

The Affordable Housing Master Class Roundup Report



In association with





The Affordable Housing Master Class

Background

Local Authority Strategic Housing and Planning Officers are increasingly being asked to take on new roles in order to deliver Affordable Housing through the planning system and to fulfil their function in shaping local communities. This requires new skills, new networks and new relationships. Planning and Housing are increasingly inter dependant and the pressure to deliver Affordable Housing, through a complex delivery chain, is growing. In addition, the requirement to work in partnership is at the heart of recent government policy, particularly within the framework of Housing Market Areas.

The development of the Affordable Housing Master Class by Devon Strategic Housing Group (DSHG) was a response to these changing roles and relationships. This report is a summary of the key features and outcomes of the programme and sets out recommendations from the delegates for future action.

DSHG is a Local Authority led, strategic partnership working to improve the delivery of affordable housing in Devon. DSHG comprises representatives of the 2 Unitary Authorities of Plymouth and Torbay, 8 Local Authorities, Dartmoor National Park and Devon County Council, together with representatives of Registered Social Landlords, Supporting People, the Housing Corporation, and the Government Office for the South West.



Working for Affordable Homes in Devon

The Programme

- A “pilot” Affordable Housing Master Class Course was developed and delivered by DSHG and Hawkcrest between December 2006 and May 2007.
- The course consisted of 6, monthly, one day sessions.
- The 23 Delegates were senior housing and planning staff from across all the Devon Local Authorities, Housing Corporation Investment Managers and Rural Housing Enablers. Delegates comprised a mix of disciplines, ages and experience.
- Principal areas covered were development viability & assessment, Section 106 Agreements, policy and negotiation, departmental structures, joint working and corporate ownership of affordable housing.
- The format consisted of a mix of presentations, role play, group discussion and guest speakers. Delegates were given the opportunity to help shape the content of each session.
- This was a practical programme, led by practitioners, for practitioners. Its main aims were to strengthen delegates’ knowledge base in key areas, build stronger cross disciplinary working relationships, inform the work of DSHG and identify further action needed to improve the delivery of affordable housing across Devon.

Roundup

Most useful outcomes -

Delegates felt that these included information exchange and an understanding of the perspectives and pressures of housing enablers, planners, developers and landowners. In addition, technical insights into development viability, Section 106 Agreements and analysis of key policy issues, such as the Planning Gain Supplement Proposals were thought to be very helpful.

Least useful outcomes -

Delegates were fairly evenly divided on this. Some wanted more detail and hands-on exercises relating to development viability assessment, but almost as many comments were received from those who felt that the coverage of this area

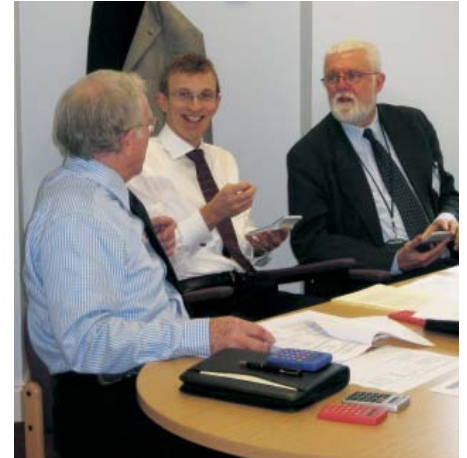
(and Section 106 Agreements) had been too technical for them. This in part reflected the mix of disciplines and variations in the experience of the delegates.

Most delegates said they had been able to apply what they had learnt in the course to their work, by way of increased technical knowledge and improved joint working with colleagues on both day to day and strategic policy issues.

The delegate group bonded well during the course, and became comfortable sharing queries and concerns in an open way. As a result of the relationships and networks developed during the Master Class, it is likely that joint working between local authorities in Sub Regional groups, (as well

as between disciplines within local authorities) will also have improved.

Delegates felt that the programme could have been improved by more opportunities to discuss real life dilemmas, more detailed worked examples, good practice ideas and success stories.



Recommendations

Delegates and organisers alike feel that the key outcome from the Master Class should be to ensure a continuation of the impetus that has been developed from the course.

Specifically, delegates have asked for the following areas to be addressed;

- **Further capacity building & Training** - particularly more training on areas such as development viability and the procurement of external advice, negotiation skills, and using viability assessment model. It was also felt that Council Member Training in this area would be useful.

- **A structured multi - disciplinary cross local authority forum** - meeting regularly to promote networking, agree approaches

on major issues, lobby and co-ordinate strategic activity & training. This could be supported by an interactive on-line facility, provided via the DSHG web site. (The new partnership between Devon Rural Housing Partnership and DSHG will also provide a useful springboard for this forum).

- **Strategic policy development** - to establish "task and finish" groups within DSHG to progress the development of a standardised approach to Section 106 /documentation, the joint procurement of viability tools and dissemination of best practice on affordable housing issues across Devon.

For the future, the following could also be considered;

- **Continuation of the Master Class** (or tailored versions)

to other multi disciplinary groups within local authorities in Devon, including senior officers unable to attend the pilot, junior officers and Council Members.

- **Expansion of the Master Class** concept to senior local authority officers outside Devon (i.e. possibly Cornwall or Somerset).

- **Tailored Capacity Building Days** to cover the training needs raised by the Master Class to include worked examples, real-life dilemmas from delegates and good practice approaches.

- **Mentoring and resource support** for Master Class delegates/forum members to assist with affordable housing capacity generally and specific projects as required.

Summary of the DSHG Affordable Housing Master Class Programme

Session 1 - Affordable Housing - Where are we now

Aims

- To identify the policy framework, organisational cultures, team structures, resourcing of the Strategic/ Enabling function, extent of cross departmental working, and the development of a corporate priority for affordable housing within Devon's Local Authorities.
- Short presentations from LAs 'How We Do It' and examples from outside Devon.
- An introduction to Development Viability Sessions.

Session 2 - Affordable Housing and Viability - Part 1

Aim: To raise awareness of the key issues influencing development viability by looking at:

- Basic Affordable Housing Policy Requirements
- Public Subsidy – background, bidding and managing expectations.
- Viability policy framework and approaches to site economics
- Case studies and "number crunching", referring to developer's "worst case scenarios" and real life examples.

Session 3 - Affordable Housing and Viability - Part 2

Aims

- To look at the key elements in development viability. (More detailed consideration of the case study appraisal from Part 1).
- To identify guidelines when considering viability – to identify "norms", areas to watch out for, good practice tips and tactics.
- To look in more detail at residual land value and developer contributions
- To consider the role of public and private subsidy and the effects on viability of changes in the amount of subsidy provided
- To give an overview of the Three Dragons Model, how it operates, its assumptions, its limitations, and how the Cornish Authorities have made it work for them.

Session 4 - The Section 106 Framework - Part 1

Aims

- To look at the principles behind key components of s106 agreements.
- To examine examples of good practice in the legal documentation required for affordable housing.
- To identify guidelines for what can and what cannot be included in s106 agreements, and identify good practice tips.
- To explore the issues raised by setting a Dwelling Transfer Price

Session 5 - The Section 106 Framework - Part 2

Aims

- A continuation of the examination of specific issues relating to the content of s106 agreements as identified by delegates. e.g. Unilateral undertakings – how to use, manage and get the most from them, best practice for associated agreements e.g. nomination agreements
- To examine the potential implications of Planning Gain Supplement
- To identify how the Group could take S106 issues forward across Devon?
- To identify best practice in the process and procedures of managing Section 106 agreements.

Session 6 - Innovations

Aims

- To examine some of the innovative affordable housing products currently on offer or in development and identify implications for Local Authority policies and practices.
- To review the 5 sessions and identification of key action points and recommendations.
- To review of course format and identify ideas for improvement

Contact Details

To provide your thoughts / input, or for further information, please contact;

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