

Council 'shock' as association fails to build any new homes

By JOHN GEOGHEGAN
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A HOUSING provider has built no new affordable homes in Rochford district, despite promising to provide 50 a year since 2007.

Rochford District Council's review committee heard the revelation at a meeting, where councillors expressed their disappointment at the findings.

They criticised members of Rochford Housing Association, part of the national housing provider the Sanctuary Group, for failing to meet the promised targets for affordable housing.

The association's aim was to provide at least 50 new affordable homes each year, mostly ones with low rents, but also properties which are cheap to buy.

But councillors heard no new homes had been provided for the past two-and-a-half years and just two planning applications had been submitted for a total of 12 homes.

The council transferred its housing stock, with almost 2,000 tenants, to Rochford Housing Association in Decem-

- ❑ It vowed to provide 50 properties a year
- ❑ Group blames lack of grants and land

ber 2006 after 80 per cent of tenants voted in favour of the move.

Rowan Kirk, director of development services of the Sanctuary Group, said: "We are disappointed we haven't delivered the 50 homes per year. We are behind target on that.

"We are absolutely committed as a group to deliver more affordable housing.

"We clearly haven't made significant progress in Rochford in the past two-and-a-half years, partly because of the downturn in the market and land in Rochford is difficult to come by."

Mr Kirk also blamed a lack of funding from the Government's Homes and Communities Agency, adding: "This is the key issue. Funding is getting tighter.

"We have the skills, the money and the resources in place.

"We understand your con-

cerns and share your disappointment."

However, councillor Gillian Lucas-Gill (Con, Rochford) said: "You are 125 homes down already. Our main worry is if you are relying on a big housing development, we could be waiting forever.

"I want you to be aware of how very concerned we are this just isn't happening."

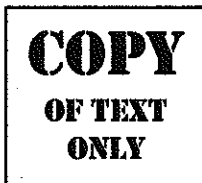
She asked why the association could not build on garage sites it owns.

She said: "No one is expecting you to come up with a site and build 50 houses, but our concern is you are doing nothing we can see.

"If you take a garage site, then at least it's a start."

Mr Kirk said the association had looked at garage sites, but they were not "technically deliverable".

“ Our worry is if you are relying on a big housing development, we could be waiting forever



15th February 2010

Dear Councillor Mrs Lucas-Gill

RE: AFFORDABLE HOMES IN ROCHFORD DISTRICT
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Further to my telephone call today in which we have agreed to meet at Rochford District Council Office at 2.30pm Friday 19th February, I thought it would be helpful to more fully acquaint you in advance with the salient points of my enquiry.

As mentioned, I am responding to the comments which appeared in the attached article regarding a shortfall in affordable homes. In acknowledging this problem I would like to point out that the remedy is almost entirely in the Council's hands.

By way of explanation, we are a private land trust informally partnered with The Swan Housing Association Group. Sometime ago we responded to the Council's Core Strategy 'Call for Sites' (2011-2021). Being aware that some greenbelt land would have to be released to achieve the Council's future housing targets, we presented an ideal, part greenbelt site for such housing, which would significantly reduce the Council's affordable housing deficit. Working with the Council through the proper channels we contributed a lot of time and expense submitting a plan to promote the site, No.17 in the Core Strategy, call for sites exercise. The land is in the Preferred Options area of south-west Hullbridge on the Key Diagram.

As a private land trust we are completely flexible with regard to how the land could best be utilised, including the possible upgrading of associated infra-structure and the Swan Housing Group have the necessary finance in place. We are currently thwarted in progressing matters further by a continual deferment of the associated Core Strategy document, called 'The Allocations Development Plan Document' which identifies the selected future housing sites.

In the light of what you have said, we would greatly appreciate it if you could please inform us whether our site is of interest to the Council and if not, why not, when such a need obviously exists at present, which if not satisfied now, will have to be added to the quotas set out in the new Core Strategy, which we understand has recently been submitted to the Secretary of State for formal approval.

Thank you for agreeing to see me, I look forward to meeting you at the appointed time and place. However, should you require further information in advance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Your sincerely

SPENCER WELSH
Managing Trustee
The Hanover land Trust

Encl.