

Housing Needs Survey

At its September meeting the parish council hear from Sunila Osborne from Community Action Suffolk about the Rural Housing Project.

West Suffolk Council has selected Wickhambrook PC as a pilot parish based on current housing need figures and where they feel housing needs may be identified which would hopefully bring forward a development for local people. The survey would be undertaken by Community Action Suffolk, who would identify if there is a local housing need in the parish, and if a need were established, to work with the parish to bring through a Rural Exception Site (RES).

An RES may be located either abutting or outside the settlement boundary where planning permission would not normally be granted. If there was evidence from a housing needs survey, planners would consider bringing a site forward for local people. Any properties on such a site, whether shared ownership or rented, would always remain in perpetuity for people with a local connection. Shared ownership would always be capped at 80% market value. On a rural exception site, subject to planning, small numbers of full market properties are allowed, to cross subsidise and ensure that the scheme is financially viable and affordable. If they were to be sold on, the relevant share would be offered back to housing association that manages the properties. Any sites would need to be near key facilities.

Community Action Suffolk (CAS) would undertake a survey which ensures that it considers national policy planning framework and it takes into account people in the parish who want to downsize or move to an upgraded property that meets their changed needs.

The Housing Needs Survey is split into 3 parts:

Part one – generic information about the household (no. people, type of household, no. bedrooms, tenure type) period of time settled in the parish. Designed to build a picture about the types of properties in the parish and feeds into WSC for their profiling. It asks about views of future development in the parish, and if supportive, what type of properties they would like to see coming forward. This is important, as if the parish were to progress to a RES, the planners would want to know the level of support for the project in the parish.

Part two – looks to identify any households or members of the household within the Parish that may be in need of housing now or in the future. This gathers more detailed information about parish households – financial, tenure types, needs. This information is required to establish why there is a need, the household affordability etc

Part three – as part 2, but looking at people who want to live or return to the village. Captured through word of mouth through the households.

Process - if the parish decided it would like to go ahead a small working group would be set up (3 – 4 members of the pc). CAS would work with the group, and could include additional relevant questions relating to housing, but does not recommend taking questions out. All questions optional for participants and they would be made aware of that. The group would then discuss delivery methods, closing date, and a comms plan, collection of questionnaires, closing date and report. There would be a formal agreement between the parish and CAS outlining the work that would be undertaken, and what is expected of each party. There is a clause with regard to sharing of report, the full report would be restricted to the parish council and West Suffolk, with only an executive summary shared with residents.

The surveys can now be completed online or delivered back to CAS by post, and all data is anonymised. Information does not go through or be held by the parish. The parish would neither be a data processor nor data controller. Return rate, with good publicity, is 30-40 %. Where possible engage for 2-3 months in advance of distribution of the survey, setting out why the parish is undertaking the survey, and possible benefits.

CAS would then produce a full report and identifying any levels of housing need and reasons for need. If the PC wanted to proceed with an RES, CAS would continue to work with the working group and WSC to look for potential sites in the parish (land adjoining or abutting the settlement boundary) and then contact landowners to bring forward any sites.

Costs

WSC would pay CAS services for work on the report. The cost to the parish would be the printing and stationery costs (£1.75 for printing & stationery, & £1.75 for data input per property where returned as hard copy). Based therefore on a total of 546 properties within the parish (based upon information received in November from West Suffolk Council), the likely cost to the parish council before any financial support from a locality grant would be:

$$\begin{aligned} 546 \times \text{£}1.75 &= \text{£}955.50 \text{ and (based on 40\% return rate)} \\ 40\% \text{ of } 546 \times \text{£}1.75 &= \text{£}382.20 \text{ (assuming all returned by post)} \end{aligned}$$

Total £1337.70

Cllr Evans reported at the September meeting that that Wickhambrook PC had previously looked at local housing through community land trust and that there was at the time quite a bit of interest in building some housing in Wickhambrook that would be suitable for local people. She further reported that she would be happy to support with some grant. Any costs arising from the council's participation in a housing needs survey would be likely to fall in the next financial year.

Recommendation:

That Wickhambrook Parish Council ask Community Action Suffolk to undertake a Housing Needs Survey for the parish, based on West Suffolk funding CAS to undertake the work, and Wickhambrook Parish Council underwriting the cost of printing and stationery and data input where returned as a hard copy, at not more than £3.50 per property.