

ICKLESHAM PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING MONDAY 5TH MARCH 2018

AFFORDABLE HOUSING UPDATE

1.00 Introduction

- 1.01 As many of you will know, the Parish Council has for several years been pursuing the building of some additional low-rental housing to enable existing residents of the Parish to remain in the Parish. We recognized that without a project of this nature, people living in unsuitable housing or young persons wanting to form separate household but whose financial circumstances would not allow them to enter the house purchase market locally, would not otherwise be able to remain in the Parish where they had family, or grew up.
- 1.02 Three years ago the Parish Council finally persuaded Rother District Council to agree to a Housing Needs Survey being conducted across the Parish, with the view to establishing the need for a Local Needs Housing Scheme.
- 1.03 A Local Needs Housing Scheme is a scheme built on land beyond the recognized Limits of Built Development of a community, but contiguous with the boundary. Land in this location would not normally attract planning permission. However, an exception is made where a Housing Needs Survey has demonstrated that there is a need for housing for local people and that need cannot be met using land within the Limits to Built Development.
- 1.04 Land that will not normally attract planning permission does attract the premium prices of land with planning permission or a reasonable chance of obtaining permission. This means that the land for Exception Needs Housing can be purchased at a lower price and low-cost land is one of the key planks of Exception Needs Housing as the lower the total cost of the development, the lower the level of future rents can be and the more chance there is of making the accommodation affordable to people on incomes lower than the national average income.
- 1.05 Another key plank of this policy is that through the grant of planning permission, the Local Planning Authority seek to prevent the housing becoming part of the general housing market, which would, of course, result in the rent levels rising to market levels; thus, defeating the object of providing the housing. What the Local Planning Authority will do when granting consent for such development is to seek a legal obligation from the owners of the land that the occupation of the dwellings is limited in perpetuity to occupation by persons having a connection with the locality. In our case 'locality' means the Civil Parish of Icklesham rather than Icklesham Ward of the Parish.
- 1.06 The exact wording of the obligation will not be decided until we reach the planning application stages. It is likely to make provision for the unlikely event of there being no eligible occupants with connections to the Parish who need accommodation. In that case it will cascade out to adjoining Parishes. The Local Planning Authority have already adopted a general policy along these lines. Furthermore, no housing provider would want to commit themselves to a scheme in terms that could result in periods of no occupation and thus no rent coming in. However, any vacancy that occurs will always, in the first instance, be offered to residents having a connection with the Parish.

2.00 Where have we got to.

- 2.01 The Parish Council, having received the results of the survey, indicating a need for up to 30 units of accommodation, together with the list of potential sites suggested by those who responded to the survey;

short-listed the potential sites by carrying out an exercise jointly with Officers from Rother District Council's Housing and Planning Services to determine which sites had the most potential to obtain planning consent, based on a set of criteria such as access to services, ability to provide suitable vehicular access, etc.

- 2.02 At that point the Parish Council decided it would step back from the project and hand the project over to either a Housing Association or Community Land Trust. A public meeting held in Icklesham indicated that the preference was for a Community Land Trust.
- 2.03 The outcome of this was that the Icklesham Parish Community Land Trust Ltd formally came into existence in January 2017 and took up the mantle of pursuing the local needs housing project.
- 2.04 The Community Land Trust is entirely independent of the Parish Council. It is a Community Benefit Society, meaning that any income can only be used for projects to benefit the community it serves, not the shareholders. The Board of Directors are answerable only to their shareholders and the Financial Conduct Authority. In fact, two members of the Parish Council are currently on the Board, but not as councillors. They both took independent personal decisions to remain involved with the project. Any resident of the Parish is entitled to become a member by buying a £1 share.

3.00 The Project.

- 3.01 The site that performed best in the site assessment process is a site at the Western end of Icklesham, adjoining the bungalows to the West of Broad Street.
- 3.02 The Community Land Trust (CLT) decided that as this was their first project that it would be wiser to engage with a Housing Association to carry out the development and the future management of the site, as they had the expertise and the experience to find funding for the development.
- 3.03 What the CLT has brought to the table is the ability to access preliminary funding for most of the significant survey work that has to be carried out prior to the submission of a planning application. These are funds not available to Housing Associations, but significance of the funding is that as comes in grants, it will reduce the overall costs that have to be considered in setting the rents.
- 3.04 Before selecting the Housing Association the Board of the CLT visited one of their newer sites and spoke to tenants. The response from the tenants was very positive, particularly with respect to running costs, which is as important as rent levels.
- 3.05 The preliminary survey work cannot be completed until April/May time as the Regulations governing some of the surveys mean that they can only be carried out in March/April. This means that any planning application is not likely to be made before June/July.
- 3.06 It is only when all the surveys are completed that a decision can be made to submit a planning application.
- 3.07 If the outcome of all the surveys is positive, once the CLT and the Housing Association have a scheme they are prepared to submit for planning approval, a public exhibition will be held to outline the scheme and receive comments, before the application is submitted.
- 3.08 The scheme currently being proposed would provide 15 units of accommodation in a mix of 1,2 and 3-bedroomed units. Current practice dictates that one should only seek to meet 50% of the identified need because the time frame between surveying the need and first occupation taking place means that some of the identified need has fallen by the wayside.
