

## **Tywardreath and Par Parish Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group Meeting with Noreen Jefferies (NJ) 24 June 2019**

### **Summary agreed with NJ and Justine Rolfe of the Affordable Housing Team.**

**Present:** Cllr David Hughes (DH), Chair; David Quoroll (DQ), Vice-Chair; and Alison White (AW), Secretary.

**NB** The housing situation is relatively fluid, so details in the information below could change, particularly if government policy changes in this area. For detailed information on the Community Land Trust option, please see the January 19 Steering Group minutes and associated presentation by Cornwall Community Land Trust on the NP section of the Parish Council website.

### **A. Tywardreath and Par Parish: Community-led Housing Options**

1. Noreen Jefferies (NJ) explained that in her role as Rural Housing Enabler, her main aim is to help communities deliver small-scale, community-led housing. Community-led housing is where groups of regular people i.e. volunteers take action either to refurbish existing or to build new affordable homes, creating a bespoke solution to address the particular housing need identified in their community. The houses on community-led developments are usually owned by a Community Land Trust (CLT) or Registered Provider (RP) e.g. Ocean.
2. Given that in our parish the community has indicated a desire to re-instate a development boundary, rural exception sites will probably be the most likely location for such housing. Landowners of these sites would be paid more for the land than agricultural prices but less than if the land was being sold for open market homes. The maximum land value for these sites is generally £10k per plot.
3. Delivering through a community-led development **may** provide the community (or the community in collaboration with their partner Registered Provider) with an opportunity to influence the lettings policy i.e. determine the geographical definition for the 'Primary Area' and the cascaded 'Secondary Area' to which prospective occupants of Affordable Rental Properties must have a connection. When a S106 applies to the site, allocations **could** be done via local connection criteria and then priority banding (as per Cornwall Community Land Trust model c.f. January 2019 Steering Group minutes) though this is not necessarily the case.
4. Tywardreath and Par Parish is a Designated Rural Areas c.f. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/capital-funding-guide/10-right-to-acquire> and such areas are defined by:
  - The Housing (Right to buy) (Designated Rural Areas and designated regions) (England) Order 1981 and,
  - The Housing (Right to Acquire or Enfranchise) (Designated Rural Areas in the South West) Order 1997
  - In respect of Right to Acquire, this means that properties in our parish are excluded from right to acquire c.f. **Properties situated in a rural area**

designated by order of the Secretary of State under [section 17\(1\)\(b\) \(Right to Acquire: Supplementary Provisions\) of the Housing Act 1996](#)

## **B Discussion, comments and queries**

1. NJ supplied the latest **Homechoice Register** figures for the parish. See table below. Currently 34 individuals in need of affordable rented property are registered with HomeChoice (20 May 19), while the Help-to-Buy SW register (June 2019) shows 15 individuals registered for Shared Ownership properties. Help-to-Buy SW check the parish connection of applicants when they express an interest in a particular property. As of May 2019, HomeChoice Figures are as follows (total figures are across all 5 bands of need A to E):

1 bed properties 18 households

2 bed properties 9 households

3 bed properties 3 households

4 bed properties 3 households

5 bed property 1 household

It was noted that these figures have changed since February 19. Homechoice has been “cleansing” its data as it moves over to a new system, so this may explain some of the changes. **SG members commented on the following:** The CC organised Affordable Housing Need Survey (2018) suggested that there were a number of households in the parish which required 2 and 3 bedroom houses who were registered neither with Homechoice nor Help to Buy. In the survey, such households were advised to register with these organisations. However, the Homechoice figures for May 2019 do not register any such increase. Indeed, the figures for 2 and 3 bedroom homes show a decrease in demand. It may be that some households did apply to Help to Buy (which does not check primary local connection data at application stage). And/or maybe they applied to Homechoice and discovered that they were not eligible to claim primary local connection to Tywardreath and Par Parish, possibly because of the ongoing confusion with the postcodes. Or maybe previous or these “hidden households” as described in the Affordable Housing Need Survey are no longer in “housing need”.

2. **The greatest demonstrable “housing need”**, as evidenced by the Homechoice figures in our parish, is for **1 bedroom dwellings** (as of May 19). There is no indication as to why this is the case, so for example, it could be that these are young, single adults or those experiencing a house-hold break up or older people who have been widowed. Of our current parish housing stock only 16 dwellings have 2 rooms or fewer (in addition to a bathroom) which suggests that the vast majority are 2 bed homes or larger. (Tywardreath and Par Parish, Local Insight Report, 2018, p.27). AW said that a member of the Affordable Housing Team had told her in the past that they are in favour of a mixture of housing including 2/3 bed homes on any development, even if there is a clear “housing need” for 1 bed homes.

### 3. SG members asked NJ to check the following:

- a) Does Homechoice operate a priority allocation system for 2 bedroom homes i.e. are such homes first allocated to households where there is more than 1 person in the household e.g. 2 adults or 1 adult and child for example?

Response from affordable housing team. Yes.

- b) Does Homechoice ever allocate 2 bedroom homes to 1 person (who does **not** have any individual need for a personal care assistant or similar)?

Response from affordable housing team. The allocations policy is framed to best utilise the housing stock to minimise both over and under-occupation and therefore within the policy itself prioritises all sizes of dwellings to a matching household size criteria in accordance with the DWP regulations.

In other words (AW comment), housing size is matched to housing need and it is only if no 2 person + households bid in the first round, that a single person would be able to do, providing they meet other requirements e.g. are able to pay the increased rent.

- c) If only 1 person of working age is allocated a 2 bedroom home, will they incur the bedroom tax penalty? (The bedroom tax or under-occupancy charge is a cut in housing benefit or the universal credit housing element, where you are deemed to under-occupy a home).

Response from affordable housing team. Yes, in line with Department of Work and Pensions regulations the bedroom tax penalty would be incurred in this situation, the applicant would need to provide evidence they can afford the 2 bedroom property (over occupying) when checks are carried out if they are successful in their application.

### Discussion points included:

NJ stated that where new-build is concerned, there is a perceived need to “future-proof”. The theory behind this is that if one person moves into a one-bedroom home, at some point they may decide to start a family and need 2 bedrooms or perhaps there may be a need in the future for a “half-bedroom” for a personal care assistant. (According to the 1985 Housing Act section 326A, a single bedroom has to be 70 sq/ft or 6.5 sqm to be classed as a full (1.0) bedroom. If it is 9ft x 7ft then it is 63 sq/ft and just 0.9 of a bedroom.)

Homechoice figures are only a “snapshot” of demand at a given time, but AW said that whatever the reason/s behind the changes, there has been a substantial increase (+33%) in the number of households seeking homes with only one bedroom (looking across all the Bands A-E). AW added that she felt it is important to meet the “housing need” of those with a local connection to the parish on the Homechoice Register a) because that appears to be in line with what many in the community have said b) because any substantial shortfall will be used as developers to argue that more homes should be built in the parish. DQ acknowledged the figures and the “housing need” in this area, but also stressed that at best Homechoice figures are a

guide to what is required and should be considered in the light of other data and the context of Tywardreath and Par Parish as a whole.

Since the meeting, Justine Rolfe of the Affordable Housing Team has confirmed that Cornwall Council “will be building some 1 bed Private rented sector properties”. “For example, Brook House, Newquay – our first turnkey acquisition under the Housing Development Programme – is a 28 unit block of flats, of which 12 are 1 bed and the remainder 2 beds. Two of the one bed units will also be wheelchair accessible.’

Much of the information below about the **Housing Development Programme (HDP)** which is part of Cornwall Investment Programme is not directly relevant for Tywardreath and Par Parish, as it is unlikely that such large developments will be allowed within the parish.

## **HDP – Pilot Schemes**

**The Cornwall Investment Programme** of which the HDP is one element, has been established to help provide homes, infrastructure and other developments for Cornwall while also generating income. Longer term, it is intended to invest any profit in council services. Cornwall Council has set up a new company called Treveth which will operate “at arms’ length” from the council. **This company will focus on larger developments directly delivered or purchased as part of the 1,000 Homes Programme.** The two Pilot new build schemes are nearing completion at Tolvaddon and Bodmin.

1. Occupants of affordable homes, whether for rent or sale, will be subject to a ‘local connections’ requirement. Estate Agents marketing open market rental properties have been instructed to target their advertising so it reaches key workers and to prioritise applicants with a local connection where possible. There are no restrictions on applicants applying for open market sale properties. Those homes available at open market rent or for sale will be open to all, wherever the tenants or buyers come from.
2. As far as the cost of “affordable homes” to buy are concerned, NJ referred us to Appendix 1 on p. 38-39 of the “Housing Supplementary Planning Document’ (April 2019) where information is given on this. c.f. <https://www.google.com/search?q=Cornwall+Supplementary+planning+document&og=Corn&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j69i59l2j69i60l2j69i59.10114j0j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8> For information, Tywardreath and Par Parish falls into Value Zone 4 c.f. Cornwall Local Plan, Strategic Policies 2010-2030, 2016, Appendix 2 p.95.
3. The tenure details of any future pilot schemes would need to be agreed. If a proposal for a mixture of affordable rent and shared ownership homes is appropriate for the site / location / parish, then the mixture should be appropriate for the future tenants needs.
4. Some of the homes on the Pilot developments will be available at an open market rent level. Other “affordable” homes to rent will be offered to those on the Homechoice Register at a rent level which is set at the lower of either local

housing benefit or at a discounted rate set at 20% below open market rent. Rent for affordable homes is normally higher than for social housing (more commonly known as Council Houses).

5. The intention is that the “affordable” rented homes (and “affordable homes” to buy) will be covered by a Section 106 agreement which will last in perpetuity i.e. it will remain in place forever. Affordable Housing S106s requires homes to be used as the occupant’s primary residence and if the occupants choose to sublet a room, the usual restrictions apply: the tenant must have a local connection and rent must be set at the lower of two values ie. 80% of Open Market (OM) rent or local housing benefit, whichever is lower. This automatically precludes AirBnB.
6. The length of tenancies varies between registered providers. Some tenants may be offered 5-year tenancies and it is the intention that there is the option to review at the end of a tenancy. Depending on the tenant’s situation with regard to affordability etc., if the tenant is still eligible the intuition would be to extend the tenancy. Again extending a tenancy would be up to the registered provider to set their procedure. For the pilot scheme, the S106 restriction attached to the property title ensures the property remains affordable in perpetuity. For the pilot scheme (with a registered provider) right to acquire applies (and not right to buy).
7. To be able to apply for an “affordable” rented home, an applicant must first register with Homechoice. However, after that the process differs from that in respect of “social housing” where the rent is set at the lowest level. For information, the current **average** rent for all “social housing” properties across Cornwall is £69.86 a week, which includes properties from 1 up to 4 bedroom. The actual rent tenants pay for individual properties will be higher or lower than this figure, depending on the size of the property.
8. The “affordable” rented homes will be advertised extensively in advance of anticipated vacancies. Bidding on a specific property will be open for a week (bidding sessions always run from a Thursday morning to Monday midnight). Once bidding closes HomeChoice compile a shortlist of everyone who has applied for a property and send these details to the landlord RP. In the event that homes are unallocated to applicants in the primary area at the end of this period, they will be offered to registered applicants from the secondary area and any remaining unallocated properties will be offered County wide. AW expressed misgivings about the notion that there would be a fixed period of one week within which all expression of interest also known as “bids” would need to be submitted to Homechoice (where they may be involved). AW’s personal view is that this would make it much more difficult for some individuals to apply in a timely manner, especially for those with individual needs and/or where their current home circumstances or lifestyles do not necessarily make it easy for them to comply with such requirements. NJ said that the “bidding” process is on-line and DH queried whether postal applications could go in in advance of the specified week. The **Affordable Housing Team response**: Your point is noted however the week bidding period is Home choices set procedure, this has been the case for many years. The process is that Homechoice will advertise and produce a

shortlist of eligible applicants. The Parish Council can publish a local lettings plan to influence eligibility criteria (this needs to be unbiased, fair and approved by Cornwall Council). This local lettings plan can then be used in conjunction with the shortlist of eligible applicants provided by Homechoice after the bidding week closes to review tenants. The parish council (of the area where the site is located) is welcome to advertise the properties in any communication channels they have prior to the bidding week. Direct marketing to applicants on the Homechoice register is the direction of travel and eligible applicants with a primary parish connection will be contacted in the future. Regarding other processes and postal votes, please contact Home Choice directly on 0300 1234 161 or [homechoice.duty@cornwallhousing.org.uk](mailto:homechoice.duty@cornwallhousing.org.uk)

9. S106 requirements are communicated to Homechoice in advance and 'bidders' are aware of these requirements when they bid. At close of 'bidding' a shortlist is drawn up which prioritises those with a connection to the primary parish above those with a priority need banding outside the primary area. The allocation process thereafter follows the Homechoice Allocations Policy, see link below:- <https://www.cornwallhousing.org.uk/media/14964640/cornwall-council-allocations-policy-v10.pdf>
  10. "Affordable" shared ownership homes are likely to be available through the Help to Buy SW process where geographic priority will prioritise those with a connection to the primary parish, cascading out to those with a connection to secondary parishes and finally to Cornwall.
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