

Housing Needs Survey

At its meeting in November 2020 (**Min. 20.11.06 refers**), the parish council considered report **WPC.20.11.02**, which summarised the approach from Community Action Suffolk (CAS) to undertake a Housing Needs Survey in Wickhambrook, West Suffolk Council (WSC) having selected it as a pilot parish based on:

- current housing need figures; and
- where West Suffolk Council feel housing needs may be identified which would hopefully bring forward a development for local people.

And resolved:

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.

In January 2021, the parish council appointed Cllrs J Barton, K Merritt and S Thwaite (Min. 21.01.12 refers) to a working group to prepare the necessary documentation and agree timescales with CAS.

The working group met by zoom in early March with Sunila Osborne at CAS, who confirmed that:

Community Action Suffolk (CAS) will 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. Under the National Planning Policy Framework, the HNS now capture all tenure types of need. This can be for affordable rented, shared ownership, open market. People currently living in the parish may want to upgrade or downsize and find that there isn't anything suitable for them.

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 - CAS would work with the parish working group to draft publicity, a covering letter for the housing survey (printed by CAS) and agree timescales, a closing date and delivery methods (CAS recommend hand delivery). There will 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 being restricted to the parish council and West Suffolk, with only an executive summary shared with residents. The parish would be able to agree with CAS that, for example, information relating to tenure types of property could be extracted for use in the development of a Neighbourhood Plan.

The survey could include additional relevant questions relating to housing, but CAS does not recommend taking questions out. All questions are optional for participants and they will be made aware of this.

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 the parish should ensure community engagement 2-3 months in advance of distribution of the survey, setting out why the parish is undertaking the survey, and the possible benefits (this could be tied in with a public meeting to discuss whether or not there is a community desire to develop a Neighbourhood Plan).

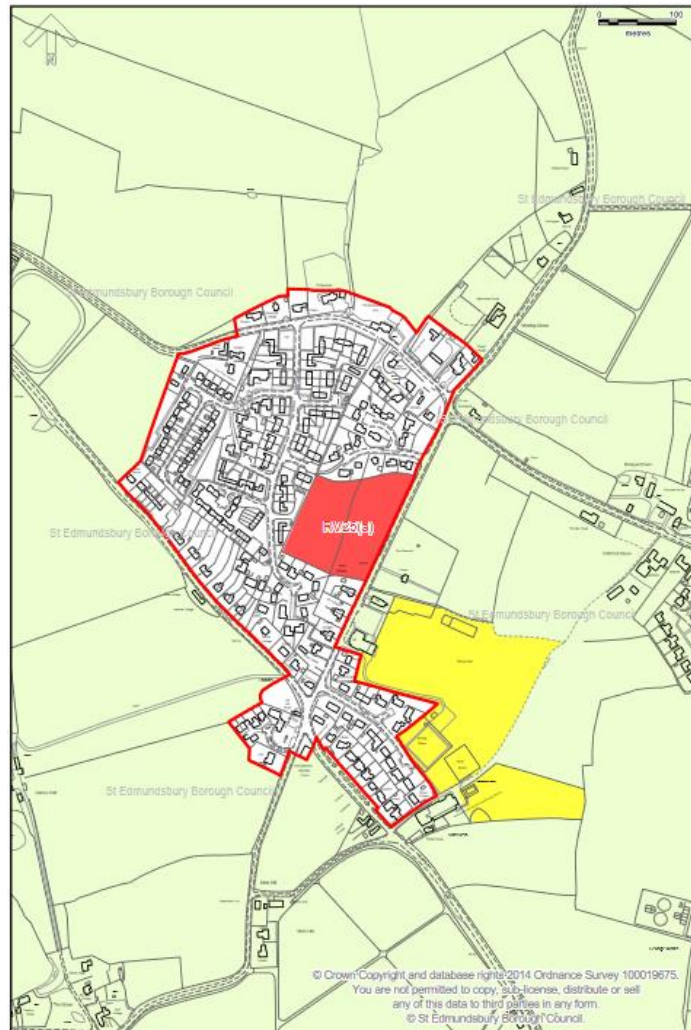
CAS will then produce a full report, identifying any levels of housing need and reasons for need. There is an expectation from West Suffolk Council and Community Action Suffolk that, they having funded the Housing Needs Survey and undertaken the work to draft the final report, the parish should have an aspiration to bring forward a Rural Exception Site if any level of housing need is established in the report.

Any properties on a Rural Exception 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. If they were to be sold on, the relevant share could be offered back to housing association that manages the properties (tenants could also agree to sell themselves, however they would need to ensure the local connection aspect is met).

Subject to planning, a small number of full market properties are allowed, to cross subsidise and ensure that the scheme is financially viable/affordable, but the purpose of the site is that the majority of properties are limited to people with local connections.

West Suffolk Strategic Housing and Community Action Suffolk would work with the parish council to identify appropriate and viable Rural Exception Sites for

future development. A site identification exercise would look at any sites abutting the settlement boundary (see below)



and seek to ensure that any sites are accessible to facilities. An initial, for example, 10 sites would be identified and prioritised. CAS then works with planning to identify viable sites, which the parish would then re-prioritise. CAS would then take forward the preferred sites to work with landowners and planning and identify housing associations to develop the sites.

The HNS report does not recommend type and tenure of properties and generally only a third or half of need is recommended at the time of the report. For some parishes, sites have been as small as 4 units. This is because by the time a scheme comes to fruition, people's circumstances may have changed. During the progress, CAS along with partners will continue to monitor housing register and also encourage people to register. During Public Consultation events, CAS has found find that people tend to express their interests and numbers may increase when they can see that something is happening.

Once a site has been identified, a sketch scheme is drafted, and then a public consultation undertaken, giving local residents an opportunity to register for any of the units developed.

The majority of parishes who have undertaken a Housing Needs Survey and where a housing need has been evidenced have progressed to identifying sites, but some stall due to no landowners or no suitable sites.

West Suffolk has listed Wickhambrook as a priority and may be aware of possible sites which could be used for development.

Because the work of the parish will not be restricted to community engagement and the practical delivery of the housing needs survey in the parish, but may, if a housing need is evidenced, extend to working closely with CAS and West Suffolk to identify and bring forward one or more Rural Exception Sites to be developed by a Housing Association (or through a Community Land Trust), the working group wants to be satisfied that the parish council does have an appreciation of the work and commitment involved in undertaking this Housing Needs Survey.

Recommendation:

That Wickhambrook Parish Council confirm its aspiration to work with CAS and West Suffolk Strategic Housing and Planning Services to identify and bring forward a Rural Exception site if evidence of a housing need for such a site is identified from the Housing Needs Survey which it has commissioned; and

That the parish clerk, in consultation with the Housing Needs Survey Working Group, be delegated authority to sign the agreement with Community Action Suffolk.