

Scoping Report for Longhope, Gloucestershire (Forest of Dean DC area - FoDDC)

Provided by Ian Crawley from the visit on Thursday 20th September 2018, following approval to a Stage 1 Start Up grant from the National CLT Network. IC met the Parish Clerk and four residents, including a parish councillor, who comprise with the District Cllr and others the informal CLT Steering group. The visit involved a tour of 13 prospective development sites, an informal lunch and a meeting in the Latchen Room.

Summary

With Parish Council support, a made Neighbourhood Development Plan, clear need for affordable rented homes set out in the 2015 Housing Needs Survey Report and a site owned by the Parish Council with potential for up to 8 homes, there is the genuine prospect of a successful CLT development to meet local housing need. The Group should therefore be supported.

1. Background and Context.

1.1. Longhope is a small civil parish of approx. 1200 population in 600 households, largely located in the settlement of Longhope, the core of which is a Conservation Area. There is a consistent demand for freehold detached homes due to its attractive location within the Forest of Dean and in easy commuting distance of Gloucester and Cheltenham. The village has a range of industrial and commercial businesses, two churches, modern primary school, cafe/bakery, a shop and three pubs, one of which has been closed for some time.

1.2. The Parish Council has all eight places filled, with recent contested elections. There is a quarterly parish newsletter, the Leafletter and a five churches monthly newsletter, The Edge. Both are circulated to all homes. The precept is £18,900. The Latchen Room built in 1906, and the recreation ground with a modern pavilion and tennis courts, are both owned by the LPC and run by separate charities.

1.3. The Forest of Dean Local Plan Core Strategy was approved in 2012. it designates Longhope as a 'service village' and states that new housing and employment development opportunities in service villages will tend to be 'small in scale (e.g. single plots, or pairs, small workshops or changes of use of existing buildings plus reuse of agricultural buildings)'. Longhope is, therefore, a suitable location for some small-scale growth to sustain its vitality, but major developments would not be appropriate. This is due in part to limited infrastructure (no medical centre and only one shop/post office), the local topography (steep-sided valleys) and the rural setting.

1.4. Only 3% of the housing stock is social housing, as compared to the England average of 18%. Those over 65 years of age comprise 25.9% of the population, as compared to a England average of 16.3%. A Housing Needs Survey was published in March/April 2015. Longhope Parish currently has 18 affordable dwellings, owned

and managed by Two Rivers HA. The HNS identified 20 eligible households with a local connection to the parish who would benefit from affordable housing. However, of these 20 households, only three were looking to move from their current accommodation within the next two years. Eleven households were looking to move within the next two to five years, while five households indicated a potential need to move at some point over five years hence. The remaining household did not specify a time frame.

1.5. In the 2015 Planning Officers Report on the proposed development of 16 affordable homes at The Wend, taking account of the Gloucestershire Homeseekers numbers and experience with under-reporting of need elsewhere, the report noted up to 40 households requiring affordable housing in Longhope. There are no extant planning permissions or schemes in the pipeline that would provide for some or all of this need.

1.6. The FoDDC Allocations Plan 2015 identifies two sites for housing development. About 1.34ha of land off Church Road, owned by the Diocese of Gloucester, is allocated for 28 dwellings. The Longhope Industrial Estate, in the centre of the village could through redevelopment for a mix of uses including employment, have no more than 30% of the 0.8ha site occupied by housing and concentrated in the northern part, i.e. fronting an existing residential road.

1.7. The made Longhope NDP 2016 to 2026 (Our Village, Our Vision) was approved at a referendum in February 2018. There was a 27% turnout with 333 in favour and 33 against. One aspect of the NDPs approach to sustainable development is, 'to ensure that new homes are appropriate for the needs of local people (especially younger families and elderly downsizers)'. One of the main issues identified in the survey was, 'the provision of affordable housing for elderly and younger households'. One of the objectives in the NDP is, 'to provide a limited amount of new housing to meet local needs (including open market and appropriate affordable or low-cost housing)'. There is no mention of setting up a CLT or of community led housing being a mechanism for delivering any of the affordable homes required.

1.8. LPC agreed on 15th January 2018 to provide £500 towards the setting up of a CLT. The inaugural meeting of the informal Longhope CLT SG was held on 1st May 2018 with eight residents present, agreed a pathway to setting up the Trust and delivering a scheme; agreed the principles to guide the SG; and identified 11 sites to be explored. On 18th June 2018, the LPC approved the draft terms of reference for the CLT Steering Group.

2. Specific Issues and Considerations: SWOT Analysis.

Strengths

- A made Neighbourhood Development Plan.
- Housing Needs Survey undertaken in 2015

- Two sites in the FoDDC Allocations Plan of 2015.
- Parish Council providing £500 and committed to a CLT.
- Informal Steering group in place.

Weaknesses

- Preferred site requires infrastructure works.
- Steering Group would benefit from a wider range of skills.
- Steering Group would benefit from representation of a wider range of local interests.
- Steering Group would benefit from wider diversity of membership

Opportunities

- Preferred site in Parish Council ownership.
- Potential to meet the wider needs of the community. i.e. bungalows to enable older residents to vacate larger homes.
- Appointing a Housing Association as a development partner, to fund achieving planning consent at their own risk, fund the development and manage and maintain the completed scheme on the CLT's behalf. This would be through a long lease to the HA, with a break clause only in the CLT's favour.
- Start up and professional assistance grants, Homes England (Community Housing Fund) grants and various loans available.

Threats

- That there are insufficient CLT Members to give the CLT credibility with the local authority and the community at large.
- FoDDC not agreeing the Local Allocations/Connections Policy the community wants, to guide the allocation of tenancies.
- No Housing Association willing to partner the CLT.

3. Next Steps

3.1. The Parish Council formally joining the National CLT Network, thereby enabling access to Stage 2 CLT Start Up Grant for continuing advice and support on setting up the CLT and to meet start up costs, including registering as a social enterprise.

3.2. The Longhope CLT should be launched with membership for say £1 to all those over 18 years of age living and/or working in the civil parish, from amongst whom volunteers should be sought to serve on a Steering Group alongside the with invited Parish Council and FoDDC councillors. This should involve a leaflet and application form to every household with a public meeting and/or weekend drop-in session to launch the prospective CLT. The SG would then become a formal SG under the auspices of the Parish Council, until it became a registered independent social

enterprise. Establishing the Local Planning Authority view on the rear-of Latchen Room site as early as possible would be sensible.

3.3 The first formal Steering Group meeting should elect/agree chair, secretary, treasurer, communications/website positions and confirm their approach to confidentiality, registering individual interests, ways of working and community relations.

3.4. Representatives of the Steering Group would then need to meet FoDDC Council officers to explore:

* for planning, their advice on the site at the rear off the Latchen Room, particularly, the number of homes they would accept; the principle and practice of shared access with the LR car park; the principle of cross-subsidy homes; and their support in continuing pre-application advice as it will be a community-led scheme.

* for strategic housing, their approach to the development of this site, particularly their willingness to apply to Homes England for an infrastructure grant; types and mix of affordable homes and freeholds for cross-subsidy, if the latter were required for cross-subsidy and/or to provided covenanted freeholds for elderly downsizers; potential HA partners, from their Preferred Partner list; and having a Local Connections Policy.

3.5. Meet representatives of the HAs operating in the parish, to introduce yourselves and explore their willingness to work with you, particularly exploring with Two Rivers HA, the potential for using their work on The Wend proposal to explore taking forward a smaller development as a CLT project.

3.6. Obtain Homes England grant (see CHF application form) to meet the costs of the feasibility studies and making the planning application. NB: any capital grant to subsidize the development itself will only be available to a Registered Provider, hence the value of partnering with a HA.

3.7. Secure a HA partner, then with and through them appoint feasibility architects.

4. Recommendation. With the progress already made and the genuine prospect of a successful affordable scheme on land already in community ownership, subject to the initial local planning authority response, the community should be supported with Stage 2 funding.

Ian Crawley/National CLT Technical Advisor /23rd September 2018