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To Andrew Hall
Asset Services Manager
Cambridgeshire County Council
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21 February 2008

Our Ref DCS/kjb

Dear Mr Hall

The Cambridge sub-Regional Housing Board is a senior officer group of Local Authorities and partner agencies, set up to work jointly and collaboratively on strategic housing issues and sub-regional delivery of housing growth targets across seven districts.

The Cambridge sub Regional Housing Board has recently been discussing land resources in general, including the County's policy on the use of its own land holdings. The Board have asked me as chair to pass on our conclusions and to ask the County to review its policy on land holdings and disposal.

We fully appreciate that the County, in common with all local authorities, have a range of functions and need to allocate their resources in line with a number of different objectives and requirements. However, we feel that this is an appropriate opportunity to reconsider the County's use of its land assets, whether or not they are currently earmarked for potential disposal, in the context of our respective contributions to shared objectives. The issues we would wish to raise concern both the availability of County owned land and its terms of disposal.

We feel that the increased importance of the LAA, including pooled budgets, together with the move to Comprehensive Area Assessments, argues strongly for a review of the use of the County's land assets in the context of our relative contributions to shared objectives. Central to this will be the explicit commitment by the Audit Commission to use the CAA to assess how well organisations are working with their partners to share resources where that improves efficiency and effectiveness.

The importance of potential development land cannot be overstressed. Not only does it represent an asset with significant monetary value, it is also a very scarce

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resource given the considerable environmental and other land use planning constraints which restrict development potential in so many locations.

The control of publicly owned land offers certainty over the timescale and use of that land which is not available with land levered in through planning gain. The existence of free public land can both stretch the funding available from other sources (eg the Housing Corporation) and by creating certainty about delivery and timing can increase the chances of discretionary funds being allocated to schemes in this local area

Equally, the timing and location of land being negotiated in conjunction with planning applications is necessarily determined by private sector investment decisions and may not meet the requirements of provider agencies in developing appropriate housing solutions.

The publication of the shared *Vision for Cambridgeshire 2007-2021* is an appropriate opportunity to review the assets and resources being used by partner agencies. The partners in the Cambridgeshire sub-Regional Housing Board (CHRB) have identified a number of areas where their discretionary contributions to housing related projects are directly supporting activities which are the primary responsibility of County and health providers. This helps to relieve pressures on social care and health budgets as well as helping to achieve your primary objectives.

Clearly the mainstream provision of general needs housing for a range of households contributes directly to a range of shared objectives. The “headline objective” under the Growth category in the vision statement refers to meeting housing need through the provision of new affordable housing and adaptations to existing dwellings. The provision of new affordable housing, and the management of existing homes, meets this objective directly. In addition, the provision of good standard, affordable housing contributes to-

- supporting families, including lone parents
- maintaining sustainable, diverse communities
- promoting good health
- encouraging educational attainment and participation in the workforce

However, the contribution of district councils goes beyond their contribution to the development of general needs housing into direct, tangible contributions to specialist housing provision and related services. Examples include-

-the provision of free land for the development of supported housing including extra care sheltered housing, homes for people with physical disabilities accommodation for continuing drinkers and hospital re-provision.

-subsidy to meet the costs of sheltered housing scheme managers, over and above the amount supplied through Supporting People.

-subsidy to Home Improvement Agencies in addition to Supporting People funding, and discretionary grant funding, to support disabled people in independent living.

-subsidy to floating support schemes, in addition to Supporting People funding, to enable vulnerable people to live independently.

-subsidised accommodation leased to voluntary agencies supporting vulnerable people

-grant aid to enable women and children to live safely in secure refuges, to provide single homeless and rough sleepers day provision and night shelter accommodation etc

The allocation of these discretionary resources directly contributes to important aspects of our shared objectives in addition to those listed above including-

-maintaining people in independent living rather than more institutional settings.

-reducing health inequalities.

-minimising hospital admissions and preventing delayed discharge from hospitals.

This does not take account of the public service workers who are housed under various "Key Worker" initiatives. Some of these will be in properties which have benefited from district council discretionary funding.

We understand that in the current project to identify County owned land which could provide future travellers sites, land with alternative development potential will not be considered. This is particularly disappointing, both in terms of our shared objectives in this matter and in the light of government guidance in circular 1/2006 and elsewhere. The Circular highlights the importance of public land and co-operation between authorities and the sustainability issues highlighted by the Circular suggest that suitable potential sites for Travellers could well be expected to have alternative development potential.

The lists of discretionary allocations by districts, and the joint objectives these address, are not intended to be exhaustive. Hopefully they help to illustrate the breadth of issues that we have considered and the importance of developing appropriate housing solutions.

District councils have relatively little land holdings left and have already disposed of significant parcels of development land to housing associations at discounted prices for a variety of affordable housing schemes. The importance of maintaining this supply-at a viable cost-cannot be overstated.

I understand that your Cabinet is due to discuss this matter in the near future and I would be grateful if you would bring this letter to their attention for them to consider. If you require any further information, or clarification of any of these points, please get in touch with me.

Yours sincerely



Liz Bisset
Chair, Cambridge sub-Regional Housing Board (CRHB)