Affordable Housing
Task Group Minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Affordable Housing Task Group held on Tuesday 15 May 2012 at the Village Centre, Great Eccleston

Members present:

Councillor Anderson
Councillor E Anderton
Councillor Balmain
Councillor Brooks (Chairman)
Councillor Ormrod
Councillor Perkin
Councillor Balmain
Councillor Perkin

Officers present:

Peter Foulsham, Scrutiny Officer

Others present:

Councillor Catterall
Councillor L Butterworth
Councillor M Carroll
Councillor N Cross
Councillor S Duerden
Councillor J Garth
Councillor Y Miller
Councillor J Rowe

7 other members of the public

AH.24 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Henderson, Pimbley and Williams.

AH.25 Declarations of Interest

Councillors Balmain and Rogers declared a personal interest in item 3 on the agenda, as members of the Regenda Partnership Board.
AH.26 Affordable Housing – Demand, Supply and Public Awareness
(Chairman’s introduction)

The Chairman, Cllr Brooks, explained the background to the task group and its rationale and went on to explain the formal definition of ‘affordable housing’. He added that the task group was interested in hearing the opinions of Parish and Town Councils and the residents of the borough, and had already held meetings in Clauhton and Fleetwood. He said that it was important to find out what local people really thought about affordable housing.

Cllr Brooks reminded the meeting that a shortfall of 570 dwellings across the borough had been identified in the Fylde Coast Sub-Regional Housing Market Assessment (2007). He also referred to the Wyre Rural Housing Needs Survey (2010) which had identified the actual annual need for affordable housing in the rural areas of Wyre over a five-year period. It had taken into account the existing backlog of unmet need and newly arising need, and included details of the accommodation required by type, size, tenure, affordability and appropriate location while considering the work that had been undertaken in the 2007 Strategic Housing Market Assessment.

The Chairman stated that the response rate to the Wyre Rural Housing Needs Survey (WRHNS), which had been a survey required by law, had been higher than anticipated at 25.8%, with a response rate of 23.3% for Great Eccleston.

AH.27 Affordable Housing – Demand, Supply and Public Awareness
(Discussion)

Cllr Rowe said that there was a clear perception that planning policy had not been followed in relation to the affordable housing development at Hall Lane, Great Eccleston. He added that the Parish Council had taken the view that the WRHNS had been riddled with contradictions and had been fatally flawed, giving rise to the continuing possibility of legal action. When asked by the Chairman to explain the statement that the survey had been “fatally flawed” Cllr Cross pointed out that Table 3.2 on page 35 of the report included figures within it that demonstrated that there had been double or even multiple counting of identified need.

Cllr Rowe added that Great Eccleston Parish Council had commissioned its own Housing Needs Survey. The Chairman said that he had asked on several previous occasions, over a number of weeks, to see the survey report, but it had not been made available. Cllr Rowe later provided a copy of the report to the task group. The Parish Council had carried out their own survey in order to ensure that they were able to cater for their own housing needs.

Cllrs Rowe and Cross reminded task group members that, when undertaking the WRHNS, a number of questionnaires had not been delivered to the residents of Hall Lane and South Street so they had been
unable to respond. Mr Rowe quoted the response that he had previously received from Wyre Council on the matter whom, he said, had accepted that a small number of questionnaires were not delivered. The response previously provided was as follows:

“The RHNS is an evidence document commissioned by the council for the purposes of informing policy making and determining planning applications (Development Management). It is not a policy document and therefore it is not one upon which public consultation following its publication is required or warranted. The report was, nonetheless sent out to all Parish Clerks as soon as it was completed, inviting comments/questions and very few responses from Parish Councils were received (and none from Great Eccleston). Whilst it does appear that during the data gathering process that went on as part of the preparation of the document, a number addresses on Hall Lane did not receive their questionnaires, we sought a response from Arc4 on this matter and they informed us that the addresses in Hall Lane were covered by ID numbers 5826 – 5849 and that questionnaires were definitely sent out and that they could provide proof of this. However Arc4 suspected that for whatever reason the questionnaires must not have been delivered which is outside of their control. However, whilst the issue of the missing questionnaires is regrettable, on the basis of the return rate the missing questionnaires represents about 5 responses and it is not considered that had these been received, it would have materially changed the findings in relation to housing need within the Parish.”

Cllr Brooks asked Cllr Rowe whether he was suggesting that Wyre Council had deliberately not delivered questionnaires to houses in Hall Lane, and Cllr Rowe responded by saying that members would need to draw their own conclusions on the facts.

Cllr Rowe went on to explain that as the concerns of Great Eccleston Parish Council had been expressed and, in his opinion, ignored by Wyre Council, this had led to a strong feeling of mistrust which would be very difficult to overcome. It was likely that Great Eccleston Parish Council would make a further request for Wyre Council to reconsider the WRHNS.

The view was expressed by a number of people that the proposal for a further 55 affordable housing units to be built in Great Eccleston over the next five years was disproportionate and would amount to an increase in the size of the village of 9%. Great Eccleston’s own survey had indicated that there was a need for 44 affordable homes in the village, although there were already 21 empty properties, some of which could be used for that purpose. Cllr Rowe reiterated that Great Eccleston was intent on looking after its own needs, which included more properties for aspirational families.

A local resident, Mr Shepherd told the task group that, in his view, the Great Eccleston Parish Council had spent more time on affordable housing over the past year than on anything else. He said the Parish Council had
stereotyped people who live in and need affordable housing. He believed that affordable housing was needed in the village as there were many young people who would like to remain living locally but who could not afford to rent privately.

Cllr Rowe drew the task group’s attention to the New Homes Bonus, which was announced by Government in August 2012, with incentives for local authorities to build new homes, and he said that it was possible that Wyre councillors had an intention on behalf of the borough that overrode the needs of the Parish.

A view was expressed by Cllr Butterworth that affordable housing was needed in the village to provide for local people. That view was generally supported by those attending the meeting, including Cllr Rowe who added that the number of affordable homes built should match need and smaller developments would be, in his view, the best way to do that. In answer to a further question from Cllr Butterworth, Cllr Brooks confirmed that the WRHNS would be updated every five years.

The key points made by a majority of people at the meeting, including the Parish Council’s representatives Cllrs Rowe and Cross, were as follows:

- There was a perception of irregularity and unfairness in Wyre Council’s planning processes
- There was a strong feeling of mistrust between Great Eccleston Parish Council and Wyre Council
- The WRHNS was fatally flawed
- The voices of residents were not always listened to by Wyre Council
- Great Eccleston Parish Council would continue to look after its own needs

Regarding the views expressed about affordable housing, specifically, the following comments were made:

- Great Eccleston Parish Council is not opposed to affordable housing, per se
- Affordable housing should match need
- Affordable housing should be for local people
- Developments should be kept as small as is economically viable

The Chairman thanked Cllr Rowe, other members of Great Eccleston Parish Council and members of the public who had attended the meeting for their contributions and their valuable views, knowledge and experience, which would be fully taken into account by the task group before any recommendations were made to Cabinet.

**AH.28 Next Steps**

The task group would meet with the Regional Director of the Regenda Group at their next meeting.
AH.29  Date and time of next meeting

Thursday 24 May 2012 at 6pm in the Members’ Lounge, Civic Centre.