



Our plan – Our future

Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan

Meeting of Housing Associations, Shropshire Council and Members of the Steering Group
10th December 2012, 5.30 pm to 7 pm, Guildhall

PRESENT

REPRESENTING

Members of the Steering Group

Bob May	Community
Cllr. Lesley Durbin (Chair)	Much Wenlock Town Council
Cllr. Robert Stuart	Much Wenlock Town Council
Cllr. Milner Whiteman	Much Wenlock Town Council

Shropshire Housing Group

Martin Holland	Chief Executive
Paul Sutton	Director, Assets and Development

Shropshire Council

Nick Wood

Minute Taker

Robert Toft

1. Chairman's Introduction

Lesley Durbin welcomed the representatives of Shropshire Housing Group and Shropshire Council to the meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Sepp Sargeant and Helen Pugh from Severnside Housing who were unfortunately unable to attend the meeting.

3. Discussion Issues

Advice on Housing Needs

Martin Holland noted that the Shropshire Housing Group had been formed following a merger between South Shropshire and Mosses & Meres Housing Associations, both of which had specialised in rural housing. They had agreed a corporate plan which looked at future as well as current needs.

Lesley Durbin noted that housing priorities were often determined by those with the greatest need rather than any local connection. She noted that current and five-year needs had been assessed by a residents survey and added that 191 homes in the parish were currently owned by housing associations or Shropshire Council. She had also looked at the Shropshire HousePoint information which indicated an annual turnover of seven properties.

Nick Wood noted that looking a five-year period would not unearth all housing needs. Paul Sutton noted that initial needs could be understated, citing an example in Rushbury where four bungalows had initially been built, following which more residents had expressed an interest leading to further home building (mostly for rent). Martin Holland thought that it was wise to use all sources of available information to inform decisions.

(Milner Whiteman arrived at the meeting)

Robert Stuart asked what might constitute affordable housing. Martin Holland noted that 80% of the market rent was one indication of this.

In answer to a question from Bob May, Martin Holland said that the Shropshire Housing business model was centred on the provision of low cost, shared equity and rented housing but houses were also built for outright sale to generate income.

Martin Holland noted that communities could have some control over what happened locally, notably through community-led schemes.

Lesley Durbin asked if development depended on the availability of low-cost exception sites. Martin Holland agreed that some sort of subsidy was normally involved in the form of cheap land, council financial support or grants. Nick Wood noted that exception sites allowed a local connection. Martin Holland noted that Shropshire Housing were used to developing small sites of about six to eight homes.

In answer to a question from Bob May, Martin Holland confirmed that Shropshire Housing were interested in developing mixed affordable and market housing.

Lesley Durbin asked whether Shropshire Housing were involved with sheltered housing. Martin Holland noted that they had recently completed a mixed development including sheltered housing.

In summary, Lesley Durbin noted that Shropshire Housing had indicated that they able to meet housing needs provided that value and viability issues were addressed.

Levels of Affordable Housing

Nick Wood noted that variable percentages of affordable housing might be needed and added that Much Wenlock and Church Stretton were currently seen as the least affordable area in Shropshire.

Milner Whiteman and Nick Wood thought that a 50% level of affordable housing was no longer viable. Milner Whiteman thought that a level of 20% to 30% might be viable.

Nick Wood noted that it was often difficult for potential buyers to raise finance for the deposit on affordable homes, e.g. Lady Forester Gardens.

Lesley Durbin noted that that Plan would include a minimum requirement for affordable housing.

Infill and Redevelopment Sites

Lesley Durbin asked if Shropshire Housing were interested in small infill developments of two to four homes. Martin Holland and Paul Sutton confirmed that they would be interested provided the land cost was low enough to make the development viable.

Paul Sutton noted that Shropshire Housing would be interested in the redevelopment of sites, particularly where there was strong community support.

Criteria for Good Small Scale Housing Sites

Martin Holland emphasised the importance of working together on site development to achieve a community of interest and to convince residents of the merits of the development. Paul Sutton noted that this involved spending time, for example by holding design days since local ideas were often very useful. Martin Holland noted that areas to avoid included those supporting wildlife and those where mining or subsidence was a problem.

Robert Stuart asked whether the development boundary could be changed to allow for exception sites. Nick Wood confirmed that this was possible.

(Robert Stuart left the meeting)

Need for Site Allocations

Bob May described the land allocation proposals which had been put forward by landowners in response to an appeal for sites. Lesley Durbin noted that several of these sites might be suitable for affordable housing.

Nick Wood noted that the allocation of sites could determine values by requiring community facilities, such as playing fields, be included. He added that allocations could be time-bound and could then be re-allocated if necessary.

4. Conclusion

Lesley Durbin asked Shropshire Housing to produce a statement of what they could deliver locally, ideally by 21st December.

She thanked Martin Holland, Paul Sutton and Nick Wood for coming and noted that it had been a valuable meeting.