

Neighbourhood Plan

Notes of Third Housing Topic Group

Morpeth Town Hall, 15th January 2013

1. Present:

Cllr. David Parker (MTC and Chair), Ian Campbell (Consultant to MTC), Simon Cox, Hugh Edmundson, Jo Gooding, Anna Jones, Martin Laidler, Cllr. Alan Sambrook (Pegswood Parish Council), Peter Scott, Joan Tebbutt, Colin Thompson, Henry Warne (GMDT), Kath Watkins and Tom Johnston (Speaker from Glendale Community Development Trust).

2. Apologies for Absence

David Holden, Alan Jones, Chris Offord and Leslie Starkie.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 11th December 2012

The minutes were accepted as a true record except that Simon Cox and Henry Warne were present.

4. Matters Arising

JT asked if anyone remembered how many acres Tim Nichol had said were available at KEVI for development. Nobody remembered and she was asked to contact him by e-mail for the details.

5. Public Record

DP advised that, since we are involved in a public process that is subject to legal requirements, names are required where specific statements are made so we have a clear audit trail to demonstrate to the public. Also, decisions made by the group must be minuted carefully. JT said she would check for exact wording with the group at that stage and DP will check the draft minutes. The website has already had a great number of hits.

6. Query re status of Pegswood

Cllr Sambrook indicated that Pegswood Parish Council had no objection to housing development as long it is mixed provision. However he felt that Pegswood's status as a Tier 2 settlement should be changed to Tier 1 so that further traders could be attracted to the town. It was understood that no new trader could open with premises larger than those of the Co-op, which therefore has a monopoly. IC did not think that Pegswood would be disadvantaged in this way by Tier 2 status, as strengthening the retail offer was considered satisfactory. He agreed to look into this and report back to Pegswood

Parish Council. In addition he advised that representations could be made to the Core Strategy. The Preferred Options (Stage 2) of the process) is due next month.

7. Presentation by Tom Johnston of Glendale Community Development Trust.

TJ spoke about the Trust's approach to housing provision. The work is being undertaken in Wooler, which is a small community. There was a massive problem in the town centre, where premises owned by absent landlords were left derelict in the hope that their value would increase over time. A Market Town Health Check showed that affordable housing was needed; that the population was aging; and there was a need to keep young people in the town. They looked to Holy Island, which 10 to 20 years ago had no new development and a Community Development Trust there built 6 houses. The local school was re-opened due to more children living there, while the rental income accrued to the Trust. Wooler sought to replicate this by re-opening the derelict shops and managing flats above them for young people.

As they were not a Registered Social Landlord, they could not attract funding directed at that purpose, but they got an interest free loan and sold land behind the premises. With support from NCC and Rural and Development Trust organisations they opened the flats. They are able to set their own allocations policy and have been managing the flats for some years now. They believe there is a real place for community organisations in this field. They also worked with NCC to transfer the local library into their own resource centre and obtained funding to create a further 2 housing units in the library building. This was enabled due to the new concept of Community Land Trusts, which was a shift that brought the HCA round to offering funding. The refurbished shops have brought in new businesses and there will be 8 housing units altogether by the end of February.

A number of small local organisations are now doing this nationally. Examples include a village in Oxfordshire and the Lakeland Housing Trust in Grasmere (see the Charities Commission website). At Grasmere land was purchased at below market value and some has even been bequeathed to the Trust, so they now have 37 properties and lettings are biased towards young people. The Trust is now a registered housing provider.

Some Housing Associations nationally are getting too big and losing their sense of community. Some of these have come into existence as a result of large scale housing transfers from local housing authorities such as happened in Castle Morpeth. JG pointed out that there are a lot of organisations varying from very small, and some have hundreds or even thousands of properties. KW asked about restrictions on letting in Wooler. TJ said they have a simple points system favouring young people who live or

work in the parish. The properties are all rented. They did look at shared ownership but have done nothing with that as yet. The rents are 80% of a market rent and they have not yet been faced with a request for a tenant to buy. They have no policy as yet but would prefer to keep the properties unless the capital receipt from a sale would enable them to buy another property. There is scope for further development. For example there are three empty pubs and they are looking into the possibilities there.

In order to engage the community in driving this forward, they have set up a specialist housing interest sub group with an open membership. They work with the Parish Council. There is also a Community Plan so people became involved and identified the housing need.

JG advised that the Trust should always retain a share of the equity in order to prevent loss of the asset. Localism should be a big opportunity to make approaches for such development.

IC said that NCC are drilling down to specific areas to identify need. Wooler was used as a template for the rest of the work being done on housing need. Some drilling down into Morpeth will be done, but the survey has been delayed by a couple of weeks.

8. Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)

ML summarised his Guide to the SHMA. The SHMA is a companion document to the SHLAA and provides information about the market and needs now and in the future. It is NOT a Housing Needs Survey (HNS), which is done using a representative number of surveys across the county. The ultimate figures in a SHMA may differ from those in a HNS because no surveys are undertaken, but it is done according to government guidance. It uses the 2001 census so the information is out of date. Also, it uses a lot of information from the huge area covered by the former Castle Morpeth Borough Council, covering an area from Lynmouth to Matfen. Averages are not therefore appropriate as they hide the real differences in property values.

What is the housing market? It is the geographical area defined by travel to work etc. The conclusion is that Northumberland has two housing market areas:

- North Northumberland i.e. the areas covered by the former Alnwick and Berwick Borough Councils; and
- South Northumberland, which is split in two:
 - a. The Northumberland City Region Commuter area – the area covered by the former Castle Morpeth and Tynedale councils; and
 - b. Urban Northumberland, covering the former Blyth and Wansbeck councils.

The SHMA then looks at population and housing stock. In the Castle Morpeth area there is a population of 50,000 and 22,000 properties. 76% of these are owner occupied, 14% council/housing association owned and 10% privately rented. The vast majority of the properties are houses at 93% while only 7% are flats. The population of the county and Castle Morpeth are aging, with young people leaving.

Re Owner Occupied homes. Housing conditions are measured using the Decent Homes Standard. In 2009 41% of owner occupied homes in the county and 37% in Castle Morpeth were NON decent – contrary to popular belief.

As regards incomes and affordability, one measure is the lower quartile, which is the number that divides the lower half of the data. A ratio of 3 -3.5 cost to income is considered reasonable, but in 2008 the ratio for Castle Morpeth was 7%. So, the majority of housing in Castle Morpeth is out of reach for many. If the ratio were 3 - 3.5 then average income would have to be £35,000. JG commented at this point that the rollback of housing process in Morpeth is marginal.

There is information in the SHMA re house prices, but we need information specific to Morpeth, not Castle Morpeth, as Ponteland and Darras Hall skew the ratio.

Re Privately Rented Accommodation. This comprises 10% of the market, but has increased recently and there are affordability concerns there too. 86% are houses and bungalows with 14% flats and maisonettes. Information on rent levels is also in the SHMA.

Re Housing Association housing. In Castle Morpeth the council's properties were transferred to what is now ISOS on 2007. There are also some other housing associations. In 2008 there were 2745 social rented properties. The affordable rent concept was brought in a couple of years ago at 80% of market rent, which is higher than what was termed a social rent.

Information is in the SHMA re vacant properties. Under 10% become vacant in an average year and there is currently a waiting list of 1136. Looking at current and future housing need, deduct an estimate of the number of people who can afford to buy or rent privately to reach a figure for net housing need. This figure is 194 in Castle Morpeth and Tynedale. If 53 new affordable properties are created in an average year, this means 141 is the figure for unmet need over a five year housing period. As regards tenure, 92% of that 141 would be for social rent with 8% being for intermediate, so it is clear that social rents are the main need.

We also need to consider the needs of special groups e.g. sheltered housing, extra care housing and “telecare” (where there is technology in the home for monitoring), disabled adaptations and supported accommodation. If we can demonstrate a specific need we can use that when planning applications come in to press for a different category of premises to be delivered.

One way to identify need is to look at the waiting list, but many people do not register as they know nothing will happen. That is why surveys produce more accurate results.

CT thought that surveys were wrong because they did not approach people who want to move into the area. IC responded that developers say surveys actually exaggerate need.

There are a lot of factors involved and statistics are always debateable. Our task is difficult because of the needs of such a variety of people. Surveys can help our understanding of what might be an ideal mix to meet the town’s needs. AS commented that we need shops and other facilities to be spread out to keep cohesion.

9. The Lock Report

JT gave a quick summary of the report prepared by David Lock Associates for NCC and the HCA. It is not a policy document but was written specifically for the purpose of providing evidence to be used by NCC in its bid for funding of the Strategic Link Road. A total of £32million was obtained from Government and NCC together to fund this. The report selected five options, basing their choice on a list of specific objectives such as sustainable in environmental, economic and social terms and meet local needs for jobs and homes. This list may be useful for us to bear in mind. The five options were:

- Option A. St George’s Wider Site and Fairmoor Allocation
- Option B. Northgate, Fairmoor and St George’s Allocation
- Option C. North Lancaster Park, Fairmoor and St George’s
- Option D. A192 Corridor and St George’s
- Option E. South Morpeth, Fairmoor and St George’s.

Assessment of each option included aspects such as visibility, ease of access, closeness to jobs and other facilities, critical mass needed to attract businesses and fund infrastructure etc. The number of homes likely to be built was calculated along with the number of jobs created and the number of additional school places development of each option may engender. The report made no recommendations as to what option should be pursued as decisions must be reached by NCC. However, the report would help NCC reach informed decisions re growth in Morpeth until 2031.

JT reminded the group that she is a member of the South Morpeth Coalition, and explained that, in her view, the Lock report's findings that Option E could add significantly to traffic crossing the Telford Bridge and make it more difficult to fund infrastructure needs were significant.

The report recommended that all options be assessed holistically, with a list of key issues being provided. These included issues already referred to within this group, such as delivery of the SLR; flood risk and the need to reduce adverse impacts for existing and new residents; impact of proposed development on the existing road network; pressure on schools and the possible need to identify new sites; impact on services and infrastructure such as drainage, transport, doctors, nurseries etc. By choosing a preferred option for growth the Council can direct growth to appropriate locations and plan for provision of infrastructure and services.

It was agreed that the assessment of sustainable growth scenarios in Morpeth is still relevant and gives us a good starting point, although it does not look into brownfield sites other than St George's. This is something the group needs to do.

JG felt that the Lock Report looks at strategic considerations, not community considerations e.g. the St George's site would be a huge development in one area yet water from the site runs off into the river. DP replied that Morpeth is a Tier 1 settlement; St George's is a large brownfield site and it is difficult to see any development of the town that did not include the site.

10. Next steps

The general view was that we need the Housing Needs Survey quickly. SC reminded us that we had agreed to look at needs before engaging with developers via a questionnaire as we do not want to be led by them.

DP said that a group of university students have done a study of infrastructure including difficulties and opportunities. We should be given some information about that.

It was agreed that we need to determine some principles to apply. IC said the group would need to do some more technical work round the SHLAA and Needs Survey and more re brownfield options. He felt that HE and ML were best placed to do this and perhaps should meet with NCC along with the Economy Topic Group. Colin Haylock is going to do some workshops about our vision, broad locations for development, what sort of quality of development we want and transport considerations. We need to produce a holistic view.

SC said we have listened a great deal and will have to listen again when the Needs Survey is available, but we now need some discussion to start developing ideas re what we see. AJ said we need a methodology, a route map. IC said there is no standard methodology as settlements vary. He agreed to try to get Colin Haylock to do the workshop as our next meeting, and members said they would be happy to attend for a longer session for that purpose.

DP said that the Topic group Chairs meet next week and after that he will e-mail members of the group re a programme.

11. Date of next Meeting

The next meeting will be held in Morpeth Town Hall on 12th February 2013.