

Affordable Housing in Thame

A meeting has been arranged on 25th May with the Director of the National Community Land Trust Network to assess the potential for community based housing provision in Thame. The following are notes for that meeting:

Background

1. Residents' pleas for the ability of grown up children to be able to stay in Thame are being constantly expressed on a personal basis and in public meetings.
2. New development 3 bedroom houses are on sale for £490000.
3. 2 bedroom houses are in short supply as they are mostly being supplied to the 'affordable housing' (40% of new build) sector which is restricted to social housing and shared ownership.
4. Shared ownership, unlike social housing, does not have a percentage allowance in favour of applicants with a strong local connection. TTC has attempted to publicise the availability of shared ownership to Thame residents.
5. Discussion with a Housing Association Manager caused concern regarding the ability of shared ownership in Thame to provide more than a partial solution. HAs have limited pricing variation capability.
6. There is a concern that the Housing White Paper is not addressing the income side of affordability.
7. At Thame Town Council's Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Committee (NPCC) a small group was authorised to investigate alternative, community based, affordable housing initiatives that TTC could encourage and support. This could include encouraging self-build as well as turnkey building projects.
8. Thame has a strong network of bodies that are involved in community services and support. An example is the Sharing Life Trust which has been involved with TTC and others, in the rescue of the Red Kite Children's Centre from closure by OCC. Another example is the Thame Welfare Trust.
9. Thame is undergoing considerable housing development and in certain cases developers have commuted affordable housing obligations and provided/will provide monies under section 106 agreements. The value of the latter fund is currently projected at £850K (it could rise) and could form the seed money for CLT development. This fund is obviously under the control of SODC but is earmarked to be invested in Thame.
10. Possibilities may exist for the donation of land in any future Local Plan. A developer has stated that it is a practice it has actually carried out i.e. donated land.

Objectives of TTC working party:

1. **To understand the processes and route map for the provision of community based housing.**
2. **To assess the financial viability of such provision.**
3. **To determine the structure and governance of an organisation to support the implementation of community based housing.**

- 4. To prepare a proposal for implementation that would gain the support and approval of both TTC and SODC such as to allow the use of s106 funds.**

Other information:

1. Supporting data has been requested from SOHA (South Oxfordshire Housing Association) regarding shared ownership affordability profiles.
2. The East London (St Clement's?) model seemed particularly attractive in terms of ensuring the continuity of community involvement as well as potentially recycling s106 funds for further investment.
3. Advice was sought from Oxfordshire CLT and Community First Oxfordshire (CFO). They were helpful but did not have the resources to meet our requirements. I understand SODC has been approached to provide funding for advice provision by at least one of these bodies- so far without success.
4. From previous contact with SODC I believe that to make headway we need to have a thorough case prepared.
5. I do not know whether we would qualify for any government grants and we have not had discussions regarding the Community Housing Fund.