

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO HEALTH & HOUSING COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: THURSDAY, 11 JUNE 2015
title: VACANT BUILDINGS CREDIT
submitted by: MARSHAL SCOTT – CHIEF EXECUTIVE
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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To inform Committee of the vacant buildings credit and the implications for affordable housing delivery.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:
 - Community Objectives – To address the identified housing needs in the borough.
 - Corporate Priorities – To achieve a balanced housing market.
 - Other Considerations – None.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Government has continued to introduce initiatives intended to stimulate housing development recently. Their new measure looks to assist small-scale schemes coming forward or to remove obstacles to develop previously used land. Redeveloping brownfield land has been a key planning objective that has been constrained by viability issues. Vacancy buildings credit is one measure recently introduced to remedy this.
- 2.2 The credit applies where a vacant building is brought back into lawful use or is demolished to be replaced by a new building. The developer should be offered a financial credit equivalent to the existing gross floor space of the relevant vacant building when the Local Authority calculates any affordable housing contribution. In November 2014 the Department of Communities and Local Government announced the revision of the National Planning Practice Guidance with immediate effect to reflect this change.

3 IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 An affordable housing contribution can only be required for any increase in floor space above that of the existing dwelling on the site. Therefore this ultimately will result in a reduction in affordable housing provision where there is a vacant building on the existing site. However there are a number of issues that need clarification. The definition vacant or abandoned itself is mostly a legal matter but there are some areas that need to be clarified. The date at which the property had been assessed for the measure to apply is not clear and would need to be agreed by the Planning Department.
- 3.2 Judging a building's vacancy is another issue as to whether it needs to be completely vacant or partial vacancy would count? Also what about temporary use or short-term vacancy? If the owners empty the property just before planning for planning

permission, would that still qualify? These are issues that need to be clarified to make this a workable policy, not just in its application but also in its consequences.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – None arising from this report.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – Legal advice required for clarification on various points within the guidance.
- Political – There will be reduced affordable housing delivered from brownfield sites.
- Reputation – Need to ensure correct implementation of guidance.
- Equality & Diversity – None arising from this report.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Committee accept the contents of this report and acknowledge the implications for affordable housing delivery.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

For further information please ask for Rachael Stott, extension 4567.

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