

MD/jc

18 June 2009

Mr. T. Wagstaff  
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Dear Terry

### **West of England Strategic Housing Market Assessment**

At the June meeting of the Homes West RSL partners we discussed the West of England Strategic Housing Market Assessment, written by Professor Glen Bramley and his team and published last month.

Clearly this is a very important piece of work. As the forward to the report states the robust nature of the research will inform the development of planning and housing policies across the sub-region for the next few years. The four Homes West RSLs therefore welcome the report and its key conclusions about the requirements for affordable housing to 2021.

Our main concern, however, is around the size and type of housing required (Chapter 9 of the report). We cannot argue with the demographics and household formation predictions which all point to the need for the provision of more housing for smaller households rather than larger households. However, we do not consider that this should be directly translated into a policy requirement for more 1 bed flats at the expense of larger flats or houses (Table 9.1 of the report). This table suggests the need for an average of 41.5% of new supply to be in the form of 1 bed flats across the sub-region with figures as high as 53.9% in West Wilts and 48% in Bristol.

Our concerns about providing 1 bed flats rather than larger accommodation for smaller households is based on our combined, extensive experience of managing mixed tenure communities and the need to balance the long term sustainability of these communities over many years with short term need. In particular we find that:

- 1 bed flats are not adaptable to changing household circumstances over time resulting from changes to individual's economic circumstances, relationship changes, ageing or the impact of disability and health issues.
- 1 bed flats prevent residents having people to stay with them for short periods of time e.g. children from a broken relationship, family and friends or carers

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- 1 bed flats are more costly to manage and expensive for people on low incomes as they inevitably incur high service charges on top of the basic rent to manage the communal areas and communal facilities and make provision for future repairs.
- 1 bed flats are not popular with many of our customers and blocks of flats inevitably have much higher turnover and void periods leading to a more transient community with the inevitable problems that lead to for the rest of the estate.
- 1 bed flats can lead to concentrations and ghettos of vulnerable single people depending on the location of the scheme and the particular needs to be met at the time of completion or when vacancies occur. This may lead to patterns of anti-social behaviour which the rest of the scheme has to endure until properly tackled by intensive housing management.
- 1 bed flats in the current economic climate have lost their value at a much greater rate than houses which has a long term impact on RSLs' business plans and capacity to undertake further development work.

We therefore urge the West of England partnership to consider very carefully how the results of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment are translated into future planning policies and section 106 agreements. In particular we would argue that 1 bed flats are not the best way forward to meet the needs of smaller households and instead smaller houses should be provided. In fairness the report acknowledges this to a certain extent in the summary to chapter 9 but inevitably, policy makers and developers will home in on the headline figures and not the detail of the report.

We would be very keen to be engaged as a partnership in the policy development that follows the publication of this strategy and look forward to hearing from you as to how this will take place.

Yours sincerely



**Mike Day**

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For and behalf of the Homes West Strategic Partners

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