

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Housing Task and Finish Forum held Online via the zoom app on 31 March 2021

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.20 am

15 Public speaking

There were no members of the public wishing to speak.

16 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 December 2020 were confirmed as a true record.

17 Declarations of interest

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Councillor Dan Ledger, Personal, Member of the working group and had been in discussion with Middlemarch.

Declarations of interest.

Councillor Olly Davey, Personal, Exmouth Town Councillor.

18 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency raised at the meeting.

19 Confidential/exempt items

There were no confidential or exempt items.

20 Feedback from Member Working Group meeting with Torbay Council's Housing Company representatives

The Service Lead – Place, Assets and Commercialisation advised the Forum that the member working group had met with representatives from Torbay Council's housing company (Torvista Homes) the previous day. The TaFF were reminded that the member working group comprised of Councillors Ledger, Thomas and Moulding. The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment, Strategic Lead – Finance and the Service Lead – Place, Assets and Commercialisation had also attended the meeting.

The Service Lead – Place, Assets and Commercialisation explained that Torbay Council had previously undertaken a voluntary transfer of its housing stock so was starting with no social housing. The housing company (Torvista Homes) took two years to set up and aimed to have stock of 560 units after five years. It had 360 firm sites, with 200 yet to be identified. This included land already transferred to the Council and other infill sites which it would look to infill. It brought lots of delivery methods together and borrowing was from the Council and the PWLB (Public Works Loan Board). Torbay Council had significant resource working on the project. It was noted that the Service Lead – Place,

Assets and Commercialisation had presented a range of possible mechanisms to grow EDDC stock to the last meeting of the TaFF, and that these had all been broadly considered by Torbay Council. The key messages to take from the meeting with Torbay Council's housing company representatives was that in order to be successful the appropriate skills, capacity and finance were required, as well as 'buy in' from all. It was also important to acknowledge that it could take five years for a housing company to be established and to fulfil its objectives.

The Chair echoed the comments of the Service Lead – Place, Assets and Commercialisation and remarked that it had been a very interesting meeting. Torbay Council also offered an incentivising scheme to incentivise people to move to smaller, new developments and help free-up larger housing stock.

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment commented that Torbay Council had been bold and clearly focused on meeting housing need. This vision was backed up with £40m finance and the aim of the housing company was to be a social housing provider, as opposed to income generation. The main driver was poverty. There was an acceptance of the housing company being loss making in the first five years. Torvista Homes Ltd was a not for profit, wholly owned subsidiary of TDA and had the advantage of being able to lean on the reliance and ability of TDA. TDA was created by Torbay Council in 2011. It was a collection of companies offering a wide range of diversified services spanning business and property services, workspace management and affordable housing. It was a social enterprise with a board of directors encompassing skills from a range of disciplines. Members were urged to look at the [TDA website](#).

Members agreed that the housing company should be given a chance, with at least a five year opportunity for it to become income generating. The scale of resource needed to be right, to enable the right people to be in the right place. Commitment was needed over the medium to long term in order to offer stability and continuity.

It was noted that EDDC was a registered provider and had a vehicle in terms of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to deliver affordable housing, and had been doing this in relatively small numbers. The HRA had to be retained in surplus and there were existing, competing pressures on the HRA, such as the decarbonisation of all stock over the next 20 years, tenant safety and the delivery of affordable housing.

The Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities requested to be included in the member working group and this was agreed by the TaFF.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve that the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities be included in the membership of the Member Working Group of the Housing Task and Finish Forum.

21 **Community Led Affordable / Socially Rented Housing - Presentation by Middlemarch CIC**

The Chair welcomed Steve Watson and Jay Lambe from Middlemarch to the meeting. They were community led homes accredited advisers for Middlemarch, previously Wessex. They had been invited to attend the meeting to share their experiences in East Devon and further afield.

Steve Watson explained that a Community Land Trust (CLT) was:

- A not-for-private-profit organisation set up to benefit a specific community.

- CLTs could own land and other assets which were important to a community – starting with affordable housing.
- CLTs held those assets so they were available and affordable for future generations.
- A CLT was open to membership by anyone in the community supporting its aims.

Middlemarch were currently supporting over 60 projects across the South West. In East Devon there was a pipeline of projects and seven CLTs supported by Middlemarch (two completed). CLTs tended to take about six years from start to completion of the scheme. This was a similar time period to the private sector.

There were two main sources of affordable land:

- Rural exception sites.
- Land in public ownership.

The average land value per dwelling was £7,000. Middlemarch were working with local authorities to identify fragments of land for development rather than whole sites.

CLT's aspirations were:

- Housing prioritised for local people.
- Social rents.
- Low carbon properties.
- High quality aesthetically.
- Locally supported.

They also hoped to follow the five basic principles of passive house, which relied on the constant circulation of air and required virtually no heating system:

- Ventilation with heat recovery.
- Airtightness.
- Thermal bridge free design.
- Thermal insulation.
- Passive house windows.

The legal and financial model was that the CLT was the freeholder and the housing authority was the leaseholder. By working with CLTs, housing authority partners could build on their asset base.

- The CLT led the project and owned the freehold
 - Location, numbers of homes, design and occupancy criteria
 - Selects the housing association partner.
- The housing authority supports the CLT and had a 125-year lease
 - Funds, develops and operates the homes, including land price.
- Benefits to the CLT:
 - Affordable in perpetuity
 - Prevents sales under the Right to Shared Ownership
 - Party to s.106 agreement
 - Receives ground rent: £4/home/week
 - Local people in housing need had priority.

The funding for this would come from Homes England's Approved Development Programme, East Devon's Community Housing Fund, section 106 commuted sums and Right to Buy receipts.

Middlemarch's support for community housing groups included:

- Strategic advice
- Access to fund

- Site identification and land acquisition
- Partnering
- Planning issues
- Development risks
- Communication
- Project management
- Training
- Problem solving
- Risk management.

It was noted that there was scope for CLTs to get involved in brown field sites, developments in town centres and high density housing. CLTs had an exemption from two of three tenants' Rights to Buy. There were early indications that CLT properties took less management. It was thought that this was due to the properties being occupied by tenants who were local people and already had social networks in the area.

It was suggested that EDDC work with Middlemarch, who may have additional knowledge on available sites, and were able to do things EDDC did not currently have the capacity for. The Service Lead – Place, Asset and Commercialisation advised that there was unlikely be one single solution for growing the Council's good quality housing stock. There were many different options to be explored. CLTs and Torvista Housing offered two extreme examples. The member working group intended to consult with approximately six housing companies and a report would be brought back to the TaFF for its consideration.

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment explained that the role of a housing enabler was distinct from the housing landlord role. EDDC for many years had been working with Wessex (Middlemarch) and Devon Community Together. The Council had a service level agreement with Wessex (Middlemarch) and discussions had been underway about finding land within the Council's ownership. It was planned to have a fresh look at this to identify development opportunities. It was noted that many council housing estates had nice landscaped areas and there was a tension between maintaining this and not concreting/over developing the estates.

On behalf of the Forum the Chair thanked Steve Watson and Jay Lambe for a very interesting and informative presentation.

RESOLVED: that the Forum note the presentation from Middlemarch.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

M Armstrong
K Blakey
O Davey
D Ledger (Chair)
A Moulding
H Parr
E Rylance
I Thomas

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

P Arnott
S Chamberlain
P Faithfull
M Howe
G Jung
J Rowland
E Wragg

Officers in attendance:

Tim Child, Service Lead - Place, Assets & Commercialisation
John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment
Wendy Harris, Democratic Services Officer
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer
Jay Lambe, Middlemarch
Steve Watson, Middlemarch

Councillor apologies:

I Hall

Chairman

Date: