

**Summary Outcome from the Worcestershire Housing LAA Workshop held on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2006 at Worcester Rugby Club**

Following presentations on national and regional progress on housing and LAAs and a consideration of the key issues for Worcestershire, workshop groups considered a number of potential priority areas for the future LAA. These have been distilled over the previous 9 months from a County Stakeholder event, reports presented to and endorsed by the Worcestershire Partnership and work carried out by Worcestershire Chief Housing Officers Group and the LAA Management Team.

The participants at the event on 14<sup>th</sup> July included Local Authority Officers, Members, RSLs, GOWM and representatives from statutory and voluntary agencies.

The key priorities that were supported by the stakeholders are set out below and provide a framework within which specific targets and possible enabling measures can be developed for agreement with GOWM by November 2006.

- 1. The use of public sector land for affordable housing.** This is clearly seen as the top priority for action and would have an impact across affordability, homelessness, supported housing, elderly persons schemes and rural housing. The key issue is to try and obtain agreement by the Worcestershire Partnership Members to a policy framework within which affordable housing schemes would be given a high priority or first option for such disposals where the land is suitable for this purpose. A reduced land value based on affordable housing usage would enable schemes to be more readily developed.

The next three items obtained clear support from the groups and are also schemes that have officer support. Although detailed priorities were not necessarily agreed at the event, these can be worked up as specific proposals. They may also be “relatively” straight forward to progress within the tight timescales for agreeing LAA targets.

- 2. Contribution to improving domestic energy efficiency and climate change policies.** A proposal to develop a programme of renewable energy systems (such as solar panels and wind turbines) across the County in both existing private sector and public sector stock. This could include a proportion of LA grant to subsidise schemes and it would demonstrate LAs using their ‘well being’ powers to kick start work on renewables and be seen to be taking a lead on climate change issues. This approach would be particularly appropriate for more rural housing. There is a 5% target set for the West Midlands electricity generation to come from renewables by 2010 and planning regulations will enable permitted development of wind turbines next year.

3. **Care and Repair Agencies.** Notwithstanding the longer term objective of a county-wide scheme, there is strong support for progressing a co-ordinated approach to services to assist maintain peoples independence at home. This links to the Older People's Strategy and the Worcestershire Partnership's wish to see a consideration of the housing needs for older people. A need to formalise the C&R Agency role and the links with existing agencies. Repairs, maintenance and gardening being some of the tasks that could be further developed. A much more direct input by the PCT was called for. The C&R option may be too general at this stage, but is worthy of consideration.
4. **A Countwide Equity Release Scheme for Capital Improvements to the Homes of Older and Vulnerable People.** Local Housing Authorities are expected to introduce these schemes to again assist older people remain independent and to tackle non decent housing for vulnerable people. Individual LAs cannot really progress this on their own and need to consider working with existing agencies that provide these services. Equity Release has received a bad press in Worcestershire, and it would be necessary to obtain the support of the Partnership to carry out some positive promotion of the benefits for local people. Some exploratory work has been carried out by CHOG but it needs to be developed. This would be a major step forward if a scheme could be established. The C&R Agency would again have some involvement in this.

The next category of ideas which gained support, are quite wide ranging and may also form the basis of possible enabling measures. Some of these, particularly planning issues are probably longer term and are quite challenging.

5. **Planning Matters.** A number of ideas for consideration, including influencing a standard approach to District LDF Planning documents in areas such as: limiting rural housing land valuations; an extension of exception sites to settlements above 3000; Eco Homes standards into the private sector house building; and consideration of Shropshire LAA enabling measures and whether they are likely to have much impact.
6. **Tackling under-occupation in the social housing sector.** The possibility of a standardised approach across the county and links to making better use of affordable housing and homelessness.
7. **Revenue funding.** Access more revenue funding to assist with cross LA housing projects and to improve capacity to deal with initiatives such as joint housing assessments, the LAA, supported housing projects etc. This could include making use of second homes and long term empty receipts from Council tax and the possible use of capital, in specific circumstances, to turn into revenue (decapitalisation).