

# **COPYTHORNE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING**

**TUESDAY 23<sup>rd</sup> FEBRUARY 2016**

## **ITEM NO: 9 – AFFORDABLE HOUSING UPDATE AND DEVELOPMENTS**

### **A report of the Copythorne Parish Council Affordable Housing Working Group (AHWG)**

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#### ***Purpose:***

This paper sets out an update on actions to date by the AHWG and also makes some specific recommendations in respect of the pursuit of the work programme from now on, including the delivery of the Affordable Housing Open Forum on the 16<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

#### ***Update on Work Programme***

The Working Group have met a total of three times. The Group has prepared a draft work programme covering all activities from the date of its inception through to the end point of this stage of the consultation process. This period covers the process as far as the delivery of a report to the Parish Council, at a date to be agreed, to receive the outcomes of the consultation programme and the delivery of a decision on whether or not to proceed to the next stage of development (detailed options appraisal of shortlisted sites).

A draft programme is available but will be considered at a further date for the reasons indicated in the text below.

#### ***Issues***

Since the start of the process to undertake the consultation programme, there has been a key date of 16<sup>th</sup> March 2016 for the Open Forum stated in all communications and resolutions and this has been well-publicised.

However, it has become clear that our current partners in HARA, the NFDC and the NPA are, at this time, unwilling to further participate in the Open Forum as a result of their own concerns regarding the Housing Bill, which is now in the House of Lords, at the Committee stage. These concerns centre on aspects of the Bill which could have a significant effect, if brought into law, on the future shape of Rentable Affordable Housing programmes.

Moreover, as a part of earlier deliberations by the Parish Council in response to reports received, (September and October 2014), a resolution was made to consider Affordable Housing in the Parish if the following conditions can be met:

- People with a strong local connection to the parish would always be given first priority for occupation
- A section 106 Agreement would be put in place to ensure that the housing units remained affordable in perpetuity (Right to Buy would not apply)
- No shared ownership units to be provided – all units to be for rental only
- A maximum of 15 units in total, to be spread over at least two independent sites
- Properties to be let on fixed term agreements
- No approach to be made to Copythorne regarding any further affordable housing for at least ten years.

HARAH and their partners are now finding it impossible at the current time to issue any definitive statements on Affordable Housing being available to rent in perpetuity. This has led to their declining of the invitation to participate in the Open Forum event. As the provision of Affordable Housing to rent in perpetuity was a key requirement for the Parish Council's support for affordable housing in Copythorne, it has become clear that the continuation of the Open Forum would be inappropriate as it will not have all the necessary information in respect of the final position for the Government's future Policy Framework in respect of Housing Associations, the Right to Buy and Affordable Housing Schemes.

### ***Recommendations***

The Parish Council AHWG has considered the position in respect of the entire initiative and the potential for immediate changes in Legislation to impact on what is an agreed set of requirements set out by the Parish Council. Therefore, and taking into account the commitment of the Council expressed in its meeting and resolution on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2015, and subsequently confirmed at its meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2016, to ensure we operate in as transparent and honest way as possible in all matters related to this initiative, we recommend to the Parish Council the following:

1. That the Open Forum event planned for Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2016, should be postponed (not cancelled), until greater clarity emerges in respect of social housing provision under the Housing and Planning Bill, but with a commitment that a Public Open Forum on the Affordable Housing issue for Copythorne Parish will take place at a point in the future once those points of detail are known;
2. That we continue to develop the website 'forum' accepting questions and comments which can be fed to the respective professional bodies for response where responses are possible to make;
3. That we maintain the Affordable Housing issue as a standing item on future Council agendas in order to ensure that it is not 'lost' in the eyes of the local community;
4. That in the interim, the Parish Clerk should be asked to write to the Rt. Hon. Dr Julian Lewis MP to draw his attention to the Parish Council's predicament in respect of Affordable Housing and invite him to comment, (in a letter drafted by the Working Group and agreed by all Members of the Council prior to it being sent);
5. The Parish Clerk should also write to County Councillors Keith Mans and Edward Heron as well as District Councillors Diane Andrews, Leslie Puttock and Derek Tipp to advise them of the situation in which Copythorne Parish Council now finds itself, as a result of proposed Government Legislation and changes in approach by local partner organisations in the light of that proposed Legislation, and
6. That the Parish Council undertakes a publicity campaign and website notification, as well as an agenda notification at the Annual General Meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2016 to inform the community of the meeting postponement.

Simon Lucas on behalf of the AHWG – Feb 2016