

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meeting held on 3 September 2003)

1. FORDINGBRIDGE : PROVISION OF A SKATEBOARD FACILITY (REPORT A)

The Cabinet has agreed to a request from Fordingbridge Town Council for funding of £40,000 from developers contributions towards a skate board facility in the recreation ground at Fordingbridge. The funds will be released on the letting of the scheme.

The local community have put significant effort into work with local young people to research the provision of these facilities. There is no other facility in the town and the need for facilities for young people is supported by a wide range of agencies that are working together in the town. The site is well located for use by young people being accessible from the village but not surrounded by housing.

Members agreed that this scheme was an excellent example of partnership working and was a very good use of developers' contributions.

2. TRINITY CHURCH RINGWOOD : USE OF DEVELOPERS' CONTRIBUTIONS (REPORT B)

The Cabinet has agreed to a request from Trinity Church, Ringwood for funding of £10,000 from developers' contributions for the provision of a garden area adjacent to the church hall.

Trinity Church lies between Christchurch Road and the Quomp at the rear of the site and provides a well used open walkway between housing and the shops/services in Ringwood. The garden will support the community uses of the building but will also provide a publicly accessible open area for general use during the day. As this funding will be an allocation to a third party and not the town council the Cabinet has agreed the money subject to the completion of a community use Agreement with the church for a period of a least forty years and the detailing of the scheme being to the satisfaction of the Director of Community Services.

Members noted that this scheme had the support of the whole community and was a further example of excellent partnership working.

3. HANGER FARM, TOTTON : OUTCOME OF TENDERS (REPORT C)

At its meeting on 2 April 2003 the Cabinet agreed the allocation of funds to a comprehensive scheme for the development of facilities at Hanger Farm, Totton. Since then the scheme has been let for tender. The result of the tendering process has shown a significant shortfall on the Barn aspect of the scheme but scope for savings with the park aspect.

As a result the Town Council has successfully sought additional funds from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the Barn. There was no net increase in funding required from this Council but there was a need for a re-allocation of funding between developers' contributions for community facilities and those for open space. There was no net increase in funding required.

The timescales for this scheme are very tight and in view of the ‘cost neutral’ nature of the changes in funding the Director of Resources, as a matter of urgency agreed under Financial Regulation 2.4 to the re-allocation of funding as set out below.

SOURCE	PREVIOUS (£)	CURRENT (£)
NFDC capital	£170,000	170,000
Community developers contributions (first allocation)	33,000	33,000
Community developers contributions	114,000	174,000
Open Space developers contributions	1,838,000	1,778,000
TOTAL	2,155,000	2,155,000

4. SITE THRESHOLDS FOR PROVISION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING (REPORT D)

The Government is consulting on changes it proposes to make to its current planning guidance relating to the provision of affordable housing through the planning process. The aim of the proposed change is a policy framework that will secure more affordable housing as part of the delivery of agreed housing numbers.

The closing date for comments and responses is 31 October and a full response will be drafted and agreed with members in due course. The Economy and Planning Review Panel will be asked for views at their meeting on 17 September and the Cabinet will agree the formal response at their meeting on 1 October 2003.

One of the proposed changes in the guidance relates to site thresholds for requiring the provision of affordable housing as part of new residential or mixed use development. In view of the forthcoming public inquiry into Alterations to the New Forest District Local Plan this matter requires a decision in advance of other issues.

The Cabinet has therefore considered proposed changes to PPG3 Housing : Consultation Paper on influencing the size, type and affordability of housing. Whilst the whole Cabinet supported the need for more affordable housing and, the consequent requirement to maintain a flow of contributions from developers, there were differing views as to the most appropriate way to facilitate this.

The Housing Portfolio Holder said that given the level of land available in the district he would support a site threshold of 2 or more houses and with no size limitation. He said that the current government guidance did not assist in the provision of affordable housing for those most in need. Local Authority Social Housing Grant had been withdrawn and next year local authorities would not be allowed to use bed and breakfast accommodation. A radical solution to the problem was needed. He was of the view that 2 or more dwellings would still be commercially acceptable to developers who would continue to want to build in an area as desirable as the New Forest.

The Economy & Planning Portfolio Holder said that he did not support the proposed changes. The recommendation as set out in the report could be applied to single dwellings on sites of 0.17 hectares or more and as such would inhibit re-building of run-down dwellings in the New Forest to the detriment of housing standards generally. He was of the view that the proposals, if applied to potential developments of 2 – 4 houses, would place sufficient burden on the developer or land owner to

inhibit the development from the outset, and the results would be a reduction in the availability of new housing generally. He said that a site threshold of below 5 would give viability problems to developers, and would force them to go for higher densities on sites which would change the character of the area. The current Government guidance on higher density housing could further exacerbate this problem.

Members were informed that single dwelling replacements were dealt with under other planning policies and were not subject to any affordable housing requirements. The proposals in the report only applied to towns and built up areas. The Council had a separate Rural Exceptions Policy for other areas.

The Health and Social Inclusion Portfolio Holder agreed that, if the site threshold was dropped to below 5 dwellings, this would discourage landowners and developers from coming forward and there would be less affordable housing coming onto the market. She was of the view that, in order to overcome viability problems, developers would opt for higher densities on sites that would then change the character of the area.

The Crime and Disorder Portfolio Holder said that he supported the recommendation as proposed in the report of a site threshold of 5 or more dwellings or 0.17 of a hectare. The effect of this change on towns and villages should be monitored with further changes made in future years if required.

The Environment Portfolio Holder was of the view that the current policy had not delivered the amount of affordable housing that was needed. He supported the proposal that the site threshold should be amended to 2 or more dwellings with no area threshold.

After discussion the Cabinet agreed to recommend to the Council that the most appropriate way forward would be to amend the site threshold to 5 or more dwellings but with no minimum area threshold specified in the expectation that the matter would be further debated at Council.

RECOMMENDED:

That at the Inquiry into the First Alteration to the New Forest District Local Plan, the Inspector be advised that the Council would wish to revise policy AH-1, replacing the current site thresholds of 15 or more dwellings, or 0.5 of a hectare or more, with a threshold of 5 or more dwellings, when this is permitted by revision to PPG3 : Housing.

5. DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS IN RINGWOOD TOWN CENTRE – PETITION (REPORT E)

The Council at their meeting on 21 July 2003 received a petition from the Ringwood Redevelopment Action Group, on behalf of the business people in Ringwood, expressing their dissatisfaction to the current proposals for the development of Ringwood and requesting a referendum regarding the planning application lodged by UCG Ringwood.

There are currently two planning applications submitted by the owners of the Furlong Centre (UCG/UCG Ringwood), both of which remain undetermined.

Members noted that the proposal involved land that was substantially owned by the Council and therefore, it was for the Council to decide on the most appropriate use of that land. The Council had not entered into any agreement with the developer about the use of the land. The Council had asked the developer to withdraw the application but they had declined.

Members agreed that, whilst understanding the concerns of local residents and businesses that had prompted the request for a referendum, that would not be the correct way in which to determine a planning application. They agreed that the Ringwood Redevelopment Action Group be informed that the Council did not support the request to hold a referendum.

The Cabinet has however asked the Planning Development Control Committee to determine the particular planning applications (refs: 68762 and 75580) as soon as possible.

The Economy and Planning Portfolio Holder said that the Council would be considering their own proposals for redevelopment in Ringwood and residents and businesses in Ringwood would be fully consulted on all options. The Chairman confirmed that the Council would initially develop a concept brief and ask developers to put forward proposals based on that. Residents, businesses and stakeholders would all be consulted for their views.

6. RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY (REPORT F)

The Cabinet has agreed a revised Risk Management Strategy that embraces what the Council are already doing in terms of risk management and seeks to ensure that processes are more demonstrable and consistently applied across the Council.

As part of the Risk Management Consultancy the Council's insurers, in line with the insurance renewal terms, will assist with implementation of the Strategy and any training requirements arising.

**Cllr M J Kendal
CHAIRMAN**