



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND REGULATORY SERVICES**

**to
COUNCIL
26 JUNE 2018**

**ANGLIAN RUSKIN UNIVERSITY'S BUILD FACTOR: PROPOSAL FOR
ADOPTION AS A CORPORATE PROJECT TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY LED
HOUSING**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of Anglia Ruskin University's Build Factory project and the potential for working in collaboration to support local community led housing projects and to provide a wider update on current Community Led Housing Schemes.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) that the Council's Strategic Housing Service and Anglia Ruskin University provide mutual support in developing the Build Factory approach to supporting a Community Led Housing project in the District; and
- (ii) this is adopted as a corporate project with progress reported regularly to future meetings of the Strategic Housing Board and also made available to all Members.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Members will be aware from previous reports of the progress being made supporting the government's aim of encouraging Community Led Housing. A summary of current schemes is provided as **APPENDIX 1** to this report. As a result of this work, Officers have been contacted by Anglia Ruskin University's faculty of Building and Construction which is seeking to support innovation and community engagement in construction through their 'Build Factory' project.
- 3.2 The Build Factory is a combination of academic knowledge and experience from academic staff and practical support and opportunity for students and post-graduates involved with construction skills. The aim is to combine these skills with local trades and businesses to bring forward development in a more cooperative way, ideally to provide homes that are more affordable that would meet local need, such as affordable homes to rent for young people or almshouses or supported housing for older people.
- 3.3 Staff with experience of contract management and construction would provide the role of lead contractor and others involved with the project would be appointed as partners. This would mean that new homes could be provided at closer to cost price

and any uplift in value from the development could be distributed between all partners on a proportionate basis. This would in effect be akin to a hybrid of old-fashioned builder-led development and housing cooperatives that were popular in the post-war period.

- 3.4 By appointing local trades as partners, there can be certainty in achieving the aim of having local homes built by local people. The approach could even be used for self-build projects where all the homes are to be retained as affordable. By working with the Council as the local housing authority, providing mainly or only affordable homes, the project can go even further and provide through local people and businesses homes that meet local need and help others acquire skills and experience.
- 3.5 The Build Factory approach has the advantage of being able to adjust design at any stage but would not compromise on the quality of build or construction, providing greater choice and control over design by all partners involved. This could for example include higher levels of energy efficiency, better design for individual residents who may need adaptations, or use of traditional materials to support local trades and crafts.
- 3.6 The University would obtain funding to meet the cost of the development which would be repaid on completion when the homes would be transferred to either an appointed housing association, housing charity, or other local group. This would include the cost of the contract management service provided by the university which would be comparable to a conventional margin for a contractor and technical costs. There would however be no developer's margin, helping to reduce the overall cost of development and the price of the housing to the future owner. For this reason, the project has the potential to help smaller providers of affordable homes develop and grow, by operating on a not-for-profit and cooperative basis.
- 3.7 Experience working with local groups through the Community Led Housing programme has highlighted the need for technical help and support such as this, even amongst some organisations who have previous history of building homes but now lack the capacity and / or experience to contract and manage even a small new-build programme. The University would benefit from working with the Council's Housing Service as this would help them gain a better understanding into housing need, the policy and procedure for reflecting this through allocation agreements and some of the other strategic housing issues affecting local authorities and communities. In return, by providing some technical and strategic direction as well as links to local community groups and possible opportunities for development, Officers would gain a better insight and understanding of the barriers as well as opportunities for local community groups seeking to become more involved with meeting local housing need and ways this could be coupled with genuine opportunities for local housebuilders and people developing skills and training in construction.
- 3.8 Formal support from the Council would also help create opportunities for building links with other agencies in particular Homes England and SELEP (South East Local Enterprise Partnership). By demonstrating how Community Led Housing projects could be helped to put their plans into practice, providing a range of benefits beyond affordable homes, including academic reviews of ways to support and improve community involvement in all aspects of housing development, there would be even better opportunities for future funding and investment in the District.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The Council's Community Led Housing programme is gaining more interest but officers have found local groups need help considering their options, which we can help with but the next hurdle is how this can then be put into practice. More conventional approaches such as 'design and build' can be used but are less flexible once the programme of development has been agreed and may leave some community groups feeling as if they have lost control beyond this stage. They are also less effective in delivering some of the possible wider benefits such as supporting local trades, whether these are for the design or build of new homes.
- 4.2 There is support for the government's aspirations for Community Led Housing at all levels but little practical guidance or advice on how local communities can actually be more involved in a practical way that would ensure more of the intended outcomes and benefits. Consequently there is a risk that local enthusiasm can wane and opportunities lost due to the inevitable gap in knowledge and experience of partners when it comes to developing affordable housing. The University's Build Factory proposal provides an excellent opportunity for partners to provide support and learn together, creating capacity across partners to actually put plans into practice. The only resource that is envisaged being required from the Council at this stage is officer time, much of which would be involved working with local community groups anyway. This would help improve capacity for the Housing Service and create opportunities for officers and others to learn and develop more knowledge and expertise, through what could be described as an informal knowledge transfer agreement.
- 4.3 This sharing of knowledge and skills would also be helpful for other partners such as the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) who are also working with the Council on developing a more effective, strategic approach to supporting local communities assess and meet local housing need.

5. IMPACT ON CORPORATE GOALS

- 5.1 Protecting and shaping the District – by achieving a high quality of design in development and meeting local housing needs.
- 5.2 Delivering good quality, cost effective and valued services – by providing services that reflect the needs and aspirations of our communities and a democratic structure which facilitates participation and local decision making.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – Customers are the beneficiaries of Community Led Housing, through which they can work or become engaged to have their need for housing met. In this case it would also include smaller trades and local builders.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – Community Led Housing has the potential to meet the housing need of some groups, such as older people or people with

disabilities, whose needs may not otherwise be met through conventional housing development.

- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – None identified: the Council would not be investing any revenue or capital, staff resource would be used more effectively working with partners to resource development and reduce the risk of abortive efforts.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – None.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – None.
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – The Housing Service is exploring ways, through working in partnership for example with Anglia Ruskin University, to improve the design and sustainability of new homes to lessen the impact on the environment as well as look to see where possible to make better use of existing buildings including empty or abandoned homes and buildings.

Background Papers: Anglia Ruskin University leaflet on Build Factory.

Enquiries to: Paul Gayler, Strategic Housing Manager, (Tel: 01621 875872).