Wealden District Council and South Downs National Park Authority Response to the Summary of the Inspector's Concerns and letter dated 31st October 2011

Appendix B

Statement of Affordable Housing Need

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The Council uses several indicators of need to calculate housing need in the District. The primary sources are:

- Housing Needs Survey
- Wealden District Council's Housing Register

The Council has commissioned a Housing Needs Survey approximately every five years since they were introduced. The latest Housing Needs Survey was commissioned in 2009 and carried out by Fordham Research. This Survey as with previous Surveys meets best practice and adheres to the relevant guidance on Housing Needs Surveys. The Housing Needs Survey identifies a housing need of 812 per year in Wealden. This figure is consistent with previous studies, the 2005 Study identified a housing need of 874 per year.

The Council's Housing Register presents a good picture of the number of households seeking affordable accommodation in the District and the type of accommodation required. It has remained a consistent barometer of need over the last 7 years with around 2000 households seeking affordable accommodation registered on the Council's Housing Register of which around 15% are people in existing affordable housing that require a larger or smaller home.

The Non-Statutory Local Plan 2005 identifies land to provide approximately 4683 new homes in the District from 2006 to 2011, of which an average 30% will be affordable. As sites started to be developed out, the level of affordable housing produced has increased year by year from 26 completed homes in 2007 to 215 completed homes in 2010/11.

Although the Housing Needs Survey identifies a housing need of 812 per year; this does not equate to the need to build 812 new affordable homes per year. There are many housing solutions available to help meet housing need other than building new homes. Housing need can be met in a variety of ways ie an elderly person may be classified as in housing need as they do not have adequate heating or unable to get into the bath. These needs can be met with assistance in installing appropriate heating and installation of a walk in shower through a disabled facilities grant.

Below are examples of different methods Wealden District Council, as Housing Authority, uses to satisfy local housing needs. It should be noted there is an element of double counting; (so figures give an indication of households helped) for example a household may have sought housing advice and debt advice and then assisted with a deposit to rent on the private market. Solutions to meeting housing need include:

- Major and minor adaptations to existing homes to allow the occupant to remain in their homes this could be anything from handrails to a stair lift/ through floor lift or walk in shower supplied through a Disabled Facilities

Grant - 123 major adaptations and 115 minor adaptations carried out during 2010/11.

- Improving owner occupied and private rented accommodation through grants and loans or statutory action. This could be roof and wall insulation or adequate heating to reduce fuel poverty and to make a home safe and habitable. 58 homes improved during 2010/11.
- Housing Advice & Mediation - the Council helps many households to remain in their homes through help with debt advice, mediation with landlords/lenders or neighbours and housing benefit advice. 294 households assisted 2010/11.
- Accessing the Private Rented sector - the Council assists households to access the private rented sector through provision of rent and deposit loans, matching prospective tenants to landlords and general advice. 129 households assisted in 2010/11.
- Supporting the Private Rented Sector through advice to landlords, schemes such as Letstart and regulation
- Home Ownership Initiatives - the Council supports a raft of initiatives to assist prospective owner occupiers to purchase their own home through shared/fixed equity products allowing an occupier to purchase as little as 25% of a home to 80% of a home depending in their income. This is through New Build Homebuy, Homebuy Direct and Firstbuy equity schemes. 42 households helped into affordable home ownership.
- Underoccupation Initiatives - The Council encourages existing social tenants whose families have left home to move to smaller accommodation. This frees up larger accommodation for those that need it, solving two families accommodation needs. The Council offers underoccupiers financial assistance to move and works with Registered Providers to deliver schemes such as The Rowans at Crowborough that are primarily designed and targeted to social housing under-occupiers. 8 households were helped to downsize accommodation, freeing up larger family homes during 2010/11.
- Affordable relets - There are approximately 3100 Council homes and 1700 Registered Provider homes in the District which has seen an average of 255 general needs relets per year (based on last three years).
- Increasing supply of housing & affordable housing through bringing empty properties back into use. 80 empty homes were bought back into use in 2010/11
- Redevelopment & remodelling of existing social housing that does not meet current needs and demand. 64 new homes planned on redundant housing schemes to complete 2013/14.
- Use of Council land for new affordable housing through a Registered Providers or Council new build. 39 homes completed on previously owned Council land in 2010/11.
- Provision of new affordable housing by Registered Providers through section 106 planning obligations and 100% affordable housing sites eg rural exception sites (excluding shared ownership counted above & homes built using Council land above). 151 affordable homes for rent completed in 2010/11.

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In conclusion due to high housing costs and low earnings, there is a considerable need for affordable housing in the District. There is a recognised shortage of affordable housing in the District - approximately 7.9% being affordable of the total housing stock. In recognition of the affordable housing need the Council has developed policies in the emerging Core Strategy to increase the supply of affordable housing by encouraging exception sites and requiring 35% affordable housing contributions on sites of 5 homes or more. However, as can be seen there are more ways in meeting housing need then simply building more homes; using the existing stock more efficiently, embracing new initiatives and providing the right advice to households can also help meet the housing needs of the District.