

From: THE CHAIRMAN, THE COMMUNITY HOUSING WORKING GROUP.

ANCHOR HOUSE, PILLORY HILL, NOSS MAYO, PL8 1ED
Telephone: 01752 872366. e.mail: robstar@talktalk.net

6th July 2006.

To: The Chairman, the Newton and Noss Parish Council.

Copies to: Roger Hallett Esq
William Mumford Esq

References:

- a. The SHDC Housing Review (South Hams LDF) Jan 2006.
- b. The South Hams Local Development Framework Jan 2006.
- c. The NNPC Consultation Reply - PP3 Housing dated 27.02.06
- d. The NNPC Response to the LDF Core Strategy 10 March 2006
- e. Mr Yonge's response to the LDF dated 13 March 2006.
- f. The NNPC Affordable Housing to 2016 dated 18 April 2006
- g. SHDC Supplementary Planning Guidance for sustainable development of small sites.
- h. Chairman South West Water's letter dated 3rd July 2006

COMMUNITY HOUSING –FIRST WORK-IN-PROGRESS REPORT.

INTRODUCTION.

I promised to let you have a series of “Work-in-Progress Reports” once the Working Group had begun its deliberations.

The first Committee Meeting took place on 26th May and the Minutes have been circulated and published on the NNPC Website. That said, the main outcome of the first meeting was agreement that we needed some overriding *principles*, a *factual Data Base* on which to support any recommendations and to create a series of *sub-groups* to undertake the necessary work independently of Full Group Meetings.

We met for a second time on the 5th July.

PROGRESS SO FAR.

1. The search for Facts.

It was necessary to establish early on just how many people **would actually need and who might take up any Community Housing that might be built**. An article was published in the July edition of the Parish Magazine and on the Parish website asking for this information. Thus far there has been absolutely no formal response, though there is anecdotal evidence that there are some people who might wish to take up Community Housing at some stage. There may be many reasons for this lack of response and we are now going to broaden our appeal through “The Nose” and by posting flyers on telegraph poles around the villages.

There was a need to create an **Environmental Data Base** to assist us in making any final recommendations. The Chairman has already received all the detailed local information on the water and sewage infrastructure. However, he had also written to the Director of the Planning Department at South West Water to establish how much, if any, spare capacity

remains in the local sewage system to cope with any new construction. The Chairman of South West Water has replied (Reference h). Any new development would need to fund the additional improvements that would be required. Some potential local developers are already in discussion with South West Water. The limitations of the present sewage system will impose costs on any housing project.

Detailed maps of Gas and Telecommunications infrastructure are expected shortly.

House Building Prices. Only an eventual tendering exercise will reveal true prices. The general assumption by local Planning Authorities on “Affordable House Prices” is a maximum of £83,000 per housing unit.

Environmental Issues. The Terms of Reference required us to “meet the highest sustainability criteria, minimising the impact on the environment in terms of both appearance and the use of both energy and water”. A database of available technologies is being compiled.

Employment Land. There was no immediate knowledge of who might wish to take up and make use of any new employment land that might be proposed. A request for this information was included in the article being published in the Parish Magazine. Thus far there has been no formal response though there is anecdotal evidence that such a demand exists.

2. **Actions:**

Local Landowners - Availability of land for Community Housing.

Robin Geldard and Christopher Bradley visited all the various sites set out on the NNPC Map of “Potential Affordable Housing Sites” (Reference f). Those various Landowners or their Representatives visited were very cooperative and refreshingly frank about their personal ambitions. We need to respect some of these early contributions to the debate on grounds of confidentiality but several major issues will need further investigation, amongst which would be:

- How would defaulters in rent be handled by any Community Housing Trust?
- How would any Capital Gain on any property be managed?
- How would the value in any future transaction be calculated and agreed?
- With at least two current “commercial” bids for building permission in Newton Ferrers, it will be important to discover early on the “Actual” price for local land approved for building, since this will have a profound effect on any agreements reached with local landowners.

There is a great deal of information to hand on some of these issues which have been pioneered at High Bickington and elsewhere. What is certain is that we have at least nine local Landowners who would, in principle, be glad to make land available for Community Housing provided we could deliver value for money and sensible local control over any development. **The crucial difficulty remains the planning rule which insists that any “Rural Exception Site” has to be 100% given over to “Affordable Housing”.**

Employment Land.

- A plan for a series of three commercial units, together with a workshop and apartment, are already proposed for the Membland site and would appear to be a promising addition for the Parish.
- The Collaton Site. (Reference e) needs further examination in that it is a site that could possibly be used for a mixed development of both affordable housing and employment purposes.

Criteria.

- Reference g sets out the ground rules for achieving high quality and sustainable development on small sites of approximately 20 dwellings or less on sites up to 0.5 hectares for housing, employment or mixed use schemes. Each possible site will have to be measured against these criteria.
- Paul Francombe and Nicky Tewson are reviewing the mass of eligibility criteria from Local Housing Need Literature and Local Community Trusts elsewhere. Once we have a feel for the actual requirement, then these eligibility criteria, accommodation needs and preferences can be applied to our local circumstances.

FUTURE REALITIES.

Much as we might like to see a controlled “organic” expansion of the Parish, with local control of Community Housing in perpetuity, there is mounting commercial pressure for development at two or three sites where planning decisions will be reached by the SHDC. These sites, if approved, could well provide up to 78 housing units in Newton Ferrers in the short to medium term.

The Landowners in question might modify their current proposals to appeal to the Planners at Follaton House, but will naturally wish to make the most of their opportunities. We should realise that these landowners are under real pressure to achieve their aims in the short term and certainly before the LDF kicks in and the build at Sherford begins. It is our view that every effort should be made to influence the density and design of any development that might get planning approval.

For instance, were Briar Hill Farm to get the go-ahead it could provide, at least in theory, 25 affordable homes at around £150,000 each. This Committee does not consider £150,000 even close to an “affordable price”, aiming initially for a target price of between £80,000 and £90,000; a price closely related to average local earnings, currently estimated to be £18,147.00 pa. The present owner’s intention is to vest any such a development in a National Housing Association which would, by definition, be outside NNPC control.

Any Community Housing proposals will have to be seen against such a background. It would appear that an acre of ‘building land’ in the South Hams could be worth between £800,000 and £1.2m. Were this to be the case in practice, then such values will have a direct effect on any arrangements we might wish to make with other local landowners.

Discussions with local Landowners have raised several difficult issues which will need to be reviewed over the coming months:

* **Fairness.** How do we achieve this? If one Landowner provides a site, do others receive some sort of consideration?

* **Environmental Factors.** There are many factors here that will need investigation:

- The importance of trees and the question of TPO’s on existing trees.
- The Sewage System is currently working at capacity and would not be able to cope without costly enhancement.
- New Sites will need, as called for in the Terms of Reference for this work, environmentally neutral disposal systems for the new sites and for the handling of grey water.

* **The Duties & Liabilities of Future Trustees.** There are many potential difficulties which should not be underestimated:

- * Should there be Residents' Associations?
- o How to enforce Rent Defaulters?
- o How to agree a Taxable Valuation for each site?
- o How to choose an index rating for the growth rate of each individual property?
- o How would Capital Gains be assessed?

* **Costs.** There will be significant costs, which the NNPC will have to fund in some way. Apart from some small disbursements to committee members who have had to spend money to acquire information in support of the work in hand, there may be a need, for instance, for a Building Surveyor to make a professional assessment of each potential site. The Committee are examining whether we could find a Housing Association who might be prepared to work in concert with any future Village Community Land Trust, thus reducing the costs whilst bringing their extensive experience to bear. There are good and less good Housing Associations and some care will be needed in deciding with whom to cooperate.

Beyond these disbursements there will be significant costs in setting up and running any Community or other Housing Trust.

SUMMARY.

We have made a start in gathering all the necessary information so that the NNPC can make sensible decisions towards the end of the year. The Chairman attended the "South West Initiative Housing Conference" in Bristol. This conference was aimed specifically at solving some of the problems we are investigating. The SHDC was the only West Country District Council not to send a delegate.

The CHWG is, however, inhabiting a parallel universe where we are looking towards a desirable, if modest, organic growth under some sort of village "control". In parallel, other landowners are racing to get their hands in the cookie jar before the LDF kicks in and Sherford starts to soak up both money and any enthusiasm at Follaton House for the modest proposals that almost everyone who lives here actually wants. The rules governing the use to which "Rural Exception Sites" can be put will further mitigate against the sort of solution to which our local landowners are currently drawn and which most people want.

Perhaps, more significantly; attempts to find out the "actual" demand for Affordable Housing and Employment Land from within the Parish has thus far produced almost no demand at all, except for some anecdotal opinion. The requirement, set in our Terms of Reference, to build over 100 houses over the next decade may turn out to be very wide of the mark! This information is, however, vital to the success of this enterprise since, without written evidence of likely need, the SHDC is most unlikely to see the case for Community Housing as worth pursuing.

There is an undoubted demand for Affordable Housing across the South Hams with 1,964 on the Housing Register and with 104 of those with 'priority need' currently in Temporary Accommodation. Clearly, should Briar Hill Farm get approval then, together with Sherford, there will be a large influx of people from outside the Parish into both Newton Ferrers and the local area. "Building for people with connections to Newton and Noss" - in simplistic terms the task the CHWG has been given - will need exceptional cooperation with the SHDC to achieve the results we all seem to want.

To this end; a delegation from the CHWG is shortly to have discussions with the Planners at Follaton House.