

**NOTES FROM THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING FORUM DISCUSSION HELD AT COPYTHORNE PARISH HALL ON
TUESDAY AUGUST 27th 7pm**

PRESENT AT THE MEETING:-

Councillors:	Simon Lucas (SL); Steve Herra (SH); Graham Chillcott (GC); Lady Kara Hawks (LK); Sylvia Wiggins (SW)
Parish Clerk:	David Rigby (DR)
Elected attendees:	Districts Councillors Diane Andrews (DA); Derek Tipp (DT) and Joe Reilly (JR)
Interest Parties	Beverley Harding-Rennie (HARAH - Hampshire Alliance Rural Affordable Housing) (BHR) Ian Gillespie (English Rural Housing Association ERHA) (IG)
Public attendees	29

SL welcomed those present to the forum and spent a few minutes going through a short “Powerpoint slide deck” (now listed as item 22 on the Parish Council’s website page “Affordable Housing 2019”) to set the scene and explain the purpose of the discussion. In particular he reminded those present that:

- the discussion was about reviewing the Parish Council criteria for dealing with any approach from a provider regarding Affordable Housing and
- discussing what process the Parish Council would adopt to consider any proposed Affordable Housing development.

He reasserted that the meeting was not about any specific proposal or application. He explained that the Parish Council’s existing criteria dated back to 2013-2014 and that at least two of them could, following changes in legislation since then, be impossible to apply anyway.

Having run through all of the slides SL advised that there would be no final crafting of criteria this evening, rather that the comments made by those present would be used in developing some draft updated criteria for the Parish Council debate and decision on revisions to the criteria at the Council meeting to be held on October 8th 2019.

SL then invited SH to share his own thoughts which were formulated as a two stage process, as follows:-

STAGE 1

- The Housing Association or developer (to be known as the Development Proposer) undertakes a housing needs survey sent to all households within Copythorne Parish. *(The last housing needs survey, with a response rate of 27% was distributed in May 2014, now 5 years old and out of date – more recent data is required.)*
- Provision for a resident to lodge a “refusal to accept any development” is contained within the survey. *(The 2014 survey showed 9.8% of those surveyed fully supported an affordable housing scheme (114 of the 1165 surveys)).*
- The survey is independently verified by a third party independent of the Development Proposer and Parish Council. *(There were suspicions regarding the lack of openness previously shown by the then Parish Council in 2014/15, this independent verification will demonstrate total transparency on behalf of the developer and Parish Council.)*
- The majority survey findings will determine if the proposal proceeds any further. *(This proves the Parish Council, being the representative body of the Parish, are listening and acting on the views of the community.)*

The proposal may proceed to Stage 2 providing the above criteria are met.

STAGE 2

- People with a strong local connection would be given first priority for occupation. There would be three different qualifying categories:*

Category 1 - People who live or have their work within the parish and have done so for 10 years or longer.

Category 2 - People who live or have their work within the parish and have done so for 5 years or longer.

Category 3 - People who live or have their work within the parish and have done so for 2 years or longer.

- The housing units remain affordable in perpetuity, with no right to buy.**
- There should be no shared ownership with all units for rental only. *(These two points are to ensure the dwellings are for rental only and remain affordable in perpetuity.)*
- A maximum of 8 units in one site. *(This will ensure there is no further development within the site as there has in other areas.)*
- Adequate parking is provided within the development. *(This will prevent inconsiderate parking, half on the road, half on the pavement, as seen in other affordable housing sites.)*
- Any parking issues impeaching on surrounding roads are addressed. *(This to ensure the inconvenience to existing residents is minimised.)*

SH concluded his thoughts by mentioning that councillors had recently received guidance on a subject known as “Pre-Determination” which, in summary, reminds councillors that whilst they are perfectly entitled to have preceding opinions on an issue they should approach all matters discussed by the Parish Council with an open mind and consider the debate.

By not adopting a predetermined point of view it will allow a balanced debate on the issue of affordable housing which may provide an opportunity for each councillor to arrive at what they believe **will best serve our community** and should not be used to satisfy any vanity fantasies.

However, as well as forming part of the Parish Council, we are also **individual** councillors with our own thoughts on various subjects and understand the views and concerns of others within the community.

History on this particular subject has taught us to be mindful of these views and concerns which could be fully evaluated by means of an updated Housing Needs Survey or Parish Referendum.

* The Clerk clarified that this was broadly in line with the NF NPA categories and we would need to align with those

** SL pointed out that any “no Right to Buy or Shared Ownership” criteria could only be applied whilst primary legislation enacted by a higher body (Parliament for example) remained as at present. SL added that HARAH have already said that all proposed units would be for rent with none needing to be sold to support the build costs.

Following this segment of the meeting, the public asked some questions:

Q – How are Affordable Housing Rents set?

A (SL) – These are set by the Housing Association

ADDITIONAL INFO FOLLOWING MEETING - The affordable rent must not exceed 80% of the local market rent, inclusive of service charges and must not exceed the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) for the relevant property type in the relevant location and to be secured in perpetuity.

Q – Are we saying no shared ownership?

A (SL) – Yes, subject to primary legislation remaining unchanged.

POINT FROM THE PUBLIC – Unhappy that a number of questions in the previous (2014) Housing Needs Survey wanted personal information about income etc so he (and others) didn’t respond.

A (SL) – I think that was a difference between criteria and demand for Affordable Housing.

ADDITIONAL INFO FOLLOWING MEETING – DR checked the 2014 Housing Needs Survey and identified that personal details ONLY needed to be included if a family member or a friend of the respondent “needs a new home in the next three years and would like to live in Copythorne Parish”.

Q – Disabled people need houses. Will they be available as well?

A (SL) – Houses built will need to meet building regulations which specify a range of generic requirements to make houses as accessible as possible. Any applicant would need to satisfy the qualifying categories.

At a later point in the meeting, LK agreed with previous comment from a member of the public that some of the Affordable Housing should be for the disabled.

RESPONSE FROM IG – ERHA: He explained that “lifetime homes” which catered for majority of disable issues had previously been replaced by Building Regulations. Should a person with accessibility needs meet one of the qualifying categories for Affordable Housing and be offered a property then a needs survey can be discussed with the local authority (in our case NFDC) and efforts made to “retro fit” the property with additional items to suit the individual.

Q – Were “infilling sites” to be used for Affordable Housing then perhaps objections would be less. Could the Parish Council identify “infilling sites” that would accommodate 1-2 units. This would also assist local builders if the Housing Provider invited them to tender.

A (SL) – We assume that this could be considered. It has been raised previously, but it would be for HARAHA / the HA to come up with proposals in that regard and it would require suitable sites to be offered. However, when this was raised previously we were advised that the additional costs associated with what would be ‘smaller scale projects’ of one or two houses would probably mean that a Housing Provider couldn’t make such plans economically viable. However, we will note the point and pass this view on to HARAHA / ERHA.

Q – Questioner thanked the Parish Council for their approach to this subject. Reminded the Parish Council that earlier this year the questioner raised a question with GC re the split of “Affordable Housing” by wards but hadn’t received an answer.

ANSWER FROM SL – I am aware that this question was asked and we sought and received an answer from HARAHA which is included in the Q&A on the website. It would appear that there may have been a misinterpretation of the original question by them and so will ask HARAHA to look at it again and provide an answer.

RESPONSE FROM HARAHA / ERHA: They would be happy to review their answer in the light of the discussion
ADDITIONAL INFO FOLLOWING MEETING – The original question to the Parish Council was “In order to ensure a balanced number of affordable housing in the Parish, would the (Council) confirm the percentage of affordable housing currently built within each district and confirm their future strategy to enable a balanced approach.” HARAHA’s original response was “There is no percentage ‘target’ as such, as land availability for rural affordable housing, specifically for local people, is normally dependent on the suitability of land for development and a landowner’s willingness to sell or donate land”

CLARIFICATION: It is now clarified that the first part of the question related to how many affordable units were already within the Parish.

DR has found the following data within the 2011 National Census which answers the first part of the question:- For the purpose of the Census, the Civil Parish of Copythorne was split into 9 parts. Areas 1 to 5 formed the South Ward and Areas 6 to 9 formed the North Ward (see map on page 2 of the attachment) .

The Census data shows 23 Local Authority properties, split 20 in the South and 3 in the North. Properties rented from the Local Authority accounted for 2.1% of the total housing stock of the Parish.

The Census data shows 17 “Housing Association (or similar) properties, split 16 in the South and 1 in the North. Properties rented from “Housing Associations” accounted for 1.5% of the total housing stock of the Parish.

With regards to the second part of the question, HARAHA’s original answer is relevant along with the NF NPA policy in regard to Rural Exception sites for Affordable Housing. In particular the fourth criteria regarding the units being “located where there are appropriate local services (e.g. shops, schools and public transport)”.

SW: Commented that she was interested in “brownfield sites” being considered ahead of “greenfield sites” wherever possible.

POINT FROM THE PUBLIC – We have an ageing society some of whom will face great changes, so it should be possible to build in a modular way to cover basis needs.

Q – Why is there no provision for Affordable Housing to buy?

A (SL) – As we understand it from HARAH and ERHA, any proposal from them for any development would be for ‘affordable for rent’, based on assessed demand. It was the case that after the original grants for such housing developments were withdrawn – 2012 onwards – their approach was to build a house for sale in any cluster of affordable to rent houses, to provide the debt leverage to construct the rented properties. However, grants are now available again and the HA would build solely for rent. Other developers in ‘private development applications’ might include ‘Affordable to Buy’ properties but this would be subject to normal Planning Policy and Requirements being met.

Q – If an existing house owner within the Parish were to become disabled would suitably adapted Affordable Housing become available to them?

A (SL) – It would be reasonable to expect that other agencies would need to be involved in possibly helping to adapt an existing home before this might become an option.

EHRA re-stated: It is certainly the case that were a disabled person to need a home under the scheme, then they would work with agencies to secure appropriate adaptation on behalf / partnership with the individual

Q – Will there be parking allocated and – looking ahead - what about charging points for electric vehicles.

ADDITIONAL POINT FROM SH – In other Affordable Housing developments seen, this hasn’t happened so inconvenience occurs.

A (SL) – We have to assume that NFNPA policy would come into play regarding required levels of allocated parking depending on the size of the property and be assessed in any application.

POINT FROM THE PUBLIC – As a disabled person I feel that travel/transport provision is an issue.

RESPONSE (GC) – Thought we’d all agree - the limited bus service / public transport impacts on us all.

Q – Are all of the existing sites “off the table” and are we starting again?

A (SL) - Many (the majority) of the sites that were ‘on the table’ in the original public event were withdrawn for a whole variety of reasons during the last process. Ownership of sites is an issue (various owners are ‘absent’ or difficult to locate). Site owners would have to offer sites and then feasibility would be undertaken to assess site viability. Many sites were removed from the list as a result of initial examination – flood risk, access, etc.

Q – Is there only one site being looked at? What about the National Park restrictions?

A (SL) – Restrictions on locations re NFNPA and other national / international conservation boundary requirements (such as Natural England requirements) have been the subject of legal challenges and some precedents have been set as a result. We, as a Parish Council, don’t identify sites. Many offered have been unacceptable or are not available. As previously mentioned, using “infill sites” has been raised, but again, we don’t know if this is feasible.

Q – How do our criteria get affected by NF NPA criteria? What we set may not be required by Planning Law but can we try to add ‘local’ criteria which a developer is willing to follow to gain Parish Council support?

A (GC) – A new NFNPA Planning Policy is being adopted and NFDC have a similar revision which is in the final consultation stage. Issues we face are dictated to a marked degree by NFNPA and NFDC policy on Affordable Housing. We cannot impose local criteria into a formal planning process, but we can decide not to support a proposal.

COMMENT FROM THE PUBLIC – Localism seems to have disappeared.

COMMENT FROM THE PUBLIC – Extra parking spaces means more tarmac – another Public attendee observed that there are alternatives to tarmac.

FINAL COMMENT ON CRITERIA DISCUSSION FROM SL – The Parish Council will be setting its local criteria on your behalf with your comments in mind. He commented that a two stage process as suggested by SH seemed a sensible process and that the Parish Council would need to “funnel in” on how it would actually deal with an approach from an Affordable Housing Provider. He thanked people for their useful comments and stated that some of these might be suitable to incorporate into individual criteria.

Q – Will there be minutes produced of the meeting.

A (DR as Parish Clerk): Explained that as the forum was not a formal Council Meeting the notes he was making would not constitute minutes.

A (SL) - We will arrange for the notes being taken by DR to be translated into a suitable format and made available to all interested parties on the Parish Council’s website.

SL then identified we should move the discussions on to the second part which was to consider the PROCESS by which the Parish Council would apply the local criteria.

At this point GC asked whether we were actually in a position to do that when:-

1. We don’t have answers to all the questions raised by the public
2. We don’t know the outcome of the vote to adopt the NFNPA’s new Planning Policy
3. NFDC have yet to fully formulate their new Planning Policy
4. We perhaps should wait to understand more about other local housing developments that may resolve the demand issue for Copythorne

SL said that he felt it would be right for Copythorne Parish Council to have its own criteria now as these were ‘our wishes’. We could then reappraise if needed when the Policies were published

SH mentioned that of the 1000 new houses planned in/around Totton some 35%-50% would be “Affordable”.

Q – Are those to rent or buy?

A (SH) – This is not known. We should, though, have local criteria in place to enable us to express our view. Things may change but we can look again at them if that happens.

A (SL) – Setting the criteria is more about a base to work from. We need to be ready if a proposal comes forward sooner rather than later

COMMENT FROM THE PUBLIC – Parish Council should set the pace, not be rushed.

A (SL) – This is why we are trying to get our ‘toolkit’ in place so we can be measured in our considerations. We want to avoid the difficulties evident in the previous discussions on this subject as there was no clear process.

Q – Can councillors say which way they are looking. I think majority want Affordable Housing and I am concerned with the social problems that Affordable Housing brings.

A (SL) – Individual Councillors views are, quite rightly, mixed. There are no pre-determined decisions. The process we are discussing tonight is to ensure transparency and set out a clear process so that any proposal can be considered ‘fairly’.

Q – Do you have to build Affordable Housing?

A (SL) – No. The Parish Council does not build any housing. We are trying to prepare for what might come forward from relevant bodies / agencies / developers. It is known that there is a dire shortage of ‘affordable housing’ in the New Forest District. The solutions might be identified as proposals in many different locations – e.g. Totton,

here or elsewhere. National Park protection exists and there are many technical issues which prohibit a development. Copythorne may well not be suited for additional housing as a result. All Councillors have a view but they have to follow a proper process which was mentioned at the end of SH's presentation.

CLOSING COMMENTS FROM SL – Thank you all for coming along to this forum. We will review all your comments when we are formulating draft new / revised criteria for consideration by the Parish Council at the meeting in October 2019.

ENDED 8.23pm