

Affordable Housing in Thame

A presentation to the Full Council has been arranged for 15th August. This presentation will be given by Catherine Harrington, the Director of the National Community Land Trust Network. The intention of the presentation is to inform the Town Council of the potential for community based housing provision in Thame.

At the council meeting that follows, there will be a motion of support to progress research into the formation of a CLT, to involve participation of the local community in that process and to determine the extent of involvement of the town council in any future CLT

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 – a challenge for local families.
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. A minimum 20% of social housing being built in Thame is allocated to applicants with strong local ties under SODC housing policy. From data received this percentage appears to be operating as a ceiling rate rather than a minimum.
6. 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.
7. There is a concern that the Housing White Paper is not addressing the income side of affordability.
8. 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. Such initiatives would be solely for the benefit of individuals with strong local connections.
9. 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.
10. 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.

11. 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 a working party (to involve members of the community) for which approval is required:

- 1. To further research the processes and route map for the provision of community based housing.**
- 2. To assess the financial viability of such provision.**
- 3. To propose the structure and governance of an organisation that could support the implementation of community based housing.**
- 4. To research and propose alternative levels of involvement by Thame Town Council in community based housing and the implications, financial and otherwise, of the alternatives.**

N.B.

1. The Government launched in 2016 a 'Community Housing Fund' set at £60M a year to support community based housing initiatives.
2. Start-up grants to develop community based housing are available.

Cllr Bob Austin
August 2017