

Appendix 6

Summary of Stakeholder Engagement

SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Value of Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement During the HMA

Consultation and engagement with stakeholders is good practice when developing an evidence base to inform future policy. It helps to ensure that there is some degree of consensus around the information and evidence that will inform policy development. This has the potential to reduce conflict (and delays) during the development of policy, particularly plan-making.

Government guidance increasingly encourages stakeholder involvement and partnership working in the development of the evidence base for plans and policies. There are formal consultation processes involved in the production of Local Development Frameworks and whilst stakeholder engagement is not required during the development of the evidence base, it represents good practice to do so and is likely to strengthen the evidence base.

However, there are two key points to emphasise:

- The Eastbourne and South Wealden Housing Market Assessment is not policy. It is an independent report and the authorities will need to consider whether to take on board the conclusions and recommendations it presents.
- The development of plans involves a statutory consultation process. Whilst the development of the HMA (part of the evidence base) provides an earlier opportunity for stakeholders to engage DTZ would emphasise that this should not be seen as the only opportunity. Eastbourne Borough Council and Wealden District Council are engaging stakeholders and communities in the development of their Local Development Frameworks where there are formal opportunities for stakeholders to be involved¹.

In addition to close involvement of officers from each of the commissioning authorities, the development of the Eastbourne and South Wealden HMA involved a stakeholder event. The rest of this Appendix summarises the key issues that were discussed at the stakeholder event and this feedback has informed the HMA.

Eastbourne and South Wealden Stakeholder Event: Emerging Findings – March 2007

The Eastbourne and South Wealden Housing Market Assessment stakeholder event was held on 28th March at Eastbourne Town Hall. It was attended by around 30 stakeholders from the public and private sector.

The objective of the event was to inform stakeholders about the emerging evidence and provide an opportunity to feedback to the consultants and authorities carrying out the work. Stakeholders were asked to comment on the emerging evidence (which was presented by DTZ), to consider the implications for policy and to raise any questions. The themes discussed in response to emerging evidence are discussed below.

The Housing Market Area

The discussion started by looking at the market area, key insights and points made by stakeholders are as follows:

- People generally agreed that the Eastbourne and South Wealden market area, defined by DTZ fitted with their experience

¹ The statement of community involvement will explain to the stakeholder and the community how they will be involved, and the steps the authority will take to facilitate this involvement

- There was some perception that the influence of Brighton on the market may have increased since 2001 ie increased numbers of people living in Eastbourne and South Wealden but travelling to work in Brighton.
- There was also comment that Lewes has seen a significant influx of London commuters in recent years and this might have resulted in more localised demand being pushed further south away from Lewes to cheaper areas such as Polegate and Hailsham.
- It was commented that commuting from Hailsham to London was not really an option because of the absence of a station and that Polegate, although it has a station, and a service of 1hr 40mins to London, was not seen as attractive to commuters. The suggestion was that Polegate is much more of a retirement location.

In-migration

There was a detailed discussion about the scale of the retirement market and the extent to which the area attracts all forms of retirement migration (with implications for the type of accommodation needed/demanded) whilst experiencing out-migration of other age groups:

- A social housing provider said that they get requests from tenants elsewhere in the country to move to the area and they are almost of entirely retirement age.
- Within Eastbourne there is a proposed development by Sunrise Developments of 120 dwellings, which is called an extra care facility, but is not formally recognised as such, though it will have a facility to provide nursing care. This and the Hawthornes, another developer of similar schemes, are both owned by US parent companies. The view is that these sorts of schemes merely attract additional in-migrants to Eastbourne.
- It was suggested that McCarthy and Stone are not particularly interested in developing in Eastbourne, which may be to do with the fact that the Borough Council is now insisting on provision of affordable housing when McCarthy and Stone develop. Apparently McCarthy and Stone has successfully argued with local authorities in the past that they do not need to provide affordable housing and there are still authorities that accept that argument and they are choosing to develop in those areas.
- Wider implications were raised about the ageing population including the cost of care and ‘under occupancy’ - despite incentives offered to older social housing tenants they are reluctant to downsize, partly because what is on offer eg a flat and often away from their community is not as attractive as remaining in their homes although there have been some small scale successes in Eastbourne and neighbouring Brighton & Hove where the authority’s allocations policy was revised to allow older people to occupy larger than ‘need’. There was a general consensus that engagement with older people over their aspirations (and what it would take to make a move attractive) was important, along with good marketing of schemes.
- The other dimension of in migration is that Eastbourne attracts vulnerable and homeless people because of its seaside location (similar to Hastings)
- There was a perception of out migration of younger age groups and a perception of the need for higher earners in the area to tackle the risk of Eastbourne becoming dormitory
- The BME population is limited in Eastbourne although there is a Polish community and some stakeholders felt that recent migration to work had boosted this population – though others felt that this was not particularly significant when compared to other areas.

Economic development issues – jobs and skills

Economic development issues and discussions around jobs, employment and skills were a key feature of the Eastbourne and South Wealden event and were regarded by stakeholders as critical in understanding the drivers of the housing market and the implications for housing development in the future. Stakeholder raised a number of problems and opportunities:

- The Eastbourne and Hailsham Blueprint emphasises that the population of Eastbourne, in-migrants and the ageing population all represent an opportunity in terms of economic growth – though the hope is that older people and in-migrants will be economically active

- There was also the perception that Eastbourne has a vibrant town centre when compared to other similar towns and has particular strengths in retail and tourism (though more could be made of these)
- Recent economic growth and the structure of the Eastbourne economy has favoured small business which are not necessarily keen to grow – some of them are lifestyle businesses – this raised the question around the suitability of ‘livework’ units in the future – although a few were now coming through the system, stakeholders questioned whether this was a fad/ or a means of getting housing on sites that would otherwise only be permissioned for employment uses
- Eastbourne and South Wealden offers a high quality of life (residents surveys on the perception of Eastbourne are always positive), but although many parts appear prosperous there is polarisation of incomes and high numbers of low paid jobs/ low income households – there was also concern about whether Eastbourne residents and workers have the skills to advance their position in the labour market, and contribute to the growth of the economy
- Eastbourne has delivered a high level of new housing over the last 10 years – although stakeholders did not cite any specific negative impacts on local services eg on social care, health or education, there were concerns around the intensification of development within Eastbourne and the impact on the character of some neighbourhoods

Affordable Housing

There was discussion about the shortage of affordable housing across both districts.

- There was general agreement that Eastbourne was catering for some of Wealden’s needs – given the relatively cheaper housing available within the Borough and the likelihood that households on lower incomes in Wealden would migrate in order to buy housing (and possibly to access social rented accommodation - though this could not be verified)
- Conversely, Hailsham (in South Wealden) houses some young people from Eastbourne but there was a view that there were limited opportunities to keep them there
- In the context of an overall shortage of affordable housing authorities needed to prioritise and therefore are likely to house homeless households first because of their statutory duty – with implications for the type of homes required
- There was a brief discussion about how far authorities or RSLs could change the ‘balance’ of area (mix of different households) through their lettings policies - some local housing officers felt that this was ineffective because tenants are able to swap through mutual exchanges
- There was some discussion about the needs of disabled tenants in social rented accommodation – the adoption of Lifetime Homes standards was viewed as desirable but stakeholders raised the issue that, in order to be effective, all houses would need to adopt this otherwise it would be difficult for those who need the adaptations to access housing easily. There was also a concern raised about the cost implications – feedback was that the impact on build costs was low but the size of plot required to accommodate a Lifetime Homes dwelling was larger than for an average dwelling – with implications for costs to the developer given that land values make up a significant (often the largest part) of overall development costs

Policy Implications

A range of policy implications were raised and discussed during the stakeholder event:

- Given the relationships highlighted between Eastbourne and South Wealden, the issue of joint working was raised. Some stakeholders emphasised the challenge that this represents for both authorities – particularly around co-operating on affordable housing since there is a shortfall of accommodation overall. Others highlighted that Wealden had under-performed against its housing targets in the past which was an issue for both authorities given the integration between Eastbourne and South Wealden housing market. Some stakeholders felt that there was a need for policy levers or mechanisms to enable joint working, one example cited was the joint special needs housing scheme for Eastbourne and Wealden

- Concerns around retirement migration, out migration of younger age groups and the future balance between jobs and homes and the health of the economy led to suggestions that various economic development activities were required, including training and skills development and the development of employment opportunities that would encourage people to stay in the town and encourage greater self containment of the Eastbourne and South Wealden labour market (ie limit the need to commute to Brighton and other labour markets)
- Related to this, one stakeholder cited the need to improve the quality of design of new housing, particularly in Eastbourne if a compact town with higher population densities is going to be successful and attractive for people to live
- Stakeholders cited that land availability was a key challenge in delivering new housing – in Eastbourne, new development is dependent on regeneration opportunities, with implications for density. Stakeholders felt that there was a need to consider land supply holistically – by looking at land for other uses including employment sites and whether they are better suited to housing and also the need to look at housing sites in context of service delivery
- In terms of affordable housing policy implications, stakeholders emphasised that affordable housing tenants are less mobile and their housing market is more limited, partly due to transport links. Stakeholders generally agreed that social rented accommodation was the priority but in reality delivery depends on funding and viability. There was also a tendency for developers to propose the ‘planners dozen’ – 14 market homes on a site in order to avoid affordable housing thresholds
- Views were divergent about whether the type and size of market homes were best left for the market to decide – there were strong views from some stakeholders that developers should be allowed to put forward the mix of market housing that reflects demand but local authority officers felt they had a role to play in securing Lifetime Homes and Code for Sustainable Homes standards which would inevitably influence the type of market homes developed
- Stakeholders highlighted that there was also a booming student market and that this would have implications for the private rented sector (and DTZ would add, implications for those on housing benefit accessing the private rented sector)
- There was much discussion about the type of development required to meet the needs of older households and to encourage them to free up larger housing for other households (in the social rented sector this could help tackle over crowding). Stakeholders agreed that there needed to be a quality alternative on offer which is accessible to services and social networks and perhaps incentives for moving.