

WATLINGTON. NEIGHBOURHOOD. PLAN

Meeting on Housing held on 25th November, 2015, at the West a Room at 7.30p.m.

The meeting was attended by Peter Canavan, Strategic Planning Officer, SODC, Delasi Osei, Housing Officer, SODC and 40+ members of the public including members of the NP Forum and members of WPC NP Steering Committee and Cllr Steve Harrod (OCC).

The meeting focused on the following questions:

1. How can the NP help to meet housing need in Watlington?

The first thing to do is to undertake a housing needs survey to update the one which was done in 2010. This will identify a range of needs across the population. It is limited by the fact that information is only obtained from people currently living in Watlington but is a good route to getting relevant and current data. It will also guide decisions about whether rural exception sites, outside the remit of the NP, are needed.

2. What is the definition of 'affordable housing' and how can it be provided?

Affordable housing is built by Housing Associations for rent and part ownership and is available to people on the SODC housing register. There are four categories of need on the register and people in the top three are eligible and can apply for consideration for newly built HA homes. The aim is to build 40% of affordable homes on a development site where 60% are sold on the open market, although 40% cannot always be achieved. Of this 40%, 75% of the homes are for rent and 25% for part ownership. The rent is calculated on a national scale of 80% of the market rent in the area. Watlington probably comes within the Oxford region for this purpose.

3. What is the maximum number of these homes which could be available to local people ?

The usual allocation is 20% of the 40%. For example, if a site is developed with 100 homes, 40 could be affordable homes and 8 of these would be earmarked for local people.

4. Is there a way of increasing the number of affordable homes for local people?

Parish councils can provide affordable homes on rural exception sites. Sites can be located throughout the parish but must be able to support sustainable development. These homes can be provided where there is an otherwise unmet need for affordable homes and would be available to people in all four categories of need on the SODC Housing Register. The parish council has to be able to identify a suitable site and to negotiate if the land is available with the landowner. SODC will help with this. It was noted that Watlington was close to providing housing on an exception site following the findings of need in the 2010 survey but withdrew from the process when it was quite far advanced. Homes built on rural exception sites are in addition to the allocated number required to be built in the parish by SODC to 2031 and are not part of the NP. Once evidence of need is established it is possible to investigate potential straight away.

5. How will the provision of affordable homes be affected by recent government proposals to focus more on starter homes?

It is not clear yet how this proposal will move forward. Starter homes could be included in the current 40% of homes currently set aside for affordable homes which would reduce the number of affordable homes provided on each development site. SODC offer home loans of up to £50,000 for the purchase of starter homes.

6. Is it possible that rural housing owned by housing associations may be exempt from the right to buy which the government is proposing?

It is not clear yet how rural housing may be affected. Currently, housing on rural exception sites is intended to provide affordable homes for local people in perpetuity.

7. There is some interest in self-build homes in Watlington. - how could these be provided?

It is possible to allocate plots for self-build homes on development sites but these would be included in the % of affordable homes provided. People who want to build their own home should register their interest with SODC.

8. How can 'Lifetime Homes' be provided. Building regulations cover the width of doorways as a matter of course but other facilities such as downstairs toilet/wet room and fittings for stair lifts can be provided for at the time of build so that internal changes can be made during the lifetime of the building. It is a way of making sure that homes are suitable for people as their needs change with advancing age. This is not standard but can be negotiated alongside other needs identified in the NP.

9. Homes where some level of support/care is provided can also be planned but this would need to be agreed with Oxfordshire County Council. OCC is the local authority with responsibility for the provision of adult social care. Private schemes are also possible.

10. Can a site be provided for 'permanent' mobile homes? These homes can provide a much more affordable option for people, are good quality and are now eligible for mortgages. SODC policy for this is uncertain - PC will raise the issue and provide further information.

The meeting closed with thanks to Peter Canavan and Delasi Osei for coming and giving such clear and useful informatio