

Speldhurst Parish Council

Local Government for Langton Green, Speldhurst, Ashurst and Old Groombridge

Minutes of a Local Needs Housing Committee Meeting held in the Committee Room A, Town Hall, Tunbridge Wells on Friday 19th February 2010 at 12.00pm

MEMBERS PRESENT: Cllr Wheeler (Chairman), Cllrs Mrs Hull, Langridge

OFFICER PRESENT: Chris May, Clerk

1. **Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interest:** Cllr Wheeler said that he had asked the Clerk whether the Councillors from Speldhurst should register a declaration of Personal Prejudicial Interest because the housing project was solely concentrating on their village. The Clerk said that he was satisfied that none of the Councillors was against Local Needs Housing in their village but they were not in favour of Green Belt land being used until every other option had been explored and eliminated.
2. **Declarations of Lobbying:** None received
3. **Apologies for Absence:** Cllr Brown (Funeral); Cllr Milner (Family engagement)
4. **Minutes** of the meeting **dated 4th December 2009**, copies having previously been forwarded to all Members, were approved and signed as a correct record.
5. **Matters Arising and Correspondence:** An email had been received from a Speldhurst resident who had enquired of the progress of the project. The Clerk had updated him.
6. **Review of meeting in Speldhurst and viewing of alternative sites:** It was agreed that the meeting and the visits to a number of possible sites had been constructive and useful. It was agreed also that all brown field sites should however be explored before any Green Belt land should be considered. It was evident from the presentations given by the RSLs that the price of land was one of the major factors in the whole project. The possible use of the Speldhurst Business Park had effectively been ruled out after the visit because of access through a car park and there was no further progress on the sites 14/15 in Langton Road identified by the TWBC Planning Office since the owners had registered an interest in selling the land.
7. **Review of RSLs:** Two RSLs had made a presentation to the committee prior to the meeting.
 - 1) **English Rural Housing Association (ERHA)** has been established 20 years and has 1,000 properties in the South East, 220 in Kent. They specialise in rural housing and only work with Parish Councils that support the project. They hold consultation events where residents can register their interest and they will change plans at this stage. They obtain funding from HCA and private finance.

The tenure is a mix of buying and renting and the rules for ownership are written in to the 106 Agreement before the build. They do not charge rent on the unsold part and when a resident who part owns a house wishes to move they sell back to ERHA who act as an Estate Agent. The recent financial conditions means that there are only 4 lenders at the moment who are willing to lend to part ownership applicants (as opposed to about 15 two years ago)

It was estimated that the rental on a 3 bedroom house would be about £120pw.

There is a Kent wide initiative called Choice Base Lettings which keeps a register of people who would like a house. Applicants must be registered on the Housing Register and with ERHA and **MUST** have a local connection which will be thoroughly vetted.

They presented examples of recent builds in Smarden to the committee.
 - 2) **Circle Anglia** is a bigger company (2nd biggest in the Country) and has a number of companies within its umbrella including Russet Homes Ltd and Mole Valley Housing Association Ltd. To date they have concentrated more in East Anglia and Social Housing but have experience of shared ownership projects in Kings Hill, Tonbridge and Dorking. They also work with Parish Councils and choose an architect that they feel comfortable with and are committed to Local Needs Housing.

They stressed that mortgages are a problem at the moment and prospective owners needed a good size deposit. They showed some examples of recent builds by the company.

The committee then discussed the two applicants and it was unanimously decided to recommend English Rural Housing Association to Full Council at the next meeting.

During the discussions Sarah Lewis admitted that TWBC had misunderstood the structure of the Parish when it had used the Parish wide survey and the implications that it had on Speldhurst village. Cllr Mrs Hull asked that, in view of this, a proportion of the houses that were to be built could be allocated to people with an association to Speldhurst village. Sarah Lewis said that this could be done when the 106 agreement was written.

- 8. Future progress and timetable:** Sarah Lewis was on holiday the following week so it was decided to follow up after the Full Council meeting of March 1st when we could advise her which RSL had been selected. An update on any progress regarding the visit to the brown field sites and if the Planning Officer had any recommendations would also be sought.
It was also requested that she start work on a Register of Social Housing in the Village and Parish of Speldhurst both private and public.
The visit to possible sites in Langton Green was suggested for mid April – date to be confirmed.
- 9. Items for Information** – Cllr Langridge asked if it was worth asking the community if it had land for sale via the Village magazines. It was decided to refer this to Full Council.
There were no further items for discussion.

The meeting closed at 12.25pm.

Chairman