

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