

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? CONTINUING TO EXPLORE AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN 2021

We have taken a year off since February 2020 to seek further information and consider our position on affordable housing.

Last February, the councillors were preparing to list their site preferences and leave the results to Winchester City Council (WCC), but a councillor proposed that, as the response to the latest survey didn't meet its target response, the subject should be reviewed in one year. Another councillor suggested a clarification: the affordable housing project should be put on hold for one year. This was seconded and agreed upon. Our first move has been to seek more up to date housing figures to gauge any need.

The latest housing figures (3/12/2020) arrived on 22/12/20 and will be the subject of a separate report.

UPDATE ON THE SITES

According to our new Hastoe Group (housing association and developer) representative, Persimmon Homes are frustrated by the delay and threatening market housing. In his next email, they are not. It is explained to us that a developer normally retains a ransom strip, but in this case they did not and the owner isn't seeking financial gain. The opinion of the tenant farmer must be sought. He recently expressed reluctance to part with land rented from the MOD because of the uncertain current state of British agriculture arising from Brexit. Now we learn that the Basic Payments scheme will be replaced by the Environmental Land Management scheme, which will reward managing the natural environment and nurturing environmental assets which can earn subsidies and payments from other sources. Will this be sufficiently attractive to want to hang on to Persimmon Field?

West Hill Rd North remains undeveloped in both parts and there are no pony lodgers. Christmas Hill is also unaltered. The Jolly Community Project parcels of land are unchanged except for the field north of Bridge Bungalow which is being cleared for some unknown purpose. Suncroft is still derelict. Jazzmyn Fields is in the ownership of a local tree surgeon.

Would it be worth getting WCC Planning Department to examine their previous opinions in more detail? The officers weren't altogether convincing about Persimmon Field's suitability. Will they be able to make the sites as a whole any more attractive in planning terms?

THE RURAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING WORLD NOW

On 1st April 2020, Hampshire Homes Hub (HHH) took over from HARA (Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing) and the Hampshire Community Housing Partnership to increase the supply of rural and community led housing, primarily affordable housing to meet local needs in Hampshire. It is based at Action Hampshire in Winchester. Its method of operation isn't so very different from HARA's: carrying out housing need surveys and finding suitable sites for Rural Exception Sites for Parish Councils, working with landowners and holding public consultation events. Two former HARA employees are in the new team of accredited advisers.

Hastoe Group have recently completed a scheme of seven rentable and five shared ownership homes for the Parish Council at Pamber Heath Rd (Basingstoke and Dean Borough Council). (November 2020) with the full support of Pamber Parish Council. There were strong objections to the scheme, but the site had been in line for identification as suitable for affordable housing for years and the Borough Council insisted that nowhere else would suit for a Rural Exception Site.

Hastoe bought the land from Hampshire County Council and met twice with MH Architects at Basingstoke and Dean Borough Council who were commissioned to prepare a planning application on behalf of HARA. Although the sources for this story may not be entirely accurate (local press etc), it does illustrate how various elements can come together to produce a result and how small a part, ultimately, the Parish Council plays.

Winchester City Council is looking to provide a new social/affordable housing company in the Winchester District but the model must be changed to ensure the perceived risk can be mitigated. Winchester is an expensive place to develop and the City Council has a target of 1000 homes between 2020 and 2030. It's the purchase of land which is so risky; if the sites are council-owned much less so, yet see the proposed funding boost below.

OPPORTUNITIES AND FUNDING IN THE WINCHESTER DISTRICT

Winchester City Council is building new council houses and working with Housing Associations to provide new affordable housing across the district. New homes are currently under construction at The Valley, Stanmore (76-77, 2-3 bed houses, 1, 2 and 3 bed flats by 2021), and Hookpit, at Kings Worthy (35, 1-4 bed, 25 affordable rent, 8 shared ownership and 2 market homes by late 2020). Rowlings Rd, Weeke (7) appear to be complete. Chesil Lodge Care Home and properties in Hillier Way are also finished. Schemes in their early stages include Knowle Water Meadows, (200, including 93 affordable houses), Dyson Drive, Abbots Barton (8 units, 2019?), Winnall Flats (73 flats, 3 small family homes with 2 beds, flats to be a mix of shared ownership and rent, application early December 2020), and Woodman Close, Sparsholt (5, 3 1 bed, 2 person houses, 2 2 bed and 3 3 person bungalows, application early December 2020).

Also in Winchester are Vivid Homes at Kings Barton: 89 new community homes, 37 for affordable rent and 52 for shared ownership, accessible via WCC's register. The original target of affordable housing was 800 units. The final target of market housing was 2000. 270 market homes have been completed over 3 years, 9 months. The project will be completed in phases. Coming soon is Persona Homes, launching in Spring 2021: 1-2 bed apartments and 3-4 bed houses, available through shared ownership and none especially cheap. The only Vivid property I could find on WCC's current list of available housing for affordable rent is a 2- bed house requiring local connections in Medstead. It looks as if Kings Barton is all taken at present. Just how much influence could Vivid Homes have on Winchester's housing registers?

On the other hand, there were 14 other properties on the list for affordable or social rent in and around Winchester: bidders just have to be registered and secure their nomination. But how long will people wait? How many bidding cycles will they go through?

We can't yet say precisely what will be available at Sir John Moore Barracks, but it looks as if there will be a variety of housing. on what is partly a brownfield site, by 2022.

The WCC Housing Revenue Account, hoping to find approval this month, will show an increase in projected capital programme spending of £173 M and propose a long-term funding strategy that will see funding increase to £407M. This Business Plan will support 1000 new affordable homes over the next 10 years.

CHANGES IN THE PLANNING SYSTEM

HM Government's proposed changes to the planning system involve speeding up and simplifying the delivery of planning outcomes. Some of this relates to the provision of First Homes, a type of affordable housing, which would form a percentage of a market housing development. A First

Homes Exception Site Policy may replace the existing Entry Level policy, yet: “We intend to protect the important role that Rural Exception Sites play in delivering Affordable Homes in rural areas, with Rural Exception Sites being retained as a vehicle... However, we recognise that this delivery mechanism is currently underused in many cases, and we will update planning guidance in due course.” (Changes to the Current Planning System).

The Rural Exception Site is just that, an exception, so that a local need may be met, appropriately, to meet an identified need, in perpetuity, on land outside the settlement boundary in certain settlements, where housing wouldn't normally be permitted. (See Local Plan Part One, Market Towns and Rural Area 3 and Policy CP4) But look carefully at the hazards. Define “need”, and “community support”, which the applicant must demonstrate – which will be the housing association/developer. See Pamber. What are the site constraints How much do they cost in loss, compromise, forced solutions?

Who is being helped here? Is the housing adding something? Will the new community thrive? All these types of questions need to be taken on board. More questions, please. And wise answers.

Ann J. Peal

Chairman

South Wonston Parish Council