

Housing Needs Survey

At an Extra-ordinary meeting of the parish council on 8th September '21, (Mins [EO.21.09.04 & 06](#) refer) the parish council carefully considered:

1. the Housing Needs Survey Agreement proposed by Community Action Suffolk (CAS) (previously circulated as **WPC.EC.21.09.01** and attached as **Appendix A**)
2. the responses from both CAS and West Suffolk Council to its queries
3. oral comments from Ms Osborne in response to questions at the meeting and, having noted the following points:
 - The background to the agreement as stated, to protect Community Action Suffolk's intellectual property and provide income to enable it to further its charitable purposes
 - The proposed continuity at 7.2 beyond expiry or termination of the agreement (and therefore ongoing risk to WPC of indemnity or breach claims from CAS);
 - That the survey itself would not result in designation of a site or Registered Provider
 - That even where WPC were to put in place measures to control access, sharing and disposal of any controlled documents identified under 6.7.1, there may still be circumstances where a 3rd party could obtain access to controlled documents without the pc's consent, which may be deemed by CAS as negligent. Consequently, whilst the likelihood on unconsented disclosure might be low, it could not be fully controlled or mitigated, and the financial risk to the parish council arising from the penalties £10,000 and possibly 1.5% of acquisition and build cost, is not fully quantifiable and beyond the resources of the parish council;
 - That, as advised by the clerk, were the parish council to set aside the breach of contract fee (£10,000) notified at 6.10.1 as an earmarked reserve, it would be unlikely to be able to meet the required 25% value of precept as general reserves;
 - That the parish council would still bear the cost of stationery materials supplied by CAS as set out in the report (£1050).
 - It would be possible for the parish council to identify either other providers of Housing Needs Surveys, or technical assistance or advice through the Neighbourhood Planning process to undertake a survey of its own

The meeting decided not to enter into the agreement, which it considered would put the parish council at risk of a large financial liability, and constrain the council's intention to make full use of information from the report to inform the development of its Neighbourhood Plan. The meeting did not consider this to be in the interests of the parish community.

In accordance with the meeting's request, the clerk has continued to explore options to undertake a housing needs survey in the future as part of the wider Neighbourhood Planning project.

Camb's ACRE (Community Action Suffolk is an ACRE organisation) also deliver Housing Needs Surveys, and the clerk approached them to establish whether the NP Working Group could use the questions in their published surveys as a basis for its own Housing Needs Survey Questions. There was no objection to this, and in the course of further conversations, the Camb's ACRE advised that they could possibly undertake an HNS on behalf of the parish council and provide a summary report to West Suffolk's Strategic Housing Team.

WPC.22.01.02: Housing Needs Survey

In November, West Suffolk Strategic Housing Team confirmed to the clerk that it would accept a Housing Needs Survey and subsequent report through Cambs ACRE, and this was reported to the parish council.

Following a meeting between Cambs ACRE and CAS, Cambs ACRE subsequently asked Wickhambrook Parish Council to explore further with CAS whether there were any adjustments which it could make to the contract which would address the concerns the pc had set out in its decision not to proceed with the HNS through CAS in early September. CambsAcre advised that it would be able to undertake a survey on the pc's behalf if its concerns relating to the CAS agreement could not be addressed by CAS. Accordingly, the clerk contacted the Housing Needs Officer at CAS at their request provided a detailed summary of the specific points on the agreement which needed addressing, specifically items 6.1, 6.10 & 7.1. Their response did not set out any proposed change to the agreement.

Cambs Acre have provided a breakdown of costs which are set out at Appendix B to this report (with appended notes). It has confirmed that there is no confidentiality clause on the final report and Cambs ACRE would be the data controller for the purposes of the survey. In the event that were ever approached by a third party wanting the data without the PC's knowledge once the report is complete it would inform the parish council and check they the pc was happy for this to be done or pass the enquiry onto the parish council.

The parish council had a budget of £1500 for the Housing Needs Survey. Once the CAS bill (£353.75 plus VAT) is paid in this financial year, there would be an underspend of £996.25 which could be used to fund the Housing Needs Survey by Cambs Acre (anticipated cost £1006.50). The balance (£10.25) could be covered by supplies and services budget line, or drawn against the NP earmarked reserves (currently £5071).

Recommendation

Wickhambrook parish council authorise the cost of commissioning a Housing Needs Survey and subsequent basic report from Cambs ACRE at a cost of £1006.25.

Min. References:

EO.21.09.04 & 06

21.05.29

21.03.5.1 & 2

20.11.06

Housing Needs Survey

At its meeting in March 2021 (**Min. 21.03.05 refers**), the parish council considered report **WPC.21.03.01**, 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 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.

At the annual May meeting of the parish council, funds were approved for the cost of printing leaflets to promote the HNS at a drop in public meeting planned for July.

Work to agree the questions of the Housing Needs Survey (HNS) was completed in late spring, and a communications plan and timetable agreed for delivery, the period of the survey, and CAS's reporting afterwards. The HNS was promoted on the parish council website and at the Community Engagement Day on 3rd July 2021. The parish council met all its key dates, and the original timing of the HNS was brought forward by one week to coincide with return to school. The surveys were packed and ready for delivery in the week commencing 30th August.

The agreement between CAS and the parish council (**Appendix A refers**), to which the clerk had been delegated authority to sign (**Min. 21.03.5.2 refers**) was only sent to the clerk on 25th August. On checking the agreement prior to consulting with the Housing Needs Working Group, the clerk identified a number of issues (marked up on the agreement as comments) which she considered would expose the parish to too great a financial risk, and for this reason, the matter has been referred to the parish council for consideration.

The Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC) advised the clerk to check the agreement with West Suffolk Council as the housing enabler, and this is in progress.

Hilary Workman
Clerk & RFO
September 2021

Community Action Suffolk have advised that the agreement (which had been revised this summer following advice from their legal advisers) is designed to protect the parish council as well as CAS's intellectual property rights.

Both Community Action Suffolk and West Suffolk Council (WSC) have been invited to the meeting.

The parish council may decide, having considered the concerns raised and any additional comments addressing them received from CAS and WSC, that there are adequate protections from exposure to financial risk for the parish council, and if this is the case, it could resolve to instruct the clerk to sign the agreement on its behalf and return a copy to CAS. In this instance, CAS have confirmed that it would be possible to extend the closing date of the survey, and address this by means of affixing a label over the outer label each survey pack envelope, advising that the survey has been extended (e.g., to 30th September). This would involve some additional work (nine volunteers prepared all the packs in just over an hour), and the packs could then be delivered by the company previously instructed.

Alternatively, the parish council may decide that, based on the responses from CAS and WSC, there are inadequate protections from exposure to financial risk for the parish council and that it does not wish to sign the agreement or proceed with a survey carried out by CAS and underwritten by WSC. If this is the case, the packs should be returned to CAS for destruction. The parish council would still be likely to incur costs for the printing and stationery of the materials at £1.75 per property - £1050 (**Min. 20.11.06 refers**). There would be no costs arising from the return rates of the surveys.

It may be possible to commission another provider to undertake a housing needs survey at a future time, and one option would be to include this element in the Neighbourhood Plan grant application for funding from locality. Ian Poole of Plans for People has advised that a housing needs assessment can be commissioned through this route. Whilst it would not identify the locally assessed need, it would provide information on the affordability of and mix of housing types in the parish.

Action:

Councillors are asked to decide whether to instruct the clerk to sign the agreement with CAS

Min. References:

21.05.29

21.03.5.1 & 2

20.11.06

From: [Jenna Brame](#)
To: [Hilary Workman](#)
Subject: RE: quote for HNS
Date: 07 January 2022 15:18:18
Attachments: [image002.png](#)
[image003.png](#)
[image004.png](#)
[image005.png](#)
[image006.png](#)
[image007.png](#)
[image008.png](#)
[image009.png](#)
[image010.png](#)

Hi Hilary,

Apologies just found the email I sent this morning stuck in my outbox for some reason!

I can't provide the exact cost for the housing needs survey as I don't yet have the address list from the council, but I had in my notes that it was 546 properties so I have gone off of that.

The cost is broken down into a few parts which are as follows;

Our consultancy rate for my time which is £400/day + VAT, after our conversations we agreed that this would be 2 days for a basic report with just figures coming to £800 + VAT. If the PC have changed their mind and would require full report this would be our usual rate which is a minimum of 4 days for up to 400 addresses with an additional day for each additional 400 addresses which would come to £2,400 + VAT

Printing and postage I believe we agreed would be done by yourselves/the neighbourhood plan group. Please correct me if this has changed.

The freepost return envelopes would be around £70 – this is going off the quote from the last survey we did but may have changed as I know our printers were experiencing an increase in costs. There would also be a cost for each return completed which is at the current royal mail rates, as of the 4th of January this was 57p per return. We usually expect a return rate of 25% so an estimate would be £136.50 based on that logic. Of course the final cost will depend on the exact number of returns. I am still looking at the logistics with the freepost returns but will update as soon as I can.

In summary;

The total for the short report as we discussed would be an estimated £1,006.50 + VAT

If the PC opted for the full report we would be looking at a figure of around £2,606.50 + VAT

Both costs would depend on the exact number of surveys completed due to the way the freepost returns are costed.

As I said these are estimated figures so may vary a little but are the closest I can provide at current.

Many Thanks,


Jenna




Jenna Brame

Rural and Community-Led Housing Development Officer
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Community Homes

From: Hilary Workman <parishclerk@wickhambrook.org.uk>

Sent: 07 January 2022 15:01

To: Jenna Brame <Jenna.Brame@camsacre.org.uk>

Subject: quote for HNS

Hi Jenna, sorry to chase, but I can't find the quote and just wondered if somehow it had gone astray?

Hilary Workman

Clerk & RFO for Wickhambrook Parish Council

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E-mail: parishclerk@wickhambrook.org.uk - Please note the new address

Website: <https://wickhambrook.org/parish-council/#parish-council-contact>

My normal working days are Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.

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