

Councillor T Revill
Chair
Regeneration & Environment
Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Councillor Glyn Jones
Deputy Mayor & Cabinet Member for Housing
Tel: 01302 734781
E-Mail: glyn.jones@doncaster.gov.uk
Our Ref: GJ/BS
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Dear Councillor Revill

Thank you for your letter dated 22 March 2013 setting out recommendations further to an informal Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny meeting in February 2013. I will respond to each of the recommendations in turn as follows:

1 That further consideration is given to planning policy and land values in order to encourage more development in the Borough.

The Council's Strategic Housing Team will continue to work with Planning to ensure that housing delivery across all tenures is maximised, with a particular focus on ensuring that appropriate options for accommodation for those in need of social housing are considered and progressed.

Strategic Housing have carried out a comprehensive audit and assessment of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) land and other non HRA Council land and assets in order to identify:

- Sites that can be brought forward for housing development.
- How such sites might be developed in order to maximise delivery.
- The wider economic benefits of housing development for the local economy and the Council itself (for example, increases in New Homes Bonus income and council tax receipts), and finally,
- Disposal mechanism options for those sites deemed un-suitable for housing development, the team work closely with the Councils Assets and Property team and looks to maximise the capital receipt received from land and asset disposals.

Over the past 12 months Strategic Housing have also been developing 'New Delivery Model' options for accelerating new housing delivery across all sectors and tenures. We have engaged Anthony Collins Solicitors to advise on similar work being carried out by other local authorities and to recommend a suite of options which would be appropriate for Doncaster given the challenges and constraints of the local housing market.

- 2 That further investigation should be carried out by officers as to what is being done by other local authorities nationwide, which schemes are proving successful and what could be applied by Doncaster Council.**

Strategic Housing have been investigating a 'New Delivery Model' which would work across all sectors and tenures. As previously suggested, we are working with Anthony Collins Solicitors and the draft proposals for consideration will be available in October 2013.

- 3 That consideration should be given to raising further awareness and establishing a dedicated resource to provide specialist advice on mortgages and related financial advice.**

As a Council, and given the current revenue resource issues, the Council will continue to signpost customers who specialise in providing appropriate specialist advice and assistance. We will continue to work with the banking sector and other organisations, through the work of Business Doncaster and the corporate Financial Inclusion Group, to ensure that services are available to those who require financial assistance.

- 4 That we review the feasibility and level of risk of Doncaster Council providing mortgages and loans to enable residents within the Borough to purchase their own homes or to act as a guarantor.**

The Council currently does not have the resources available to either provide mortgages, or act as guarantor in respect of customer lending. As previously stated, the Council will continue to signpost to organisations providing the required financial advice and products.

- 5 That a report is brought back to a formal Panel meeting in June 2013 as part of the 2013/2014 work plan outlining various options for proposals and schemes that Doncaster Council could become involved in. For example, providing s106 free lands, purchasing repossessed properties and providing mortgages etc.**

I am content for Officers to continue with ongoing work to look at ways of ensuring that both developers and residents have appropriate access to finance and that schemes that could assist purchasers to buy their own homes and to report to future formal panels meetings to provide progress updates.

With regard to s106 obligations, these will continue to be considered on a site by site basis in accordance with current planning policy. We will continue to work with banks and other lenders to prevent repossessions by assisting current occupiers in arrears through the Mortgage Rescue scheme, and to consider purchasing empty repossessed properties through the empty properties work.

We will continue to maximise opportunities for residents to access home ownership through shared ownership / shared equity schemes offered by developers. We will also continue to acquire affordable housing units on new development sites which are being delivered through s106 agreements – a role which had previously been exclusively provided by Housing Associations.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Glyn Jones
Deputy Mayor, Cabinet Member for Housing