.
- 1.2 The Macclesfield Town Centre Housing Strategy is designed to support this vision and demonstrate the role which Housing will play in the rejuvenation of Macclesfield.
- 1.3 The strategy itself has grown out of the **In-Town living project** as a need was identified to provide strategic guidance towards articulating the vision of the project which aims to bring empty / underutilised residential buildings and sites back into use. The strategy also provides specific information on the population and housing make-up of the town as well as to evidence the requirement for further housing in the area. The strategic direction links into the **Brownfield** project and the agreed approach approved by Cabinet in September 2014
- 1.4 The Macclesfield Town Centre Housing Strategy and the In-Town Living project aims together will produce several important benefits which will consequently support the regeneration in the town. Direct benefits would include:
 - Ensuring a vibrant and financially resilient town centre as well as supporting the local economy in the town both in the day and at night,
 - It would bring empty / underutilised buildings back into a useable condition thereby improving the overall look of the town centre areas,
 - It would also naturally provide increased pedestrian footfall in town centre which would also improve security for both residents and business owners alike.
- 1.5 Several actions have been identified within the strategy which will essentially govern the next stages of the In-Town Living project. A summary of those actions is as follows:

- Research must be conducted to identify further empty / underutilised properties & sites throughout the identified focus areas in the town centre and then converse with the owners of those properties to ascertain the barriers which have prevented re-use of those properties.
- Work must then be done utilising currently available tools such as the Council's Empty Homes Loan, which can assist owners to bring properties back into a useable condition.
- Assistance must be given to registered providers (RP's) seeking to bring empty units back into use as affordable housing which would then be allocated off Cheshire Homechoice.
- Assist ongoing work with sub-regional and internal partners to create a standardised but enhanced Empty Homes Tool-Kit which can then be presented to property owners and show them what assistance is available.
- Seek to attract additional funding streams to Macclesfield to support further In-Town living developments and link with other Macclesfield projects.

Although Macclesfield has been selected as a pilot area for the In-Town living project the underlying premise is that it can be reproduced in any of the towns across the borough.

2. Consultation Outcome

- 2.1** Following approval for consultation the draft strategy was made available for public viewing and comment over a 6 week period.
- 2.2** Consultation has also been ongoing with the members of the In-Town living partnership group throughout the drafting process. Furthermore, comments have also been sought from Macclesfield members prior to public release.
- 2.3** The consultation process has resulted in several enhancements to the final document including to some of the information within the strategy, and a redefinition of the "focus areas" which were originally identified by the project group.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1** That the final version of the strategy (*included within this report*) is approved by the cabinet.

4. Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1** Approval of the Macclesfield Town Centre Housing Strategy will provide the catalyst towards enabling the Council to:
 - Articulate the vision, aims and objectives of the In Town Living project, demonstrating how housing is going to play its part in the regeneration of Macclesfield.

- Map the current empty or underutilised residential and commercial properties within the identified areas in order to identify owners and try to work with them to bring the properties back into use. Empty properties are a wasted commodity and in an area where there is high housing need for both affordable and private rented accommodation we need to find innovative solutions to bring them back into use.
- Realise **Outcome 5** of the Council's Three Year Plan: *People Live Well and For Longer*.
- Proactively provide a boost to **Outcome 2** of the Council's Three Year Plan: *Cheshire East has a strong and Resilient Economy*.
- Realise Priority 5 of the Council's Three Year Plan: *Securing housing that is locally-led, community-based, and meets local needs*.

5. Wards Affected

5.1 Macclesfield Central

6. Local Ward Members

6.1 Councillor Ken Edwards Councillor Janet Jackson

7. Policy Implications

7.1 The Macclesfield Town Centre Housing Strategy links to a number of other strategic work packages which are currently ongoing and includes:

- The Macclesfield Town Centre Vision, which identifies the needs and challenges faced by regeneration in Macclesfield Town Centre.
- The Housing Strategy – contributing towards the priorities to facilitate the development of both market and affordable homes and to make the best use of our existing housing stock.
- The Local Plan - Housing is mentioned substantially within the proposed local plan document which further enhances its position as an integral part of strategic planning throughout the borough and on a more local level in Macclesfield.
- The Vulnerable and Older Persons Housing Strategy – There is an identified need to provide supported accommodation within the Macclesfield area.
- Brownfield development work – Within Cheshire East there are a number of Brownfield sites located in our town centres (including Macclesfield) which would lend themselves towards residential re-development.

7.2 The strategy will set the direct of travel and articulate the vision of the In-Town Living project group and demonstrate the part that Housing can play in the regeneration of Macclesfield.

8. Implications for Rural Communities

- 8.1** As the strategy focuses on Macclesfield Town Centre, bringing empty or underutilised buildings back into residential use there would be no implications for rural communities other than to say that increasing the number of residential units available in the town centre would go some way to reducing the need to build on greenfield land in the future.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1** The Strategy highlights the existing funding opportunities, which can be accessed by owners of empty homes. This includes working with Registered Providers who can access Homes and Communities funding and also Cheshire East's Empty Homes Assistance scheme, which provides loans of up to £10k. This scheme forms part of the Private Sector Assistance capital allocation.
- 9.2** Action MTCHS 5 contained within the strategy's Action plan is to seek to attract funding sources to support In Town Living development for example institutional investment. The Housing department has recently submitted a business case for a capital allocation of £150,000 which if approved would provide a strong financial base and would ultimately assist towards successfully realising MTCHS 5.

10. Legal Implications

- 10.1** There are no statutory requirements to produce or publish Town Centre Housing Strategies. There may be legal implications in relation to the actions, especially around possible future funding for example State Aid issues. These will be considered when developing the business case for individual projects.
- 10.2** It is noted that a consultation exercise has been undertaken. Case law has established four principles for consultation:
- (i) It must be undertaken at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage
 - (ii) It must include sufficient reasons to allow those consulted to give intelligent consideration and an intelligent response
 - (iii) Adequate time must be given for the consultation; and
 - (iv) The product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account when the ultimate decision is made.

Cabinet must therefore satisfy itself that the consultation has been conducted correctly and take the results of the consultation into account in reaching the decision requested by this report.

11. Risk Management

- 11.1** It has been acknowledged that if no action was taken to regenerate Macclesfield, the town would run a very serious risk of further decline. Furthermore, there is the potential that should commercial / retail vacancy rates continue to rise there would be increased security concerns for those businesses which survive. Those concerns would not only be in a physical respect i.e. for the safety of their premises but also in a financial regard as there would potentially be further reductions in town centre footfall and consequently less money flowing through the area.
- 11.2** In a financial respect, with less money in the town there would be a further knock on effect which could lead to Macclesfield losing more money and investment to other towns in the region, having a continued detrimental impact.

12. Background & Options

- 12.1** The Macclesfield “In Town Living” group was established in 2013. From the beginning it was clear that in order for In-Town living to be a success the project must have a collective approach across both the private and public sectors. As a result a partnership has been created between Cheshire East Council, Peaks & Plains Housing Trust, Symphony Housing, as well as a number of local private entrepreneurs, and consultants. All members of the partnership have contributed their professional knowledge and experiences to ensure that the project is a success.
- 12.2** The group have identified a number of aims including:
- Identify suitable empty / underutilised residential & commercial properties in town centre area and work with the owners of those properties to bring them back into a useable condition,
 - Assist registered providers to deliver Affordable Housing units in the town centre,
 - Seek to introduce a mixture of tenure types into the town centre area,
 - Stimulate interest for future projects in Macclesfield Town Centre area,
- 12.3** Completion of the Macclesfield Town Centre Housing Strategy is the next phase of the In-Town Living project and enables us to achieve the aims above.

13. Access to Information

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

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