

NOTE OF OPEN FORUM/WORKSHOP ON COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING

Held in Thurlestone Parish Hall on Monday 28 January 2019 at 1900 hrs

This workshop was attended by around 65 people, including, District Cllr Judy Pearce; and Parish Cllrs Jack Rhymes, Tony Goddard, Jill Munn and Nigel Hurrell. The event was arranged and co-ordinated by the Community Housing Group, assisted by the Neighbourhood Plan Advisory Group.

Jack Rhymes, Chairman of Thurlestone Parish Council:

Cllr Rhymes welcomed those present and introduced the event by explaining that the workshop was essentially an evidence-gathering exercise to find out how many people were likely to be eligible for community housing and to hear the views of the wider community about its potential scale, design, mix and siting.

Cllr Rhymes referred back to when the Neighbourhood Plan process began, when one of the biggest concerns that came across was the high proportion of second homes and holiday homes. These make up 39% of the housing in the Parish (well above average). The Parish is also a popular retirement area, with 43% of the population being age 65 and over. It was therefore not surprising that house prices in the Parish had risen dramatically, with some houses selling for £1-2m and more, which meant local working families on an average wage find it virtually impossible to buy here.

Cllr Rhymes went on to say that If we want to prevent migration out of the Parish by families searching for cheaper housing and to help them get on the property ladder, then we have to find a way to provide housing here in the Parish. This will then help to keep the village alive, contribute to a year-round community and help support our shops, school and other facilities. He emphasized, however, that this housing must be right for the Parish and that we should rest assured that there are strict planning criteria that must be followed. Any housing has got to fit in with the local environment; it must also be in a location that will contribute to the vitality of a village community and Parish as a whole. He said the good news is that there is now money available for community-led housing and that South Hams District Council has nearly £2M to assist areas with a high proportion of second homes such as ours.

Most importantly, Cllr Rhymes stressed that it is early days for this project; no decisions have been made and that this is the very beginning of the process.

After outlining how the evening would proceed, Cllr Rhymes then handed over to Jess Wellens who is leading the Community-led Housing Project.

Jess Wellens, Community Housing Group:

Jess introduced herself by describing how she and her family had lived in rental accommodation in the Parish for the past 5 years and their children attend the junior and pre-school in Thurlestone. They would like to stay in the area, but were priced out of the housing market.

Jess then went on to explain that the two big questions to consider at the workshop were: who is eligible for community housing and where it should be located. She referred to a series of power point slides that covered the following topics to be discussed at each table in the course of completing the 2 questionnaires that had been circulated:

Slides 2 – 4: Eligibility and Local Connection criteria. To qualify for community housing, applicants must first register with Help to Buy South West (for discounted purchase) or Devon Home Choice (for rentals). This is mandatory. The Parish's Local Connection requirements (as stated) will only apply once applicants are registered.

Slides 5 – 8: West Buckland site. This is one of 2 possible sites that have already been offered by a landowner for this project. The slides show the possible scale and extent of the site (approx 2900 sq m) and how it would sit within the landscape (using the superimposed Valleyside houses to give an idea of scale) and how the housing could look (using the N Upton barns, as an example).

Slides 9 – 12: North Upton site. This is the second site that has already been offered by another landowner for this project. Again, the slides show the possible scale and extent of the site and how it would sit within the landscape. There are 2 versions – the first, a larger site (approx 3700 sq m), using the North Upton barns (to give an idea of scale); the second, a smaller site (approx 2220 sq m), using the superimposed Valleyside houses (to give an idea of scale only).

Slides 13 – 16: Examples of contrasting architectural styles around the Parish, selected in order to generate discussion and obtain feedback about possible design, layout and materials.

Slides 18 – 21: Examples of existing community housing at Broadhempston, Christow and South Brent, to generate discussion. *[More details of these schemes can be obtained online]*

OPEN FORUM

In the course of the Open Forum, the followings questions were raised:

Why are the sites only based on those which have been offered by landowners rather than on sites which present a good opportunity? Cllr Pearce explained that the District Council has to rely on willing landowners rather than coercing people into selling land.

[This is explained in Q3 on the questionnaire - Community housing relies on landowners being willing to sell land to SHDC for up to 10k per plot. Q3 also asks if anyone owns or knows of any land in the Parish that would be suitable. Sites will be evaluated in terms of whether they meet the relevant planning criteria.]

How do we know if every landowner has been contacted rather than just taking the first two offers? Sue Crowther explained that in the course of producing the Neighbourhood Plan, suitable sites for affordable housing had already been explored and landowners had been approached. The purpose of the workshop was to further raise the profile of the project and find out if there are any other landowners interested in selling land. *[Requests have also been made in Village Voice and on the parish website.]*

Taking into account infrastructure, why is Thurlestone eg the field at the top of Court Park not being considered, as it has the best access to facilities? Sue Crowther said that enquiries had been made about this field and another field on the other side of the main road, but the landowner is not willing to sell either of these fields.

THE WORKSHOP QUESTIONNAIRES

The questionnaires were prepared by the Neighbourhood Planning Advisory Group and were designed to obtain feedback that would relate directly back to the policies in the Neighbourhood Plan, rather than produce random responses. Laptops were located on the individual tables, so that people could take a closer look at the slides in their own time, discuss the topics raised in small groups and raise any questions with members of the Community Housing Group or Neighbourhood Plan Advisory Group who were allocated to those tables.

Questionnaire One: Details of scale, design, mix and siting

This was an important opportunity to find out where those attending the workshop considered would be the most appropriate location for community housing, and why?

This first questionnaire also sought views about how the project may look in terms of design, where it would fit best into the landscape, and where it would contribute to the vitality of a village community and Parish as a whole. Q4 asked for people's views about the possibility of a mixed housing scheme of rental and to buy properties, since this option cannot be discounted at this early stage.

Questionnaire Two: Details of household and local connection to Thurlestone Parish

This questionnaire focused on housing need and obtaining details from prospective applicants in order to ascertain how many households are in housing need and would be likely to meet the Parish's local connection criteria. The opportunity was also taken to obtain information from those in need of affordable rental properties.

[There are 47 affordable rented dwellings in Thurlestone and the Neighbourhood Planning Advisory Group will be looking closely at those we already have, before addressing any shortfall. In our Housing Needs Survey 2016 (available on the parish website), SHDC recommended an additional 4 rental properties: 1 x 1 bed, 2 x 2 bed and 1 x 3 bed over the following 5 years. Any additional rental properties are likely to be built by a housing association as an extension to their existing accommodation and close to the village amenities of Thurlestone.]

The workshop ended at 2010 hrs. A report summarising the outcome of the workshop will be presented at the next meeting of the Parish Council on 4 March 2019.