

Meeting of Harberton Parish Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group 25th September 2023

Item 6: Discussion with invited South Hams District Council Officers and Members

1. **Welcome and overview**
2. **Context in which the Neighbourhood Plan is being drafted.** We understand that the Joint Local Plan is currently under review, with the outcome of this due by 26 March 2024 at the latest. What are the implications of this review process for the Harberton Parish Neighbourhood Plan? Are there any emerging findings or potential policy changes that might have relevance to us? What else in the broader policy/political context do we need to be aware of?
3. **Outcomes of the Site Options Assessment Report** A Site Options Assessment for Harberton Parish is in its final stages, subject to consultants responding to questions and queries and matters of accuracy raised by landowners (see minutes of the meeting of 4th September 2023 for details). The Neighbourhood Planning group is keen to discuss with South Hams officers (representatives from Development Management team and Affordable Housing team) the outcomes of the Site Options Assessment overall, to investigate site constraints as identified by the Site Options Assessment and to ask for comments on the acceptability of the sites for future development. Earlier discussions with the Affordable Housing Officer included consideration of smaller sites being potentially used for development of affordable homes.
4. **Project for land East of Harberton.** The possibility is emerging of allocating land east of Harberton for development, subject to further consultation with landowners and the community. An exciting vision is beginning to emerge of a development that combines housing provision, including affordable housing, with natural amenity land that enhances biodiversity, nature-based flood risk reduction, etc. How can we work in partnership with SHDC to develop this vision for the NP, especially:
 - maximising affordable housing provision, especially for rent and ideally for social rent
 - exploring forward-looking models (example of the Welsh “One Planet” approach)
 - creating innovative, exemplary model of community owned/managed natural amenity land dovetailed with new housing.
5. **Ensuring high quality Neighbourhood Plan planning policies.** More generally, how can we best work with SHDC in coming months to make sure we develop valid NP planning policies that are effective in delivering the community’s priorities and also in complementing the JLP. For example, by:
 - Ensuring developments contribute appropriately to local infrastructure in a way that meets the expressed needs of the community. (For example, providing/funding better pedestrian and cycle facilities in Harbertonford and at key crossing points of the A381.)
 - Ensuring NP policies complement JLP policies on matters on which the local community has expressed particular concerns, but there are already JLP policies - eg light pollution, water quality/sewage overflow/protecting rivers, protecting valued views and tranquil areas, etc.
6. **Maximising use of the Neighbourhood Plan to catalyse local improvements.** How can we work with SHDC to engage other stakeholders (eg Highways, bus companies, landowners) with initiatives to deliver community priorities - eg changes to bus stop facilities, cycle routes to Totnes, developing the footpath network, etc.

Extract of minutes from HNP meeting of 20th February 2023 with regard to discussion on affordable housing in Harberton Parish

Item 5: Affordable Housing *Discussion with South Hams District Council's Affordable Housing Officer*

The purpose of the Affordable Housing Officer's visit to the HNP Steering Group meeting was to learn more about the status of the Neighbourhood Plan and to share knowledge of development of affordable homes within the District. It was noted that the visit is made within the context of South Hams District Council's (SHDC) declaration of a housing crisis in 2022.

The Affordable Housing Officer described their teams' role to secure delivery of affordable housing in the district. She commented that SHDC doesn't hold any traditional housing stock since transferring its stock to Live West in the 1990's. The Council now collaborates with a number of different housing associations.

When planning applications come forward in the district, the Affordable Housing team works with colleagues in the Council to secure delivery of affordable homes within development. This is primarily in the delivery of affordable homes on site as part of a specific planning application, but if delivering housing units is not possible, the developer may make a cash payment to the local authority to enable the development of affordable housing elsewhere. This is laid out in a Section 106 agreement between the local authority and the developer. Funding from Section 106 may not be tied to specific parishes and that funding can be spent district wide.

Under policy laid out in the Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan (JLP) a financial contribution is required on developments of between 6-11 houses in rural areas. The Council cannot insist on a contribution for a development of under 6 homes.

The District Council also has access to its own capital funding and is using Council reserves to support housing delivery. For example, funding is given to Community Land Trusts to help bring land forward for development of affordable homes for local people. Funding can be provided from the Housing Capital Programme to buy the land.

In response to a query from Steering Group members about the definition of 'affordable housing' the Officer responded that affordable housing to rent is housing rented at below market level. There are also schemes for home ownership in which there is shared ownership, usually with a housing association. It was commented that this is a good way to help people to get a first step on the property ladder, with examples of this in Totnes, such as properties in Follaton Oak and Baltic Wharf developments. It was noted that there is a legal definition of affordable housing in the National Planning Portfolio framework.

There was a query whether the 'pipeline of local need' is understood, in predicting requirements of the population through school numbers for example. It was suggested that this is the purpose of the Housing Needs Assessment, which references data available through the local authority, such as numbers of people requiring affordable housing.

The Neighbourhood Planning Group gave a brief precis of the process to date, commenting that an update Housing Needs Assessment was produced by Aecom in 2022 identifying a need for affordable rented housing within the Harberton Parish. The Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group would be interested in understanding ways that delivery of affordable homes could be facilitated on sites through working with the District Council or housing association partner.

It was commented that the majority of sites that have come forward in Harberton and Harbertonford villages are small and would be unlikely to support more than 6 dwellings. The Officer was informed that the Neighbourhood Planning group had experienced challenges from SHDC development management team on the sites that have been included in the plan to date, suggesting that many of them would not be considered by the District Council as being within the village boundary.

In response the Officer commented that there may be possibilities in speaking with housing associations to bring forward smaller developments, particularly with associations such as Live West

and Sovereign who already have housing stock in the parish as they would already have staff and resources supporting properties in the immediate area. Proximity to Totnes was also considered an advantage.

The Officer commented that SHDC does provide a management service for affordable rented homes 'Sea Moor Homes' and has also invested in small scale development of affordable homes and is looking for a few more – although the number of homes they look to build will be capped.

The Steering Group commented that because some of the sites that have come forward in Harberton Parish are very small, there could be the possibility of working with the District Council or a housing association to bring forward 100% affordable homes on those very small sites. The Affordable Housing Officer agreed that this could be a possibility.

In response to a query from members of the Steering Group, the Affordable Housing Officer commented that other groups have made allocations within their neighbourhood plans predominantly for affordable housing. Neighbourhood Plans for Aveton Gifford, Stoke Gabriel and Marlborough offer examples of this.

It was commented that the JLP's policy TTV27 'Meeting local housing needs in rural areas' provides guidance for so called 'exception sites' in which insistence can be made for affordable housing, as long as it is outside the village boundary. The Affordable Housing Officer commented that exception sites still need to pass certain tests, for example in relation to highways access and safe pedestrian links.

It was queried that based on the evidence of housing need could the Harberton Parish Neighbourhood Plan allocate sites for affordable homes only. It was commented that it would be up to the planning inspector to decide, when the plan goes forward to inspection.

To conclude the discussion **it was agreed that** once the Site Options Assessment report has been produced, it would be shared with the Affordable Housing Officer to consider whether any sites that have come forward are suitable for affordable housing and to work with the Affordable Housing Officer to broker relationship with Housing Association to bring affordable homes to fruition, or seek investment from South Hams District Council in bringing forward housing stock.