

AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN LONGPARISH?

Whether to? How to? Who for? Where? And

There can't be many in the village unaware of the vigorous debate over the last year or so about whether it would be appropriate to develop some new 'affordable' housing in Longparish. At some point in the autumn all of you will be asked for your views on this through a questionnaire.

Before that, this note is part of getting everybody as up to speed as possible with what are some quite challenging issues and questions. The note is still quite short so it will be followed up with an Open Forum (see last page). Anyone can come along to the Forum, ask questions, dig deeper into the files of further information and add in even more issues if something has been missed.

In the last few months a small group has been meeting to try to find ways of helping the whole community to make a decision on the idea. That group, listed at the end of this note, includes some who are 'for it', some who are 'agin it' and some who are 'in-between'. All in that group have worked with help from outside (a consultant called Jeff Bishop) to try to agree the key issues, how to address them and highlight where views still diverge.

*The first section of the note is about "**should it happen at all?**". The next section is about "**how might it be done?**" (assuming 'yes' to the first question). Including information on 'how to' does not in any way mean that a decision has been taken about 'whether to'.*

Under each topic we outline what the topic covers and some of the basic information. Then, if there are significantly varying views on the topic, they are set out.

Please have a good look at this note, please come to the Open Forum and please watch out for the questionnaire.

SHOULD IT HAPPEN AT ALL?

Are there people who have a genuine reason for living in the village but cannot, in normal circumstances, afford to do so?

This is about: There is national recognition that some people/households find it impossible to afford access to a house in a particular town or village. They may live elsewhere but have family connections to that village, live there but with parents or in other inappropriate conditions, or work nearby but have to travel to their job. Recent research shows not just more people in such situations but an increasing gap between incomes and house prices, especially in villages.

Are there people in such circumstances in, or with connections to, Longparish? This is usually answered through what is called a 'Housing Needs Survey' (though people rarely if ever 'need' a local house in the dictionary sense). Such a survey has been done for Longparish using the standard national methods and it suggested 24 households with a significant local connection. There are also 21 households on the Council's Housing Register with local housing connections.

View 1: The study methods are seriously flawed and are based on a false assumption of 'need'. All they tell you about is a possible preference (not need) for some time in an uncertain future. The evidence is totally inadequate for taking a decision with such a potential impact on the village. This particular survey was not even a good example and must be done again and differently.

View 2: Housing Needs Surveys may not be perfect but are used nationally and provide an adequate indicator of likely numbers, especially when reinforced by numbers on a Housing Register. Survey methods do not exist to get more accurate views on future behaviour and situations. Both these sources, and local anecdotes provide plenty of evidence to justify

considering local action. This approach places a priority on helping those already living in the village who may have affordability problems.

If the answer to the above is 'yes', is that any reason to provide for them?

This is about: This is really about your own ideas about how society is managed – is it “hard luck, just leave it to the market” or “we (government etc.) should intervene to support people in exceptional circumstances”? Recent studies have highlighted the increasing gap between incomes and house prices and the effects on social mix within villages. It is already government policy to intervene, although there is still much debate about exactly how best to do this.

View 1: Supporting family life and retaining a balanced village community are important. The community has a responsibility to ‘do something’, and being actively involved in the process will enable the community to influence what is ‘done’ for the best. In addition, we can use this as an opportunity to secure additional benefit for the whole village through the ‘community gain’ part of the policy.

View 2: Developing affordable housing will have a significant negative impact for existing villagers living near the site and for the village environment as a whole. Therefore the claim of those wanting affordable housing in the village would have to be extremely strong to justify these adverse effects. New build for people in the situations described would be better in locations such as Picket Twenty (around 3 miles away), where it is already being provided.

If the answer is again 'yes', why not deal with this through better/different management of North Acre? Why build new?

This is about: There are simply not enough homes for families. Test Valley Homes allocate the current 43 rented homes (which are administered by Testway Housing). Their policy for villages gives local families and couples priority but that demand cannot be met because there are very few vacancies for the 14 family homes. TV Homes allocate the 29 ground floor properties to elderly or disabled people, first to locals, then to those from further away. Testway consider that new build on another site is the way forward and have ruled out modification of the existing stock or new build within North Acre.

View 1: If there is no intention to try to house all those identified by the surveys, and a judgement is made about a reasonable number, then better management of North Acre should be the way forward, even if numbers are small. This is no argument for the highly significant shift to new build.

View 2: One advantage with building new homes is that they would not need to be allocated as with Test Valley Homes and North Acre. By planning it from the start and by means of legally binding agreements we can ensure that, in both the short and long term, homes go to those people with strong family connections.

How might the community decide?

This is about: It is the policy of Test Valley Borough Council to only proceed with projects of this sort if a proposal has the clear support of a village community. What exactly this means (what percentage support, from individuals, from households?) is unclear in detail and will require discussions with Council officers. The group who produced this note has developed ideas on numbers, format, questions to ask etc. They will seek your views on these at the Open Forum. However, it is important to make the point that the council criteria would be a minimum standard. We as a community will ultimately decide on the exact criteria we wish to use and these may be more stringent than the TVBC minimum.

HOW MIGHT IT BE DONE?

(This really only applies if there is a 'yes' to all questions above. But introducing these issues now should help to clarify some points about the implications of saying 'yes'.)

Who For? How many? What else might be included? Will that be it?

This is about: Even if a survey or Register showed X households with strong local links, X homes would not automatically be provided. Local opinion, eg. about sites and numbers in a particular context, always produce a locally appropriate number. Planners and housing providers usually take such decisions but in this case the Council's policy requires proof of local community support.

It also requires any project to deliver a significant gain for the community as a whole. As of now, the landowners are also prepared to consider the inclusion of, for example, provision of a village green, resurfacing of a path and the creation of extra parking.

Many such projects around the country only proceed because they are supported financially by the provision of some extra market houses for conventional sale (see next section). There are also always concerns that the next proposal will soon follow, then the next and so on. A recent proposal has been made for up to 18 houses – 12 affordable and up to 6 market houses, aimed mainly at young people and families.

View 1: The process being gone through from the community side is stronger and more thorough than usual and the District planning policy is that things will not proceed without clear community support. If all possible community issues and concerns are raised and dealt with, the solution will be locally appropriate.

View 2: The figure of 18 has been picked out of the blue and certainly not discussed and developed with the community. We also cannot be sure that the District Council will take genuine account of local views or of all aspects local people consider important. They may decide over community heads if they do not like community results.

What are the basic models for delivery – finance, controls, planning etc.?

This is about: In some cases, landowners have provided land free or at very low cost to avoid a project having to include any market housing to help pay land costs. There are currently no such landowners in/around the village. Test Valley District's Local Plan has a specific policy in it (ESN06) which enables 'exceptions' to be agreed and ensures no later loss to the rented stock through purchase. That means that landowners previously seeing no housing value for their land can now see at least some, and that can be 'haggled' to keep the commercial element to a minimum. As part of the joint planning with District and any provider, the local community can also have some influence on the allocations and management for the affordable homes.

View 1: Good planning is good planning. If a village is full, why make exceptions for something so debatable as affordable housing, especially if the extra price to be paid is some market housing? Test Valley's Policy is new and untested. Making a debatable exception for affordable houses looks bad when those already housed fail to get permission for their own extensions.

View 2: The planners' requirement for local input creates a strong negotiation position with landowners to ensure an appropriate number, size and mix. Securing 12 or so affordable homes at the 'price' of up to 6 market ones is a good deal – in fact some have said that some new market houses might be good anyway (enabling some villagers to 'downsize' later in life).

Where might something be built?

This is about: Recent discussions with landowners have identified at least two with possibly suitable and available sites. One is known as the Zurich Field (which tells you who owns it), the

other is the field immediately west of North Acre at the rear of Lower Mill Villas. A development of 18 homes would not take up all or both, just a small part of the total.

What about design, views in and out and effects on values?

This is about: One key aspect of local responses to any development would be about design and views. Longparish has its own Village Design Statement, now formally adopted so carrying considerable weight with the planners. It ensures community involvement in emerging designs to ensure they are appropriate. The design would have to respect views for those people living near the site. Though there may be impacts on values, no general procedures exist to address this.

View 1: The village community should not become involved in taking decisions with potentially negative impacts on adjacent households, or on the value of their properties

View 2: The overall process and the Design Statement both mean that any negative impacts can be managed, reduced or removed. Indeed a development of new homes with, say, a village green, may increase the value of neighbouring properties.

What environmental and traffic impacts might a project have on the village?

This is about: This includes issues such as water supply, flooding, sewage, waste, noise, lighting, eco-design (energy conservation etc.), landscape, traffic and public transport. On some of these the District and County Council or the Environment Agency have strict controls and no development could proceed without them being properly addressed.

View 1: A strong local community can use all its resources to lobby to ensure that all of the above are addressed properly. Affordable housing projects regularly win sustainable design awards.

View 2: The community has little control over the other groups and agencies. Affordable housing is, by definition, low cost; design and other standards are at risk.

WHERE NEXT?

The Open Forum will take place on 22nd September 2007 in the Community Hall, from 10.30 to 4.30. Anybody is welcome to call in at any time. There will be:

- 'Stalls' on the topics covered in this note where you can chat to people involved.
- Much more information on each topic – studies, plans, examples etc.
- Where appropriate you'll be able to hear the different views.
- Ideas on how to undertake the survey of local opinions.
- We hope to also have some outside professional experts to help you.

Following the Open Forum, all the information will be brought together and some form of questionnaire produced. That will ask for views on whether and how to proceed and the results (if appropriately clear) will decide the next stages.

This briefing has been produced by an informal group comprising the following local people:

Corinne Bowman, Chris Dewbury, Christian Dryden, Fiona Gould, Phil Harris, Andrea Hulme, Mike Johnson, Nick Marsden, Jill McHenry, Kerry Meaden, Jonathan Nelson, David Wright.

All sorts of more detailed information is already available on the website:

<http://www.longparish.org.uk/housing/index.php>

However, please contact anybody on the above group if you wish to know more. They will probably be circulating more information before, and certainly at, the Forum

*– so be sure to **COME ALONG!***