

# PRESS RELEASE

## LIBERAL DEMOCRATS AT EAST CAMBS DISTRICT COUNCIL SABOTAGE PLANS TO BRING DERELICT HOMES BACK INTO USE

31<sup>ST</sup> MAY 2019



---

## LIBERAL DEMOCRATS AT EAST CAMBS DISTRICT COUNCIL SABOTAGE PLANS TO BRING DERELICT HOMES BACK INTO USE

### THE NEW LIBERAL DEMOCRAT GROUP PUT POLITICS BEFORE PEOPLE LAST NIGHT WITH THEIR WRECKING MOTION AT THE FIRST FULL COUNCIL MEETING OF THE NEW ADMINISTRATION

The carefully worked up plans of East Cambs District Council to bring the 88 empty properties at the MoD site in Ely back into use, with the potential to further develop the site in the future, were put at serious risk last night by the actions of the new Liberal Democrat Group.

At nil cost to tax payers, the project aims to deliver 88 refurbished homes with 4 units being divided to provide 92 homes in total, 15 of which are to be retained as affordable homes in a Community Land Trust structure and reserved for local working people with ties to the area. The purchase also offers the potential for further development of the site in the future, with up to 62 new homes, at least 30% of which would be reserved as affordable homes for local working people.

The new Leader of the District Council, Cllr Anna Bailey said: “The Council has worked for months with the Combined Authority, the MoD and East Cambs Trading Company to put this plan together. The politically motivated, reckless, and ill informed actions of the Liberal Democrat Group have now put the whole project at serious risk. The on-site start date of July will not now happen, the homes will remain derelict and will continue to deteriorate whilst we try to salvage the project.”

Cllr Bailey continued: “The MoD made it clear to the Council that it was working to a very tight timeline for disposal of the site and they have worked with us, as a trusted partner, in the reasonable expectation that the Council would stick to the agreed timeline. We know there are other interested parties out there who will not be required to provide any affordable housing from the derelict properties. I fear the MoD may now simply decide to get on with site disposal through public auction or to another interested party.”

The Lib Dem motion, which was passed by 12 votes to 11, now requires the Council to work up a new scheme to put to the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) Board to increase the proportion of affordable housing delivered in phase 1 to 50%, with a “significant number” of those homes available for affordable rent. The delay, whilst the mechanics of the motion are worked through, means the agreed purchase date is now impossible.

The CPCA received £100m in the devolution deal for the delivery of 2,000 affordable homes by 2022. The CPCA looks to deliver affordable housing units at a benchmark cost of £35k per unit; the maximum it has ever agreed, exceptionally, is £55k per unit. The effect of the Liberal Democrat motion is to seek between £104k and £112k per unit to convert open market homes to affordable.

This is based on the “significant number” demanded by the motion, specifically 31, of the 46 homes being available for affordable rent, with the remaining 15 homes staying as affordable shared equity. Even setting a low number of homes for affordable rent, 10 units for example, would still require a significantly greater level of grant funding than the CPCA’s benchmark of £35k and more than the maximum ever requested.

Cllr Anna Bailey said: “The Lib Dems have failed to examine or understand the detail of this scheme. The basic problem is that the existing empty homes on the MoD site are not suitable to convert to affordable homes. Conservatives absolutely share the desire to provide affordable housing in East Cambs and we think there are big opportunities, which we have always said, to increase the percentage of affordable new units in the phase 2 development beyond the normal 30%.”

There is absolutely no precedent or expectation that the CPCA will agree to the additional grant funding required by the motion.

Cllr Bailey continued: “I am really disappointed that, having carefully explained all of the implications to the Lib Dems, and having invited them to focus on the real opportunities that exist in phase 2, they chose to put the project at very serious and very real risk of total loss. The Lib Dems, despite the evident discomfort of some of their new members, chose politics over people last night, and in so doing they clearly set the flavour of how they intend to behave over the four year term.”

The Council will now begin work on the new proposals required by the motion which will need to go before the CPCA Housing & Communities Committee, ECDC Full Council, the CPCA Board and the East Cambs Trading Company Board, a process which is likely to take until at least October this year.

-ENDS-

Anna Bailey, Leader of East Cambridgeshire District Council and East Cambridgeshire Conservative Group

#### **Notes for Editors**

The full wording of the Liberal Democrat motion can be seen here:

<https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/agendas/fc%20300519%20Ag.pdf>