

Full Council - housing Summit

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Full Council

Tonight's Full Council was very lively and as expected the Housing Summit was eventful.

The bottom is falling out of the housing market for a wide variety of reasons, so for the average person, there is not a right time to buy nor is there a right to sell, but there is a right time to rent.

The current situation in the UK is proving that, as buying and selling has almost stopped and the rental demand within the private sector has increased. Along with this has increased the price of rent in what is largely an unregulated sector open to abuse by some landlords.

The right to buy was a success in the fact that it allowed residents to buy their home at a discounted price and the sale of Council Housing stock to associations have both been fundamental errors, only now is this really being realised.

Both systems saw the whole sale of housing stock, some people making a fast buck. It is unfortunate that the sale of housing stock to associations saw rents increase and units sold, but when sold, they were and are not replaced.

The concentration then became on "Affordable Housing", with the aim being to ensure that key workers were given a priority. Here again, this caused a number of problems. There was no strict definition of a key worker and developers sales policies differ to such a great extent that there is no continuity throughout the market and it became open season, those that could afford got to buy.

Shared equity failed to take off with the WHT having less than 100 residents having taken up the option but the queue to rent is now around 12,000 and a housing stock of a little over 10,000 units down from over 14,000.

The buy to let saw mortgages being given out by the dozen and one person could easily get multiple mortgages and the housing market almost became by 4 get 1 free because of discounts given when buying from new.

And in the mix came irresponsible lending, commission hunters, rapid build leading to faulty builds.

The credit crunch as it is called, could lead to rebirth to stop and regulate irresponsible lending, knock on the head the commission hunters, sort out housing associations and give more power to the local authority.

Residents need to get back to having the security of knowing they have a home for life, they need to have a say, buy doing this we will finally begin to return the sense of ownership, the sense of belonging, thus and ultimately the sense of community and finally the return of community pride.

By working together and leaving politics at the door, I believe that Telford and Wrekin now has a unique opportunity and could easily become the Trail Breakers on housing. By working together and being prepared to identify areas that can be improved without passing blame we can move forward.

Criticism has to be made, but it has to be made in a constructive manner that identifies an area that needs improvement, but at the same time saying what is being done well.

Telford and Wrekin will have all eyes watching and I for one believe we can do it well and stop being one of the best, but become the best. Openness, honesty and commitment will ensure this happens.

Councillor Keith Austin tabled the following motion to Full Council on 25th Sept 08,

Notices of Motion

(a) Councillor R.K. Austin will move, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12, the following Motion: "This Council recognises the urgent need to focus on providing new affordable housing for rent and sale to help first time buyers and to support home owners who find themselves in difficulty. This focus is ever more necessary following the crisis in the world's banking system, resulting in the fall in house prices and availability of mortgages. With this in mind the Council welcomes the measures recently announced by the Government to support the housing market and the concept of a Telford Housing Summit being proposed by David Wright MP. This council agrees to participate fully in the Telford

Housing Summit and work with a wide range of partners to prioritise the development of affordable houses for rent and sale." The motion will be seconded by Councillor C.F. Smith

On the face of it, it could read that he was trying to score some points, but when he spoke, he certainly got away from that and having been in contact with Keith prior to the meeting, I believe his intentions were honourable.

The housing summit will involve many and it will naturally evolve, take its own shape, this is how the idea was formed initially.

I will take the opportunity to clear one issue, in 2006, the name "Housing Summit" came from MP David Wright and the name evolved out of talking and sharing ideas to and from.

I will also take the opportunity to clear a second issue. MP Mark Pritchards office have worked hard on housing issues, but the key stone a drive within this office was Cllr Denis Allen who worked long and hard. Unfortunately for MP Mark Pritchard, he dropped the ball on housing issues when Denis went onto other duties and has not recovered. Having tried to get replies from him and his office unsuccessfully lies testament to that.

Whilst we know about regeneration, LDF, LAA, BFI etc, these cannot be employed as tactics to cloud issues with Liverpool being one example of this and take away from the nature of the Housing Summit, often the best answers and ideas are the simplest.

Out of acorns oak trees grow.