

COMPTON AND SHAWFORD PARISH COUNCIL
January 2014

REVIEW OF POTENTIAL FOR RURAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND SITES IN COMPTON AND
SHAWFORD

Summary of Events - September 2012 – September 2013

1. Background

The Parish Council has responsibilities to endeavour to ensure that some specific needs of residents are taken account of, and this includes rural affordable housing in the parish. This matter has been on the agenda of various parish council meetings over the last 10 years or so.

The Council agreed at its meeting in July 2012, that it would work with the Hampshire Alliance for Affordable Rural Housing, (HARAH), Winchester City Council (WCC), and the local community, to quantify the demand for rural affordable housing in the parish, and to work with the relevant organisations and the community to take this forward.

The Parish Council was informed by WCC, that there was a specific need for about 20 individuals who had an identified link with the parish, which could be substantiated.

The process was launched at an exhibition by HARAH, held in the parish, in November 2012. The process was concluded in September 2013, when the Parish Council agreed not to pursue the initiative further at that point in time. The progress of the initiative is briefly described below. Regular progress reports were submitted to the Parish Council, meetings were held with the local community and the various organisations involved, i.e. The Compton Village Association, HARAH, Winchester City Council, Hampshire County Council.

It is understood that since September 2013 there has been no communication with parish councillors about the halting of the initiative by anyone who might have been on the housing list and that met the criteria.

2. What is meant by Rural Affordable Housing?

At the outset of the project there was confusion about what was meant by rural affordable housing. The Rural Housing Initiative is a national project that has the overarching objective of supporting communities, local authorities and their partners' efforts to enable and increase delivery of affordable housing in rural areas – focusing on settlements with a population fewer than 3,000 people. The aim of the Hampshire Alliance for Affordable Rural Housing (HARAH) is to address the need for affordable housing in the villages of Hampshire; working to ensure local people are able to afford to live in the places where they were brought up, work or have family connections. Individuals must be on the housing register of WCC. Individuals must be in housing need and unable to afford a suitable home on the open market.

Local connection to the Parish in which the housing is located or is being built means:-

- An individual must normally live in the Parish
- Have previously lived in the Parish and still have family who live there
- Work in the Parish or are taking up permanent employment there
- An individual is supporting a family member in the Parish or will be supported by a family member who lives there

Key elements of the initiative were to:

- Inform the community which covers the whole parish, i.e. Compton Village, Compton Down, Shawford and Southdown. The parish council was aware of the need to ensure all those involved communicated adequately and sufficiently as the project progressed. The parish council website also provided up to date sources of information about progress, including site options and associated constraints, possibilities, views and concerns.
- Work with HARAHA to identify possible sites. A number of “exception sites” owned by HCC, were initially identified. HCC has the authority to release sites at a lower than market rate in order to make the prospect of any building actually affordable. There was an agreed housing provider, Hyde, with whom HARAHA worked with to look at potential sites re their feasibility.

3. Roles of various organisations

The Parish Council and Councillors

Role - To represent the view and concerns of the residents or the parish to the parish council itself and, through it, to the District and County Council. To report back to the residents on issues affecting the parish.

The relationship that the parish council had with HARAHA, WCC and Hyde as the housing provider, was to work with them in identifying sites, asking questions and gathering information about possible sites and their suitability from a number of perspectives, including access, visual impact, highways issues, increased traffic, car parking, impact of facilities in the village, e.g. school places, green space, etc; ascertaining the views of the community; and asking for confirmation about the accuracy of need.

During 2013 the need for a parish poll was discussed. This was not progressed for a number of reasons. It was recognised that parts of the parish were likely to have little or no interest in the initiative and it was somewhat dubious as to what a poll might achieve in this particular set of circumstances. In addition, there may have been cost implications, but this was not a factor in decision making.

Assumptions about various parish councillors’ views were made which were unfortunate. What the council was doing during 2013 was exploring the potential and the possible sites. It was not until the autumn of 2013 that a decision was made not to proceed with the initiative for Affordable Rural Housing.

Winchester City Council

Role - To identify housing need for the parish and ensure that that need is addressed, linked to those on the housing register who met the defined criteria for Affordable Rural Housing in Compton and Shawford. This was understood to be about 20 with substantiated links with the Village, (August 2013). This would have led to about 8 – 10 units of accommodation.

Role - To liaise with and work with the parish and community in achieving suitable sites.

The working relationship was sound, but it was unfortunate that representatives of the Parish Council were not allowed to see the information in relation to need, in order to substantiate it. The two district Councillors were, however, able to see the list.

WCC would have been the organisation to commission the building of the rural affordable homes, should the parish have supported the initiative.

There are currently no agreed additional housing targets for the Village of Compton and Shawford.

Hampshire County Council

Role - HCC has in its ownership some exception sites that could be released for building affordable housing units. It can give authority/approval for a particular site to be released for affordable housing.

It was involved in the identification of some of the potential sites. HCC were helpful in identifying a few sites within their ownership which might have been suitable, but in the end, due to the community's concerns, these opportunities were not taken forward.

Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing (HARAH)

Role - HARAH has criteria related to those in need of housing having eligibility. HARAH works with Rural Housing Enablers to act as a catalyst to bring all parties together to an agreed outcome. HARAH was involved in site identification and meetings with the local community and representatives of the Parish Council.

HARAH have a website which has much detailed information on how to proceed with a rural housing initiative and is a useful reference point if any scheme should be put forward in the future.

HARAH was instrumental in leading a workshop in November 2012, held at the Scout Hut in Compton Village, which was attended by a good number of the community. HARAH'S comments on the initiative are given in **Appendix B**

It was unfortunate that from this point on a feeling of misunderstanding developed that the initiative was a 'done deal' which was certainly not the case. From then on the process became a rather emotive one, particularly for some members of the community in Compton Village.

It would have helped if the 'exhibition' and the questionnaire circulated in November had been structured in a different way allowing for a presentation at the November meeting with time for questions. However, the outcome, not to proceed, as agreed in September 2013, would probably have been the same.

The community, its residents and residents associations

Role - To participate in giving views and opinions and to inform the representatives of the parish council of their views so that they can be taken into account of when coming to a parish council decision/recommendation.

If the scheme had progressed the community would have been involved in the design of the units of accommodation. This would have included other issues such as street lighting, security issues, ecological impact and issues, provision of green/amenity space, car parking, (about which some points had already been raised).

Whilst a considerable amount of time was spent talking to and listening to the local community, some members of the community did feel that there was never enough time at parish council meetings to express their views adequately on this particular topic.

The process gone through underpins the need for better communications all round, and if any similar initiative or other initiative of a substantial nature arises in the parish, good planning and sound communication without crossed wires would be paramount. An ad hoc survey was undertaken by the community, and whilst the views obtained in response had some validity, it would have helped if there had been a joint effort between the Compton Village community and the parish council.

The community was concerned about settlement gaps. Policy CP18 of the Winchester District Plan states (Chapter 9) that the gaps between Otterborne and Southdown and Winchester, and Compton Street, are

to be maintained, and for these areas only development that does not physically or visually diminish the gap will be allowed.

Whilst much information is provided on the parish council website, notice boards the parish magazine etc. it should be noted that the CVA also had an important role in disseminating and coordinating information and the response to the initiative.

4. Sites

A long list of sites was identified. These have been described at length in previous reports to the parish council. A short list of sites related to:-

- HCC Land to the north east of Attwoods Drove
- HCC Land to the north of Marin's Field
- HCC Land, Stoney Drove Farm, Place Lane
- Place Lane (Site B)
- Place Lane (Site C)

Other sites were ruled out:- land to the north side of Compton Street, opposite the Church; land to the east of Carmen's Lane; land to the west of Carmen's Lane; Martin's Field Garages; Godwins Field Garages; land at Coxcroft Farm; land at Church Farm, Lane at Stoney Drove Farm Buildings.

From February 2013 onwards a number of other sites were looked at or discussed, none of which were either available or suitable. These were:- Compton House; land to the East of Manor House (near the motorway), land to the south of Warner's Farm cottage; a Southdown site, protected by the gap definition between Southdown and Otterborne; another Southdown site, (opposite motorway bridge in Otterborne Road); land to the south of Beckett's Nursery, Otterborne Road, and a site in Shawford near Pearson's Lane. In all about 19 sites were identified, discussed and considered.

The sites at Attwoods Drove and Martins Field were both identified by Hyde and WCC, involving highways advice as having significant potential.

The detail of most of these sites is given in earlier reports to the council and available on the parish website.

5. Conclusion

Due to the strength of feeling against the initiative, particularly by the residents of Compton Village, the parish council agreed at its meeting in September 2013 not to proceed at the present time.

It is important to note, to keep matters in perspective, that the community of this parish has many things to be proud of when working together and this no doubt will continue and grow.

Cllr Angela Jeffrey,
Planning Convenor, revised 2nd January 2014

Extract from email to Una Stevens dated 2nd December 2013, from Debbie Rhodes, WCC

“HARAH has just undertaken a review of the Compton affordable housing project to consider lessons learned which can help us with future projects.

I have set out below the broad lessons learned from the review.

Communication between HARAH and the Parish Council/local community

- Identify at the start of the project who will be the points of contact between HARAH and the Parish Council and how information will be circulated to the rest of the Parish Council*
- Agree how HARAH will consult the Parish Council about any reports, events, information etc*
- Agree how HARAH and the Parish Council will communicate with the local community throughout the project, including communication with any resident associations*

Mandate for progressing affordable housing in the Parish

- Ensure the project has broad community support at the start of the project*
- Support may be expressed through various ways such as a parish plan, housing needs survey, public meetings*
- If the project is delayed for a significant period of time, re-assess community support for it*

Site searches and selection of site

- Agree with the Parish Council whether a call for sites is required. This can be undertaken as a question in the housing needs survey or as a local advert by the Rural Housing Enabler*
- Aim to consider all potential sites in a single appraisal to ensure effective use of time when assessment of sites is undertaken by planners and others consulted about the sites*
- Aim to shortlist the top few available sites to narrow the selection of the sites before presenting the sites to the local community*

There are two issues raised in your letter of 2 October 2013 which we are not able to address, as follows:

- 1. Winchester City Council cannot provide details of applicants on the housing register, with a local connection to the Parish to third parties, including Parish Councillors.*
- 2. HARAH is unable to provide detailed proposals of the affordable housing until a site is chosen. The cost of undertaking such work on a number of sites makes this financially unviable for a Housing Association.*

We found the review extremely helpful for HARAH. We will be considering how to include the learning points into our good practice guides.

Many thanks again for your input to this review. Of course like you, we remain disappointed that we were unable to progress a project in Compton at this time, but at least we are able to learn from the project.”

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(It should be noted that the Planning Convenor had no input into the comments made above).