



*Our plan –
Our future*

Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan

Notes of the Neighbourhood Plan Housing Providers meeting

21st February 2012, 14:00pm to 15:45pm, Guildhall

PRESENT

Cllr Lesley Durbin
Howard Horsley
Charles Teaney
Claire Hughes
Nick Wood
Jane Bax
Richard Finney
Diane North

REPRESENTING

Much Wenlock Town Council
Community
Community
Shropshire Council
Shropshire Council
Bromford Housing Association
Shropshire Housing Group
Wrekin Housing Trust

Lesley Durbin and Howard Horsley gave a brief overview of the progress of the Neighbourhood Plan and the purpose behind inviting the representatives of landlords to the meeting.

The meeting established the number of houses/dwellings available in the various Housing Associations* to ensure a degree of accuracy in the data. It was established that there are 191 Social Housing dwellings of various types in Much Wenlock parish out of approximately 1,300 dwellings in total.

The main purpose of the meeting was to attempt to establish within the Neighbourhood Plan the most appropriate type and number of affordable houses that may be needed in Much Wenlock between now and 2026.

Questions:

1. *Are we right in assuming that the housing associations have in the past acquired dwellings in Much Wenlock through prior relationships with developers?*

Bromford Housing, Shropshire Housing Group and Wrekin Trust confirmed this as correct, none had bought land and built dwellings.

Lesley Durbin explained that there had been a Much Wenlock Housing Needs Survey (Bridgnorth District Council) in 2007. Some affordable housing has been built since, but it had been part of larger developments and not on exception sites.

Howard Horsley pointed out that under Section 106 a percentage of housing in a development maybe designated affordable. However there has hitherto been no local consultation on type of housing, shared equity, rental, etc.

Nick Wood explained that the input with reference to types, under S106, was between housing authorities, developers and Shropshire Council along with the need to agree allocations.

2. *Can we have data and evidence of need from housing associations as the experts?*

All agreed that they would provide whatever data they were able to give. Richard Finney talked about the role of social housing developments, not being concerned with just today's needs but what will be relevant in 30 years time. He stressed the need for a predictable income stream from any development.

A discussion followed on the historical and geographic impediments to social housing in Much Wenlock, including cost of land, exception sites and current development boundaries. When the issue of building social housing in Much Wenlock was explored land prices were seen as a deterrent. Housing Associations need to budget for an income stream over a period exceeding 25 years. Repeated reference was made to the benefits of using exception sites for social housing, as land values would be more limited on such sites. When challenged, there was agreement that the extension of development boundaries brought land into the commercial sector where land values automatically increased.

Charles Teaney introduced discussion on the proposed housing needs survey and "soft data" collected from launch meetings and road shows. He also outlined what sort of homes – shared equity, rented, owned, 1,2 or 3 bedrooms? What needs should we be trying to meet? On the issue of a housing needs survey there was acceptance by Shropshire Council of the limited validity and accuracy of their present data. They stressed that any survey that we carried out ought, by its local penetration, to be more accurate and more valid than anything that they could produce. They agreed to assist us in formulating such a survey.

3. *Are there plans to build or acquire single-level properties, or with lifts/stair assistance in view of the larger numbers of older people within the parish. This could then release some larger properties back to family homes?*

Building is going ahead to service that need, much is being built with at least ground floor or single level dwelling areas (but not in Much Wenlock).

All providers agreed that what people want is often different to what they need; "needs" has a specific criterion.

4. *Is it correct that none of the three housing associations represented has ever built or bought land within Much Wenlock because of high land values locally?*

Possibly due to no willing local land owners wanting to sell at the right price other than possible exception sites.

Lesley Durbin observed that there are a surprising number of landowners with sites big enough for two homes. Approximately 20 landowners had attended NP meetings, although

all may not be willing currently to put land forward.

Lesley Durbin said it was hoped that local opinion on the growth of the town and housing needs would be brought out by the survey being conducted, but background data is also required. Charles Teaney observed that the survey results should hopefully mark the difference from perceived needs as opposed to what is actually needed.

Lesley Durbin observed that the William Brookes School survey of 6th form opinion showed that the younger people who live in Much Wenlock parish felt they would need to move from Much Wenlock, perhaps returning later in life. This could have a big impact on the sustainability of the community in the long term.

5. *Are there any improvements to the way lettings are carried out? How could it be improved, and the town benefit? By providing for existing families or bringing in new families?*

Wrekin Housing is not really receiving requests for properties within Much Wenlock, although only eight properties are currently owned

There is not a massive move between counties. February housing bid numbers have increased from 135 to 261, this being as a result of Shropshire Council requesting applicants to confirm their need to be on the housing register. There is a huge need for 1 and 2 bed properties, little need for 3 to 4 bedroom properties. There are a five-fold greater number of requests for the former.

6. *Would families need to move from MW once a third child arrives?*

Howard Horsley observed that some people may give addresses as Much Wenlock when they are in fact not resident, due to catchment area requirements for local schools.

Lesley Durbin said that it hoped that all data gathered from the Neighbourhood Plan survey will be given to an expert for analysis once collated.

7. *Is a snap shot of historical housing data info available, for comparison?*

There was a brief discussion on the problems in obtaining data of an historical nature. Nick Wood indicated that there could be affordable housing on all new developments. There have been discussions at Shropshire Council about moving to a banded percentage across Shropshire. Somewhere like Much Wenlock might achieve a much higher than average affordable build within developments.

8. *When properties are acquired from developers, is there a requirement for local connections when let to applicants?*

It was clear that requirements vary in relation to local connections. Lesley Durbin explained that the area regarded as establishing a 'local connection' could be widened after 6 weeks if there is no demand within the immediate locality. This aims to ensure that homes are not left empty.

Richard Finney was concerned that the result of the housing need questionnaire will be a time-limited need, rather than a plan for the future.

Nick Wood said that a local lettings plan is in place within Shropshire which must be adhered to. He does not particularly favour exception sites but sees them as a more controllable way of delivering affordable housing, although they can be a 'blot on the landscape'.

9. *Our needs survey will have with greater validity than current info held – so can Nick Wood provide the questions that we should be asking?*

Nick Wood undertook to provide examples of housing needs surveys

Sara Botham from the Community Council of Shropshire is also prepared to help in identifying key questions.

10. *Small sites are possibly available but are these sites - for 3-4 houses - useful to housing associations?*

Landowners might be willing to sell smaller sites to housing associations but are not aware how to go about this. There needs to be a mechanism to bring landowners and housing associations together.

The meeting concluded by considering what issues needed further consideration terms of preparing the plan. All present expressed a wish to co-operate.

Nick Wood stressed that the Neighbourhood Plan will succeed or fail on the quality of housing needs survey data. He also observed that there was a 1,600 net shortfall of affordable housing in Shropshire currently.

Lesley Durbin said getting the balance right for helping new and existing residents' requirements is important. Charles Teaney expressed his concern whether another Needs Survey will be required on a periodic basis? Asking the question "Have needs been met?" The plan needs to be a living, dynamic document that reflects current needs rather than the needs that existed in 2012.

Howard Horsley said that some statutory consultees have been very positive. Also important is striking the right balance between right decisions and right locations and decisions of principle.

Charles Teaney observed that the survey is due for completion and distributed between in April 2012. There is a tight schedule involving a massive amount of work for those involved, as well as financial commitment.

The Steering Group would like to hear the thoughts and receive relevant information to use as data and what trends might we expect to see from all providers. The deadline for information from attendees is Friday March 2nd 2012.

**For an explanation of these terms, see glossary: <http://www.wenlockplan.org/glossary>*