

Appendix A: Stakeholder Consultation

Introduction

- A.1 Community engagement workshops were planned as an integral part of the LCB West SHMA. Invitations were extended to a range of local representatives to attend one of two half day sessions to discuss the needs of sub-groups of the local population and to enhance the information available about current and future housing requirements and aspirations.
- A.2 A broad range of local stakeholders were invited by the Steering Group to the meetings. The list included representatives from the district councils, voluntary groups involved in working with target sub groups of the population, strategic planning, private sector housing and further education. Issues associated with six sub-groups of the population were explicitly discussed:
- young people and students;
 - key workers;
 - older people and people with support needs;
 - people who are homeless;
 - families and first time buyers; and
 - BME residents and migrant workers.
- A.3 The aim was to attract 30 people to each workshop, one held at the Dacorum Borough Council offices in Hemel Hempstead and the other at the St Albans District Council offices in St Albans. The first meeting attracted 15 attendees with ten of these representing public sector bodies. The second workshop attracted 18 attendees, with nine of these representing public sector bodies.
- A.4 The material collected from these discussions is useful in providing some background to the SHMA study and in particular to pointing to current issues in the local area. However, the findings need to be treated with caution as they represent the views of individuals, based on their own local experience, and it would be unwise to assume that these observations are general to the whole population of the area. Nevertheless, common themes emerged from these discussions which are summarized below and can form the basis for more future work.

Key Findings

Affordability of Local Housing

- A.5 All stakeholders emphasised the lack of a range of affordable housing in the area for a large number of local people.
- A.6 New housing is often taken up by commuters from London, moving out to the commuter belt. There are concerns that Hertfordshire was helping to solve London's housing problems.

- A.7 There is a growing trend for young people to continue for longer in the private rented sector (HMOs) and for young couples on one income, with young children, to live in unsuitable accommodation.
- A.8 Cost of intermediate housing was often too high for local people.
- A.9 There is increasing evidence of rising levels of debt associated with housing costs and implications for homelessness.

Economic Effects of High Accommodation Costs

- A.10 Local stakeholders indicated that local employers, across all sectors, are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain staff because of the high cost of housing.
- A.11 The majority of local businesses are SME's with less than 200 employees who will consider relocation if costs become too high or they are unable to recruit.
- A.12 Increasing movement of people in and out of the area commuting to work from home, means increased costs, both direct and indirect, for businesses and individuals.

Flexibility of Housing

- A.13 A number of representatives discussed the lack of flexibility in the types of housing on offer. This applied as much for vulnerable groups as for the general population.
- A.14 People with special needs, whether for adapted housing or support within that housing, are provided with appropriate housing based on an assessment at a point in time. Their needs may change, but changing accommodation to reflect those needs is difficult.
- A.15 Strategic developments in adult care and Supporting People, are moving away from institutional care to support for people to maintain their independence in their own homes. Appropriate housing is fundamental to continued independent living for many vulnerable groups.
- A.16 Social housing representatives described the lack of local alternatives for older people to downsize into more appropriate housing.

Homelessness Issues

- A.17 Homelessness is increasing in some areas due to a migration of homeless people from London.
- A.18 It appears that improved provision of services for this group of people attracts more people to the area.
- A.19 There is a growing problem of hidden homelessness, for example, young people 'sofa surfing' for extended periods of time because they are unable to afford accommodation.
- A.20 Some new migrants from the EU accession countries are presenting as homeless as their lack of residency means that they are not a priority on housing waiting lists.

Affordability of Local Housing

- A.21 Affordability was identified by all stakeholders as a significant issue for a large number of people in the area, but particularly for young people, single income young families and those on low, fixed incomes.

Very few first time buyers are able to buy locally, which means that local young people are often forced to move away.

- A.22 There is a growing trend for young people in employment, to continue to live in privately rented, multiple occupancy housing and for young families to live in unsuitable accommodation, for example, studio apartments, because of the dearth of affordable, first time properties.
- A.23 Newly built one and two bed flats, targeted at first time buyers, are often bought by buyers from London, seeking more affordable housing in the commuter belt, rather than by local people, who are priced out of the local market. Alternatively, they are bought by landlords for private renting.
- A.24 Service charges for new flats can be very high and this plus the mortgage make them unaffordable for buyers.
- A.25 Housing that is developed as 'affordable' is often too expensive for local people on low incomes.
- A.26 Shared ownership properties are too expensive and not fulfilling the need.
- A.27 There were concerns that people were risking serious debt problems by over-extending their expenditure on housing and an increase in advice on debt problems was noted by local advice agencies and the social housing professionals.
- A.28 The problem of hidden homelessness was also raised, with young people 'sofa surfing' for extended periods because of their inability to find suitable accommodation.
- A.29 There is a need to bridge the gap between social housing and privately owned or rented housing, as social housing cannot meet demand as the affordability gap widens.

Economic Effects of High Accommodation Costs

- A.30 Local stakeholders from the business sector underlined the significant role that affordable and appropriate housing has on economic development of the area.
- A.31 There is evidence that indicates that local employers, across all sectors, are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain staff because of the high cost of housing.
- A.32 People who work in the area, are often forced to access more affordable housing outside the area, which has an impact on public transport, congestion and wider sustainability issues.
- A.33 The majority of businesses in the area are SMEs with less than 200 employees, who will move their business elsewhere if recruitment continues to be a major problem, with significant long term consequences for the economy of the area.

Sub Groups of the Population

Older People and People with Support Needs

- A.34 Current strategies associated with provision for older people and vulnerable groups needing support, emphasise a move away from residential care to supported independent living in the person's own home. This is also supported by an increasing number of individuals holding their own budgets to purchase their support.

- A.35 Local stakeholders identified a gap in housing provision for the most vulnerable people, i.e. people with long term mental illness, long term homeless or rough sleepers, people with substance misuse issues, people with severe learning difficulties. These people not only need appropriate accommodation but also need high levels of continuing support.
- A.36 In the case of people with a long term mental illness, the present 'nomination rights' accommodation is not suitable and often in the wrong location (70% in LCB (West) and 30% in LCB (East)). The strategic intent is to house people across the area with staff living either on site or as locally as possible.
- A.37 The difficulties of implementing good plans because of attitudes to some vulnerable groups of people were highlighted. Current good practice was cited where units have been built as part of new, mixed developments and users re-housed at the same time as other new owners had moved, avoiding planning objections for some change of use applications.
- A.38 Strategies based on supporting people in their own homes, or in small group accommodation, will be dependent on recruiting carers. Affordability of housing is a key issue for this group of workers, who are often on low incomes, and need to be able to access their workplace easily, because of the needs of their clients.
- A.39 People with support needs want appropriate accommodation, which can be easily changed or modified when their needs change. There is a high demand for smaller adapted units.
- A.40 There are very few adapted properties available for people with a disability to rent privately.
- A.41 Lack of supported housing means clients are often housed away from support networks of family and friends. There is a need for more places spread across the whole of the LCB (West) area.
- A.42 It was suggested that the current provision is inflexible with older people in owner occupied properties which are too big for their current needs, but no appropriate very local provision which would enable them to move and downsize.
- A.43 The same is true in the social housing sector, where authorities want to maximise the use of their housing stock but incentives to move are often not taken up because suitable alternatives are not available.
- A.44 Sheltered accommodation is often too small for the needs of older people and is often not suitable for their longer term needs. Often lone older people are only eligible for one bedroom accommodation when they want two bedrooms to accommodate visitors and family.
- A.45 The majority of new developments are providing one and two bedroom apartments aimed at first time buyers and it is not viable to provide bungalows and older persons' accommodation.

People who are Homeless

- A.46 Homelessness is concentrated in the towns across the area and particularly in Watford.
- A.47 Homeless people move out of London and end up in the LCB (West) area, increasing the numbers needing accommodation and support. There was also the feeling that the provision of good support services attracts more people.
- A.48 Increasingly, workers with the homeless are citing debt as a cause of homelessness, rather than, for example, young people being evicted from the parental home.

- A.49 There is a need for more foyers and accommodation that comes with specialist support, rehabilitation and training to prepare clients for independent living.
- A.50 Some clients need short-term housing solutions, especially following relationship breakdowns, before their first step back onto the property ladder.
- A.51 Managing expectations of clients is an issue with homeless applicants and people on waiting lists have higher expectations than people accessing night shelters who are at crisis point and willing to accept any type of housing.
- A.52 Local Authorities could do even more if they were financially rewarded by Government for successfully addressing homelessness issues.

New Migrants and BME Residents

- A.53 Migrant workers from the new EU accession countries are taking lower paid jobs and are living in privately rented accommodation.
- A.54 There are some concerns that some of them may be in rented, shared accommodation with no formal contracts, making them vulnerable tenants.
- A.55 As migrant workers do not qualify for residency points and are therefore a low priority on housing waiting lists, they present more often as homeless.
- A.56 Local stakeholders identified that applicants for housing from the BME community tended to need larger family housing and were often very specific about the areas in which they wanted to be housed.
- A.57 Some BME elders want one or two bed flats, but with some living space for communal use.
- A.58 Younger members of BME communities often want to live independently, but within the local area, so that they can continue to support their parents and other members of the family.

Young People and Students

- A.59 There are tensions in the local resident population in Hatfield regarding the number of students taking up private rented accommodation.
- A.60 Former sheltered schemes could be ideal housing for single young people.
- A.61 Young people are having to live at home for longer due to of the cost of accommodation. Employed young people in their late twenties and thirties are still living with parents because they simply cannot afford to leave home.
- A.62 Young people in first jobs continue to live in shared rented accommodation. Good quality, well managed HMOs can be decent, first time accommodation for young people.
- A.63 Many young people are under the misapprehension that they are entitled to free housing and that they will automatically receive assistance and support.
- A.64 Vulnerable young people often find it difficult to comply with their responsibilities under supported housing contracts in, for example, foyers.

Families

A.65 Families in overcrowded accommodation in London are able to register in Hertfordshire and are considered a higher priority than some families already living in the area who have been registered for longer.

Key Workers

A.66 The definition of key workers is too narrowly drawn, does not include some critical categories, for example, carers, and the conditions to access this housing are too restrictive.

A.67 Definitions based on salary bands related to local incomes would be more realistic.

A.68 Key worker housing is not affordable for part time key workers.

Launch Event Stakeholder Comments

A.69 A total of 57 stakeholders involved in housing (including house builders, estate and letting agents, RSL's and national, regional and local agencies) attended a study launch event in which the study was introduced and stakeholders were encouraged to engage with the process. During the event delegates were invited to post comments on three topics which were:

- what are the barriers to delivering new housing?;
- what are the key issues for the SHMA to consider?; and
- what are the problems with existing housing?

A.70 The posted comments are given below:

What are the barriers to delivering new housing?

- green belt;
- land value will dictate mix, not demand;
- parking – more parking – less housing, but people won't give up their cars;
- political will;
- funding;
- concerns about social sustainability and capacity of existing infrastructure;
- planning departments;
- you've got plenty of permissions- build them;
- capacity in building industry, especially energy efficient technology;
- reduction in Housing Corporation grant rates;
- land costs and availability;
- planning restriction and inconsistencies;
- resident opposition – how do we encourage local development with local support?;
- clear policy direction at local, regional and national level; and

- landowners being overoptimistic about land value.

What are the key issues for the SHMA to consider?

- larger units- home working and bedrooms acquiring multi-function;
- is the shortage of family housing long term or an inter-generational issue?;
- more home working requiring spare room – office;
- apply 80:20 rule – not just the minorities;
- consider housing type and occupancy levels;
- rural affordable housing;
- are 1- beds obsolete?;
- clearly distinguish need and demand;;
- addressing high-end ‘executive’ needs as well as ‘affordable’;
- housing with employment – what attracts to an area?;
- appropriate mix of house types;
- migrant workers accommodation needs;
- overall housing need – market and affordable and how to meet all needs fairly; and
- monitor the data after the initial SHMA.

What are the problems with existing housing?

- under-occupation;
- too expensive;
- too many halted development;
- too few homes suitable for people with disabilities;
- review of tenancy/tenancy management;
- lack of maintenance in private sector;
- media influence, e.g. location, location, location... property ladder and positive but unrealistic images of money to be made from development –hypes up prices;
- a need to develop incentive for those in social rented stock who can afford to move out;
- lack of opportunity for movement through the stock due to lack of range of intermediate products;
- too many flats;
- that home ownership is the be all and end all of housing;
- not enough family housing; and
- land value driven by commercial factors – not necessarily demand.