

## **Response by Spencer Welsh, Managing Trustee, The Hanover Land Trust**

### **RE: COMMENTS AND RESPONSES TO THE ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL THREE DRAGONS AFFORDABLE HOUSING VIABILITY STUDY, FINAL REPORT JULY 2010**

Further to our attendance at the Rochford District Council's Affordable Housing Workshop on April 30th at Rayleigh Civic Suite, we thank you for the opportunity to be able to comment on the Final Report.

Firstly, it must be stated that the Hanover Land Trust regards the extensive amount of cross-referenced, detailed housing information contained in the report a specialist field for builders and developers and our quantitative response to this detail will be submitted by our informal partner the Swan Housing Association on our behalf, by the due deadline of 5.00pm Tuesday 17th August 2010.

However, in the capacity of landowner in the said informal partnership The Hanover Land Trust responds as follows:-

#### **Comments on selected paragraphs**

The Hanover Land Trust is in agreement with and supports paragraphs 1.8 and 1.9 relating to policies HP8 and H4 respectively.

#### **4. Land Values and the Land Market**

In the Trust's experience land values may be subject to considerable change up or down, due to many different economic factors and this is why we are reticent to agree unconditionally at this stage, certain facts, figures and quotas in the viability study until all associated matters appertaining to our site become better clarified.

The prospective price range of newly released land is naturally flexible, but is also subject to market trends and other pressures. However, we are confident that all potential key issues and planning requirements broadly outlined in the Viability Study should be achievable using our proposed site. The site itself is contained within Preferred Option SWH4 of the Core Strategy and representatives of The Hanover Land Trust and Swan Housing Association would be pleased to attend any further meetings with Council representatives as and when the need may arise to bring their site forward.

#### **5. Case Study Viability Analysis - Smaller Sites**

Paragraphs 5.13, 5.17, 5.30 and 5.31

Under the new Coalition Government proposals, use of backland garden sites for housing are to be restricted and to become ineligible for development. This will undoubtedly effect the supply of most small sites and enhance the value of new land releases, this maybe favourable in helping to support the affordable housing element and any necessary infrastructure requirements via Section 106 Agreement.

#### **6. Main Findings and Conclusions**

Paragraph 6.17

The restriction proposed or in force under the New Government rules may reduce viability on some small to medium sites. Our considered opinion is the Council will not achieve their required quotas of affordable housing efficiently in the period set out, if there is too much reliance placed on these infill sites, particularly in the light of new Government proposals to preserve the green lungs of gardens in established town scapes. Paragraph 6.24 confirms our view that there is an immediate need to remedy the Council's recently announced, under achievement for affordable housing in the Rochford District. Therefore, we feel it will be necessary to release some green belt land and we believe our site is one ideally situated to help fulfill this requirement.

Appendix 1. Basis for Interpreting Viability

## Paragraph 1

The Hanover Land Trust broadly supports Three Dragons basis of calculating liability subject to the following. Any detailed input for a Workshop Toolkit Assessment must essentially be provided by and through the offices of our informal the Swan Housing Association. This would be a core issue in our negotiations with Swan Housing to arrive at a mutually acceptable and valid land valuation. Negotiations would necessarily include what the Council would permit and want to achieve on our site in conjunction with associated infra-structure improvements and Swan Housing Association's aspirations for what we believe would be their first flagship project within the Rochford District.

### 4. Land Values and the Land Market

In the Trust's experience land values may be subject to considerable change up or down, due to many different economic factors and this is why we hesitate to agree unconditionally at this stage, certain facts, figures and quotas in the viability study until all associated matters appertaining to our site become better clarified.

The prospective price range of newly released land is naturally flexible, but also subject to market trends and other pressures. However, we are confident that all potential key issues and planning requirements broadly outlined in the Viability Study should be achievable using our proposed site. The site is contained within Preferred Option SWH4 of the Core Strategy and representatives of The Hanover Land Trust and Swan Housing Association would be pleased to attend any further meetings with Council representatives as and when the need may arise to bring their site forward.

### **Our conclusions**

The Hanover Land Trust is a private land owning family Trust of long standing in north Rayleigh and Hullbridge. Together with the Swan Housing Association the Trust has a ongoing stakeholder interest in the housing supply in this part of Rochford District. Since 1947 in our view, the release of new land for housing has been seriously constrained by national and some local Government policies together with undue, reactionary public protest in localities which in some cases could readily provide suitable land for new housing, at the same time helping to conserve superior quality green belt areas.

In relating the Viability Study factors to our specific site we find economic factors like immigration, broken families etc, help produce uncontrolled variables which can seriously effect the planned housing strategy. Virtually all council housing has been sold off into the private market, this has generally upgraded such housing and is perhaps something which needed to be done. However, this has resulted in a great scarcity of affordable or cheaper housing which normally provided accommodation for the strata of society with restricted earnings/income capacity, including the many young people now entering this strata through the current economic downturn.

In the democratic process this portion of society need modern homes in nice places like other families and it seems grossly selfish and unfair for existing residents living in the settlements of the Rochford District to deny potential new residents fulfillment of the same aspirations for a better lifestyle. There is now a large portion of our society desperately needing what are now called 'affordable homes'. This is why The Hanover Land Trust supports the Rochford District Council's proposals for developments of mixed housing types on large enough sites, able to accommodate sustainable developments and at the same time comprise a fair spread of new development conjoining the various settlements of the Rochford District.

Affordable homes must still maintain the high specification and standards of open market new housing. In essence how will a property or properties be built to become affordable to the lower earner?

As most councils no longer want responsibility for affordable housing ownership, maintenance and management, initially this can only be achieved through the flexibility and co-operation of the land owner, together with time-termed rental/lease/purchase plans via a reputable housing association, who are eligible to receive Government grants to set up and maintain

such schemes. Being aware Rochford District is seriously deficient in affordable housing, The Hanover Land Trust together with the Swan Housing Association, between them, have the expertise, flexibility and means to produce a sustainable, mixed, part affordable development and are ready and able to assist the council in the earlier phase to help fulfill their future affordable housing target figures.

The Hanover Land Trust is aware that for Swan Housing to develop their site, improvements would need to be made to the current triple road junction of Hullbridge Road, Lower Road and Watery Lane as part of Option SWH4. This would provide existing residents with a long awaited, community gain by easing traffic congestion in and out of Hullbridge. Upon the Council's final planning deliberations, should the Council wish to reduce the amount of new green belt land to be released in Option SWH4, The Hanover Land Trust and Swan Housing Association would be fully prepared to proceed with their proposal in isolation. The site does not flood under the existing drainage scheme and if developed would cause the least disturbance to the village environment unlike other options in the locality. To the best of our knowledge it is also understood that provision of all necessary services to the site are readily available nearby.

It has recently been announced by the Minister for Housing that local authorities could receive funding equivalent up to six years Council tax for each affordable home constructed. This could provide the Council with a sum in the region of £0.5m in relation to our site. If implemented this would be an additional factor, favourable to providing other infra-structure upgrades for the benefit of local residents. However, this policy may not materialise and should therefore be disregarded for the present particularly if the site is required for the earlier phase of implementation.

### **Core Strategy**

In our assessment of public comments to the Core Strategy, apart from unreasonable sweeping statements for no development whatsoever, we find that Option SWH4 is the least contentious option to public opinion and that our particular site within this option is best placed to minimise the inevitable upheaval and disturbance to existing residents caused by any new development in the Hullbridge options locality. We are confident that under the present informal partnership and with the Council's guidance our site on it's own would be able to provide a viable mixed sustainable community development with affordable housing that would be an asset to Hullbridge and of benefit to the Rochford District in general.

### **Appendix 2. Method Statement by Three Dragons**

As a landowner The Hanover Land Trust has found the Three Dragons Viability Study very informative and we are broadly supportive of the general content. We therefore look forward to further stake holder participation should our peripheral, self-contained site be considered suitable for release from the green belt.