

NEWTON & NOSS PARISH COUNCIL

AFFORDABLE HOUSING POLICY 2009

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TO BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE

NEWTON & NOSS PARISH PLAN 2004

SECTION 2: HOUSING

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JANUARY 2009

Affordable Housing Policy 2009

Definition of Affordable Housing as contained in the Newton & Noss Parish Plan 2004:-

“For us it means narrowing the gap between house prices and incomes as well as ensuring demand is met for smaller homes for people who wish to downsize. The methods of ownership may be by renting, outright purchase, or shared equity.”

Background

The Parish Council's previous housing policy was based on a Parish-wide Housing Survey conducted in 2004, when 75% of respondents supported the need for affordable housing and 50% accepted it might have to be outside the development boundary. A subsequent report from the Social Research & Regeneration Unit of Plymouth University, partially funded by the E.U., validated this view.

Since that time there has been further work, undertaken by the Community Housing Working Group (CHWG), and subsequent housing surveys. New councillors have been elected, the District Councillor has changed, there have been numerous alterations to Government policies and SHDC has been caught up in the tedious LDF process which seeks to develop an agreed planning framework to 2016 and beyond. Meanwhile, regional housing targets continue to oscillate and Sherford - which was supposed to provide a significant level of affordable housing for the South Hams - is surrounded by uncertainty.

Within the Parish new extra-care social units (of mixed tenure) and the modest redevelopment of Butts Park (exploring the “shared equity” model of ownership) have come on stream. Both these projects have been illuminating in informing the Parish Council about which models are likely to work best for those in need. They have also illustrated the advantages and disadvantages of modern high density development with restricted off-street parking. Much research has also been undertaken into the benefits and problems associated with Community Land Trusts and the difficulties of several organisations attempting to run a joint scheme.

During this period the economic climate has moved from one of excessive speculation to that of extreme credit shortage. Nevertheless, the South Hams suffers some of the lowest wages in the U.K., in a housing market where average prices in the Parish are well above the South Hams and national averages, despite the slump.

Low oil prices (if not temporary) and a new President will help to re-ignite the U.S. economy. Just as their problems made our own difficulties worse, so an improvement in the U.S. outlook will have a positive impact on us. However, the uncertainty of the U.K. political climate (particularly with such low international confidence in our Government's economic policy - the Opposition's policy is equally uncertain), and the strategic failings of the financial sector means it will be very difficult to predict the British economic future over the next three years. Higher unemployment is a certainty, as is the extent of those likely to be in housing need. The risks of deflation or stagflation cannot be eliminated and the timing of an eventual housing recovery is anyone's guess.

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On the horizon is the prospect of “Devon Home Choice” for the allocation of social housing which, although a welcome improvement over the existing arrangements, will enable people from all over Devon to apply for social housing wherever it is available. Local entitlement can only be ensured by tight Section 106 agreements.

Given these changes, the Parish Council has developed this policy in the context of implementing the Parish Plan 2004.

Introduction

The Parish Council accepts there is a persistent need for affordable social housing on a modest scale, provided on-going requirement is proven. The 2008 Housing Survey identified a real need for 32 homes, mainly for couples and families. 15 properties are required as soon as possible for those in immediate need, whilst a remaining 17 are likely to be necessary within 3 years. These figures are in line with previous housing surveys. At present there are 62 social housing properties across the Parish, 36 (58%) of these dwellings having been designed for the elderly or infirm.

The Parish Council recognises that an appropriate balance needs to be maintained between permanent, full-time occupied residences and holiday homes (which can provide employment and vital profitable summer trade for local businesses). A significant reduction in the permanent population would threaten many essential services which help to maintain the “sustainability” of the community. However, except for a pub, Noss Mayo, Membland, Collaton, Bridgend and Netton are already without local shops or a Post Office within easy walking distance. Therefore, any decline in permanent residents needs to be avoided, but achieving a consistent set of population data between official census periods is haphazard and prone to error.

In the private sector the Parish Council notes there has been a steady diminution in the availability of smaller dwellings, as many modest properties on larger sites have been enlarged over the past 20 years.

The Parish Council notes previous concerns about the number of local young families and the knock-on threat to the viability of the **thriving** Primary School. The Housing Survey identifies a housing need, mainly for families and couples. Whilst long-term average family ages have an impact on pupil numbers, recent history (both locally and across England & Wales) has shown it is the quality of a school which is the key factor to its viability. Effective leadership is far more important (and cost effective) than building large numbers of cheap houses to artificially sustain an indifferent institution. The present **success** of Newton Ferrers Primary School is a tribute to the Head Teacher, parents and Governors.

Ironically, it is safer and more convenient for some “Revelstoke” children to catch the school bus to Holbeton than walk to Newton Ferrers via the narrow and dangerous Bridgend Hill which has no provision for pedestrians; safety issues must be addressed. The practical catchment area of the school could also be improved by restoring appropriate school transport services from Revelstoke to Newton Ferrers. This would be more energy efficient than the number of private car journeys currently undertaken.

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The Parish Council accepts that for many social landlords, 15 units is the minimum economically viable, primarily social development. However, smaller mixed schemes of more evenly balanced private and social housing can also be economically viable and reduce the risks of isolating social provision. Mixed schemes are more likely to generate sites within, or closer to, the existing development boundary.

The period since 2004 has not been wasted and, at the time of writing, there is a real prospect of a “departure site” coming forward very soon which will provide approximately 15 socially rented houses in Newton Ferrers, outside the existing development boundary.

Therefore, the Parish Council’s policy on Affordable Housing is as follows:-

1. In order to maintain the character of the community, the Parish Council would not wish the local permanent population to rise much above 2,000 or fall significantly below 1,700. (The current permanent figure is estimated to be between 1,750 and 1,850.)
2. The Parish Council accepts the ongoing need for a provision of affordable housing, required by many sectors of society who are unable to afford to purchase in the open market or find appropriate secure solutions in the local privately rented sector which is heavily weighted towards holiday lets.
3. Therefore, the Parish Council believes the focus of attention should be primarily on delivering social, rented, affordable housing and that the open market should address shortages of affordable private housing for purchase with the encouragement of the Parish Council. (Part-purchase schemes have been tried but, under existing rules, are particularly difficult in our local market.)
4. At the present time, the Parish Council does not believe there to be an essential need for the development of a significant number of private dwellings on any new site.
5. The recent Housing Survey of 2008 confirmed the immediate need for 15 socially rented properties and 17 further units within the next 3 years. These figures are accepted by the Parish Council.
6. The 32 dwellings identified in the Housing Survey 2008 should be protected by appropriate Section 106 agreements to ensure ongoing occupancy for either those with a legitimate local connection, or key workers; the dwellings should be excluded from any “right to buy” provision, thus ensuring their perpetual availability for those in need with legitimate local connections.
7. Given the constraints of the planning boundaries and the current availability of land, the Parish Council recognises that the initial social housing scheme is likely to be outside the existing planning boundary. Subject to satisfactory design, space and occupancy criteria, the Parish Council looks forward to the forthcoming proposal of 15 units in Newton Ferrers proposed by SHDC and Tor Homes.
8. To fulfil the requirement for a further 17 units within 3 years, the Parish Council will seek appropriate locations, split across more than one site, paying particular attention to the needs of Noss Mayo and the Revelstoke side of the Parish.

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9. Once 32 affordable units have been completed, no further sites should be developed until an evaluation has been undertaken and a proven further local requirement for affordable housing has been established.
 10. The Parish Council notes and accepts the view of the CHWG that smaller developments, spread evenly and appropriately across the Parish, are to be preferred to one or two larger schemes. This may require a slightly higher ratio of private housing within a development, as it is likely to prevent the isolation of social provision and bring forward more sites near to or within the villages.
 11. Where practicable, all further development, whether private or social, should be within the existing development boundaries.
 12. The further sub-division of gardens or over-development of existing plots is to be discouraged.
 13. Except for replacing “like for like” and subject to maintaining the visual character of the Parish, the Council would strongly prefer any new privately funded dwellings to concentrate on replacing the lost stock of smaller open market properties, provided they are for permanent occupation and not holiday homes.
 14. The recession may provide more than one opportunity for the modest re-development and re-use of existing buildings for both private and social need. Provided there is no adverse consequence with regard to on-street parking, congestion, noise, visual or historic impact, the Parish Council will welcome better use of large redundant buildings, as long as such changes address affordability issues within the social and private sectors. However, where commercial premises become available, the Council will adopt strict criteria with regard to their long-term commercial potential, as it does not wish to see a reduction in commercial activity in the Parish.
 15. Any development to meet social or private need should be of good architectural merit and not have an adverse visual impact on its surroundings.
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