

Minutes of a Township Meeting on 31 October in the village hall Newenden at 7.30 pm

Present:

Mr A Nilson (chairman)

Community Land Trust (CLT)

Mr B Livesey (chairman of the CLT Steering Group)

Action for Communities in Rural Kent

Ms T O'Sullivan

Clerk

Mr J Leeves

There were 54 residents present.

Apologies for absence

1. Apologies were received from: Christine King, Jane Livesey, Alan Seal, Kathy Turnbull, Chris Turnbull

Introduction

2. The chairman said that the purpose of the meeting was to inform residents about the results of the Housing Needs Survey and to indicate what the CLT Steering Group proposed to do next. The meeting would deal with the issue of affordable housing which was controversial. -The full results of the Housing Needs Survey were on the village website Newenden.org but an abbreviated printed version had been distributed at the meeting.

3. The chairman then said that he wanted to formally declare an interest as he was doing consultancy work for the Bourne Group of companies. No sites had yet been identified but one possible site was owned by the Bourne's. Work on identifying possible sites would only start when the CLT was established and the meeting would not discuss the issue of sites. To further clarify the situation he stated that he was not a solicitor by profession nor did he give legal advice.

4. He proposed to put in place a moratorium on further discussion and work until the New Year. After this the CLT Steering Group and the whole community would come up with a possible solution for how to resolve outstanding matters. This solution would be discussed and a decision taken latest at the Annual Parish meeting at the end of March.

Background

5. Mr Livesey the chairman of the CLT Steering Group, introduced the members of the Steering Group and Ms O'Sullivan of Action with Communities in Rural Kent who had organised the design and administration of the Housing Needs Survey. He explained that the CLT had not yet been set up and would take about two months to form.

6. Mrs Hannavy-Cousen explained CLT's and that they were in effect owned by the local community. A CLT acquired land for affordable housing either by purchasing it or through gifts from local landowners. The advantage of a CLT was that the land it owned could not be sold or otherwise developed thereby giving the local community control over it. Equally, the homes themselves could not be sold and they would always be let at an affordable rent. This contrasted with the situation in neighbouring villages where there had been substantial development over which the local community had had no control. The CLT usually worked through a housing association that managed the affordable homes letting them at a social rent which was always lower than the market value rent in the private sector. The CLT laid down the eligibility criteria for prospective tenants. People in need of housing would then have to register with the Housing Department of Ashford Borough Council who would check eligibility against these criteria. Although the CLT was a non-profit making body in practice it would make a small profit from ground rents charged to the housing association which it would reinvest.

7. Moving onto the Housing Needs Survey results Mrs Hannavy-Cousen said that it had covered the following broad areas: information about the existing housing position in the village and the housing needs of residents, employers and their employees. On existing housing in the village the cheapest three bedroom house was priced at £325,000. To afford to purchase this property would require a deposit of £48,750 and an annual income of almost £80,000. To afford to rent privately an income of about £38,000 was required the cheapest property being in nearby Rolvenden costing £950 per month for a one bedroomed flat.

8. The survey found that there was a need for up to 8 affordable homes. The following specific needs for local people were identified: one for two people sharing, two for single people, one for a couple and four for families. Further details were in the survey document. There were a variety of reasons why people would wish to take any opportunity for affordable housing in Newenden such as employment, family associations and the possibility of downsizing.

9. Mr Livesey then explained that the next stage would be for the formation of the CLT. The CLT would have a board of three to eight members from the local community. The first function of the CLT would be to identify potential sites for affordable housing and deal with Ashford Borough Council over all the planning matters associated with them.

10. Mr Livesey said that there had been a great deal of speculation about the position of Mr Bourne and the land he owned at the end of Lossenham Lane. To clarify the situation Mr Livesey then read a statement from Mr Bourne. The statement included confirmation that he would donate the land required free of any charge.

11. Mr Cathcart commented that on the issue of control of the use of land, the position in Newenden should not be compared with that in neighbouring villages such as Hawkhurst, Sissinghurst and Cranbrook where housing developments had or were currently taking place. Ashford Borough Council considered that Newenden was an unsustainable community because the village had no facilities such as a school, shop or doctor's surgery and for this and other reasons they had a policy of non-development in the village. Although the CLT would be able to exercise control over the land it owned this would not extend to other land that it did not own the owners of which would be free to seek planning consent.

12. Hazel McKinlay complained about the time it had taken to make the minutes of the CLT Steering committee available. The inclusion of questions asking whether there was any requirement for work/live and work units was a new departure. This widened the survey into a new area associated

with employment and one that had not been in the first survey. The question about downsizing was not sensible because older people would seek properties in a town closer to amenities. She was also concerned about the number of questionnaires that had been available at Bourne's the main employer in the parish, and pointed out that many employees, particularly of the Bodiam Boating Station, did seasonal jobs and by inference did not need year round accommodation. For these reasons she felt that the Survey was invalid.

13. Ms O'Sullivan explained that the design of the Housing Needs Survey had been done in conjunction with housing advisers at Ashford Borough Council. The survey was of a type used for affordable housing and was not structured to establish other types of housing need. The inclusion of work life and work only units reflected changes in people's lifestyle and it was the case that several residents of Newenden already worked from home. The Survey was therefore intended to see whether there was any need for such units. The number of survey forms made available at Bourne's just reflected workforce numbers and additional forms had been available to all that required them.

14. Tom McKinlay thought that the requirement for affordable homes had gradually increased from three at the time of the previous survey to six to eight now and might increase further in the future. The Survey was in his view the thin end of the wedge. Moreover, the proposal to build affordable houses was a foregone conclusion supported by people and organisations in the village that wanted the development to happen.

15. A resident asked whether the CLT could disagree with any decisions of the Planning Department of Ashford Borough Council. Ms O'Sullivan explained that the CLT would have greater influence with the Planning Department because it was supporting the housing needs of the parish.

16. A resident thought that the issue had become so emotive that any future vote on the issue should be conducted in private so that the way in which people voted would be confidential. The meeting was closed and further consideration of the issue deferred until the New Year.