

INTERIM HOUSING POLICY

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PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform Members of the outcomes of the findings from the recently commissioned work to understand housing supply in Copeland, to discuss the possible options available to the Council to boost housing delivery and agree a Draft Interim Housing Policy to aid this process in the short term.

RECOMMENDATION

That Members consider the issues around boosting house building in Copeland, and discuss and agree a Draft Interim Housing Policy to present at Full Council on 9th May 2017 for adoption.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council recently commissioned a piece of work to understand the house building sector in Copeland and its potential and capacity to build the number of homes identified in the adopted Core Strategy.
- 1.2 This work involved interviews with the housebuilding sector, including those already active in Copeland as well as potential new entrants to the borough, to understand their perspective around the attractiveness and issues relating to developing in Copeland. The consultants used this information as well as their own professional judgement to consider the deliverability of the sites proposed for allocation in the Local Plan.
- 1.3 The findings of the Study showed that house building rates are lower than the target set in the Core Strategy and that there are not sufficient house builders currently active in the borough to meet this target. As a result the Council will need to take steps to help boost house building and make Copeland a more attractive place for developers to invest.
- 1.4 The Site Allocations and Policies Plan Preferred Options document (2015) identified a large number of sites for housing, however the Study has questioned the deliverability of a number of these sites, and suggests that greater flexibility will be needed to attract new developers and enable existing developers to expand to meet the growth ambitions of the borough.

1.5 A key short term measure to support this would be the production of an Interim Housing Policy.

2.0 PURPOSE AND CONTENT OF THE INTERIM HOUSING POLICY

2.1 The development strategy in the Copeland Local Plan Core Strategy and sites within the emerging Site Allocations and Policies Plan are not currently enabling house building to take place at the rate required to meet the target within the Core Strategy. To help boost supply of sites the Council can look to provide greater flexibility around where development can take place.

2.2 One way to provide greater flexibility to the existing policy framework, whilst still providing certainty to developers and the community, is to produce an Interim Housing Policy. This will highlight the local planning context from the Core Strategy and key elements of the National Planning Policy Framework that are most relevant for Copeland, and explain how flexibility will be applied to the adopted Local Plan policies when considering planning applications.

2.3 There are two main areas for flexibility to consider:

- Removing settlement boundaries
- Reviewing the existing settlement hierarchy

2.4 The first area for flexibility that is proposed is around the removal of settlement boundaries. The current settlement boundaries relate to the 2006 Local Plan and are therefore out of date. As such, proposals adjacent to the existing built form of settlements could be appropriate, subject to other material considerations being acceptable, rather than having to be within the adopted 2006 settlement boundaries.

2.5 The Interim Housing Policy can also consider the towns and villages that make up the current settlement hierarchy and the amount of development proposed for each, as identified in Policy ST and Figures 3.2 and 3.3. For example, it may be beneficial to change the amount of development attributed to different settlements, such as allowing more development in Local Centres, and also consider other villages where small amounts of house building may be appropriate.

2.6 The issues above will be considered in detail at the LDF Working Party meeting, and following discussion a Draft Interim Housing Policy will be produced to take to Full Council on 9th May.

3.0 CONCLUSION

3.1 House building rates have been low in recent years, and have been significantly below the target set in the adopted Core Strategy. The Council needs to

demonstrate that Copeland is 'Open for Business' and be a more attractive place for developers, including house builders, to invest.

- 3.2 The first stage to proactively support this is the production of an Interim Housing Policy, which will outline where the Council can and will be more flexible in the short term to help attract developers and increase the house building rates in the borough.
- 3.3 The detail and contents for the Interim Housing Policy will be discussed and agreed at the meeting and it is recommended that the agreed Draft Interim Housing Policy is presented to Full Council for adoption on 9th May to proactively shape development while allowing some flexibility in decision making and increase house building in Copeland.