**HEVER PARISH COUNCIL –AFFORDABLE HOUSING UPDATE FROM HPC HOUSING WORKING PARTY.**

**NOVEMBER 2018**

**Background**

“*For many rural households, finding somewhere affordable in their local community remains a barrier. Small developments of local needs housing schemes can provide affordable housing for local people, thereby enabling them to stay in their community and contribute to village life.”*

*December 2014, the Rural Housing Alliance*

Affordability is a key issue in the Sevenoaks District given the high house prices relative to incomes. In 2016 the average house price in the District was £392,500, the highest in Kent, and house prices were 13 times annual earnings, compared with 6.5 times across England. In the Sevenoaks District the average private weekly rent for a 2 bed home is £ 262 (data 2016).

Tackling this national problem requires strong community support and there is no simple solution and we will all need to consider the range of options and which one meets our local needs. HPC wishes to explore these options and, if required by evidence, support a small plan of affordable homes for local people in our community. This working party feels that it would be better for HPC to be engaged and involved with any local developments of affordable housing, although are not obliged to do so.

Every parish is required by Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) to complete a Housing needs survey every 5 years.

An independent Rural Housing Enabler (RHE) undertook a parish wide survey to ascertain if there are shortfalls in affordable housing provision within the parish of Hever (Hever, Markbeech and Four Elms). A survey was posted to every household within the parish in May 2018.

Analysis of the returned survey forms identified that 83% of respondents are owner occupiers. 67% of respondents have lived in the parish for over 10 years. 72% of respondents supported more affordable housing.

High property prices and a predominance of privately owned homes means that some local people are unable to afford a home within the parish.

The survey has identified a total need for 14 affordable homes (a home can mean a 1 bed flat to family homes) across the parish (ranging from individuals to families); 2 of which are for older households.

A second stage (likely in 2019) will update that evidence as level and type of need may have changed over the time period.

**Proposals**

Having spent a significant amount of time exploring the options, meeting with housing experts and providers, studying other parishes and County’s solutions we propose that HPC should work with English Rural Housing Association (ERHA to ***consider the possible options*** *for a small number of homes* of the required size (this could be for example a one bed flat for an older person with accessibility needs ranging to 3 bed homes for a family) locally. This would be beneficial for the parish as HPC can provide input on local community issues.

The next stage would be to plan for the second housing needs survey (paid for by SDC and carried out independently) and for landowners to be contacted / nominate themselves for possible site consideration. Only after this further information is gathered can proposals then be considered, brought back to the full Council for consideration and public consultations be held.

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS;**

**What do you mean by local?**

*Local means a person who is; currently resident in the parish, was previously resident in the parish and wants to return, is permanently employed in the parish, or is connected by close family still living in the parish.*

**What is affordable housing?**

*The aim of affordable housing is to provide homes for peoples on modest incomes, who can’t afford to buy or rent a home on the open market. The term includes rented and affordable shared ownership and social rent. Any such schemes would be for locals only. For example, in Eynsford, a 2 bed house run by ERHA is £106.52 social rent per week. Each site has different costings so this can be used as an example only.*

**I’m not on the SDC housing register and I would like to stay in the area but my salary means I can’t afford to move into the home I need locally, will this help me?**

*Some people who are currently in housing need, e.g. a young couple living with their respective parents who want to move into their first independent home - may not have previously joined the SDC housing register as they feel their chances of being allocated a home locally are tiny. With this type of affordable housing however, local connection to the Parish comes first, so those with a strong connection to the Parish but a relatively low housing need (compared to others across the District) still have a reasonable chance of being allocated a home.  This is quite different to the usual allocations process where homes are allocated to those in highest housing need (but allocated anywhere in the whole of the Sevenoaks District).*

**How long will it all take?**

*It depends on the proposed scheme and how long each part of the process takes. As a general rule, it can take over two years from the first discussions of a project to residents moving into their new homes. A good deal of patience and determination are required but the benefits of new affordable homes will support the community for years to come.*

**Won’t the housing developments in Edenbridge include affordable housing that could meet the local need?**

*No. Any affordable homes built in Edenbridge will be open to* ***anyone*** *on Sevenoaks District Council’s housing register to apply for, so not local needs housing.  Those in greatest need from anywhere in the Sevenoaks District (spread from Swanley in the north to Cowden in the South) will be given priority. The homes in Edenbridge also may not be the type and size that local people to the parish need and probably not close enough to family / work they want to stay close to. However, affordable homes built locally with ERHA would be only for those with a local connection and could not be sold to residents under the right to buy.*

**How do we know exactly who needs what type of home where?**

*National and Regional data gives us a guide to what the local issues are and the Housing needs survey completed gives us more specific local information. Parish based housing needs surveys are the established and most trusted route towards the identifications of local housing needs. Although not perfect, they are considered to be the most accurate “snapshot” of housing need. We would encourage everyone in the parish to complete the second stage survey (likely in 2019) so we have the most accurate information from which to work on. In other areas, once locals realise there is a chance of securing an affordable home locally, people are more encouraged to join the housing register which will also act as evidence of need.*

**What if those in affordable housing decide to later move out of the area? What happens to those homes?**

*Any homes built under this scheme, would always be kept for local people.*

**What is shared ownership?**

*They are designed to cater for households who are unable to purchase on the market but can afford a modest mortgage. Until the second stage survey is done we won’t know what balance of shared ownership and rental properties are needed.*

**What about the lack of local transport?**

*All those (apart from 1) who responded to the survey as wishing to stay locally, currently live in the parish, so are well aware of the rural transport issues, but whom still wish to live in the area. If possible, any homes would be sited near to train / bus routes. The reality is that many locals have access to cars for travel.*

**Who is English Rural, what is their role?**

*ERHA is a specialist rural provider of affordable housing, owning and managing stock across rural England. English Rural owns and manages 1200 properties, in 120 villages, mainly across the south of England. The homes are built by English Rural in partnership with local landowners, parish councils and local housing and planning authorities.*

*Their role is to work with parish councils, using their expertise and experience, including through local public consultation to ensure the community is well informed and that any locals concerns about the project are addressed.*

*ERHA are a Community Benefit Society, which is a not for profit organisation that is registered with the Financial Conduct Authority with the specific intention that it must benefit the community. They are registered with a Government body (currently the Homes and Communities Agency), so that service standards and the use of public money for housing can be monitored.*

*English Rural believes the long term security of tenure is important for those that they provide homes to and also the communities they live in. This approach of a ‘generational tenancy’ is on the basis that it was particularly designed to provide young families security whilst children went through education. This approach is about sustaining and building communities though housing local people close to their support networks.*

**Is HPC spending, risking or making any money by working to deliver affordable homes for locals?**

*No. The cost of the first (already done) and second housing needs survey is funded by SDC.*

*HPC are not entering into any contract and is not spending or risking any money on any proposal. There is absolutely no financial incentive for HPC. HPC are interested in working with this process to ensure absolute transparency and public engagement.*

**Why is HPC getting involved in affordable housing?**

*We are obliged to undertake a housing needs survey every 5 years. The motivation for HPC is to respond to the local need identified and to ensure that any affordable homes built in the parish are for local benefit. Currently, those locals in housing need and on the housing register are part of the Sevenoaks District housing register and are unlikely to be allocated a home in the parish where they wish to live. We have an opportunity to alter this (even though on a small scale). We act to provide specialist local knowledge and ensure community consultation is at the heart of the process, helping to facilitate communications and deal with local queries. HPC is a civil local authority and the first tier of local Government. HPC is made up of 10 Councillors who live locally and endeavour to make decisions in the interests of the local community, Councillors are not paid but volunteer their time to serve our villages. All Parish Council meetings are open to the public and led by the Council’s Chair and advised by a Clerk who is there to see that business is conducted within the law (see hever.org / facebook).*

**What role does Sevenoaks District Council have in this?**

*SDC have an enabling role for housing and are responsible for making sure that housing needs in their rural areas are met. SDC is also the planning authority. The housing department will ensure a project fits in with the overall housing strategy for the area/ It makes sure that the homes are allocated to the people most in need and who meet the local criteria.*

**So what can be done to support genuinely local affordable housing whilst respecting the character of the area?**

*Any proposals would go through the usual planning processes and consider the effectiveness of the green Belt, Conservation Areas, Local Wildlife sites, AONB etc. Those sites with the least negative impact on the countryside will of course be preferred. Agricultural land may be considered for such proposals. In some areas, land is gifted as a legacy to the Community by landowners who wish to support such projects.*

*All other planning considerations such as utilities and flood risks will also be considered.*

**What if there is no one in the parish who needs an affordable home?**

*This is highly unlikely, but if should occur, then applicants from specified neighbouring parishes will be considered. We may specify this to be from Cowden or Chiddingstone, for example.*

**For more information;**

Summary of the 2018 Housing Needs survey; <http://hever.org/973-2>

Rural Housing Alliance http://ruralhousingalliance.net/

Sevenoaks District Council Core Strategy February 2011

Sevenoaks District 2017 Local Housing Needs study

Kent Rural Homes Protocal [www.kenthousinggroup.org.uk](http://www.kenthousinggroup.org.uk)

www.englishrural.co.uk

Campaign to Protect Rural England [www.cpre.org.uk/](http://www.cpre.org.uk/)

ruralkent.org.uk

**Council for Protection of Rural England view** *CPRE believes that to solve the housing shortage facing both rural and urban areas, we must build the right types of housing in the right places. We believe everyone is entitled to live in a home that is truly affordable and that planning policy should seek to deliver that housing. The current planning system allows house builders to unnecessarily target countryside for development, creating a growing threat to high-quality open space and farmland.*

*A number of measures can counter these threats, including prioritising brownfield sites for new housing and promoting the delivery of the right housing developments by investing in affordable housing to meet local needs.*

***CPRE and housing*** *A thriving countryside is important for everyone, no matter where they live. To achieve this, it’s important to deliver housing in rural communities that meets local needs. It's essential to minimise sporadic development in the countryside and the unsustainable sprawl of our towns and cities. Otherwise, we will see unnecessary loss of our countryside and irreversible damage to our landscapes.* ***What we want:***

* *An increased delivery of the right housing by investing in affordable housing to meet local needs, particularly in rural areas.*
* *Diversification of the house-building market, WITH small- and medium-size house builders, custom and self-builders, and councils playing a greater role in the development process.*
* *Good-quality housing design with high environmental standards, complementing the local character.*