

CRANBROOK & SISSINGHURST PARISH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE PLANNING & PRESERVATION COMMITTEE
HELD ON 4TH FEBRUARY 2020

Declaration of Interests, Dispensations, Predetermination or Lobbying:

Members are required to declare any interests, dispensations, predetermination or lobbying on items on this agenda. Members are reminded that changes to the Register of Interests should be notified to the Clerk.

Present: Cllr. Bunyan (in the Chair), Cllr. Smith, Fermor, Gilbert, Hatcher, Kings and Pethurst

PLANNING APPLICATIONS:

19/03592/FULL

Toffees Barn, The Common, Sissinghurst, Cranbrook, Kent. TN17 2AD
Open structure canopy to south elevation (retrospective)

The Parish Council recommended APPROVAL.

Proposed by Cllr. Smith, seconded by Cllr. Hatcher and agreed.

20/00159/FULL

Toffees Barn, The Common, Sissinghurst, Cranbrook, Kent. TN17 2AD
Erection of single storey 'granny' bed/sitting room, with glazed link to main house.

The Parish Council recommended APPROVAL.

Proposed by Cllr. Smith, seconded by Cllr. Fermor and agreed.

20/00064/FULL

9 Oatfield Close, Cranbrook, Kent TN17 3NH
Demolition of detached garage and single storey rear extension and erection of two storey side and rear extension and single storey rear extension.

The Parish Council recommended APPROVAL.

Proposed by Cllr. Bunyan, seconded by Cllr. Gilbert and agreed.

20/00082/FULL

Land to The Rear of Breremede, Angley Road, Cranbrook, Kent TN172PL.
Variation of Conditions 2 (Approved Plans) and 3 (External Materials) of Planning Permission 18/02622/FULL (Construction of two 3 bedroom semidetached dwellings with parking and shared driveway. Stationing of 2 No. caravans for temporary accommodation on site to facilitate works) – Changes to plans incorporating fitting of PV panels to rear roof and installation of air source heat pumps.

The Parish Council recommended APPROVAL.

Proposed by Cllr. Bunyan, seconded by Cllr. Kings and agreed.

APPEAL NOTIFICATION:

19/01732/FULL

Pennyfields, Angley Road, Cranbrook, Kent.

Erection of a first floor extension above and a two storey extension to the rear of annexe including glass canopy; new window to front elevation.

The Parish Council had no objection. They did not feel that the extension would have an adverse effect on the street scene being only marginally higher than the existing extension and the fact that

the front boundary is extremely well screened from Angley Road. Breremede, the neighbouring property, has a new driveway running the full length of the boundary, to two new houses at the rear. It was felt that the distance and the positioning to the new extension would not cause any concern with regard to overlooking of the garden of Breremede.

TREES:

20/00040/TPO

Deacons, High Street, Cranbrook, Kent TN17 3DT

Trees: HAWTHORN X 2, HOLLY X 11 (G1) – South Hedgerow: Reduce to 10 foot in height. Leave all standard trees and plant up gaps; HAWTHORN X 14, FIELD MAPLE X 2 (G2) – West Hedgerow: Coppice & pollard to 4-5 foot where ingrown wire fence makes it unable to lay, hedge lay where possible. Leave all standard trees and plant up gaps.

The Parish Council recommended APPROVAL.

Proposed by Cllr. Fermor, seconded by Cllr. Hatcher and agreed.

CORRESPONDENCE:

Nothing to report.

CONSULTATION:

Cllr. Pethurst attended the meeting and was invited to read the response he had compiled on behalf of the Parish Council to the KCC consultation regarding Affordable Housing. A copy of the Parish Council response is attached to the minutes.

It was proposed by Cllr. Bunyan, seconded by Cllr. Gilbert and agreed that the response as presented be submitted to the KCC Select Committee.

DECISIONS:

The decisions notices were deferred until the next meeting.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION:

None raised.

Affordable Housing – A response from Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish Council

Introduction

It is often repeated, but nonetheless true, that the country is in the midst of a housing crisis. We are concerned that there are not enough 'affordable' houses. We are obsessed with affordability, when the truth is that all houses must be affordable. There is no benefit to society in expecting anybody to take on a property which they are unable to afford, but affordability means different things to different people, in different parts of the country.

Since about 2014, the most commonly used definition for affordable housing is that preferred by the Government as set out in Annex 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (latest edition February 2019). In essence, this identifies property as being affordable if it is at least 20% below the average local market value, and applies to properties, which are available either to rent, or for purchase. This is the definition used by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council in their recently published Draft Local Plan (DLP).

In reality, it seems that the discount is no more than 20%, which has had a particularly dramatic effect on new tenants in the social rent sector, where rents would have been set at about 50% of the local market value. The Peabody Trust has identified that longer term tenants, who are on pre-existing tenancy agreements and who are likely to have progressed further in their careers, with a greater disposable income, could be as much as £80 per week better off than new tenants in a similar property. To counter this, it announced in May 2018 that it was going to adopt the lower London Affordable Rent¹. This suggests that we can adopt a local definition of affordable housing.

An alternative view of affordability could be based on percentage of disposable income spent on housing costs. For example, the amount of rent paid in the South-East as a proportion of net salary has risen from 31.2% in 2000 to 49.8% in 2020²; we should be seeking to reverse this trend. Of course, this may be considered a reasonable proportion of salary to pay as long as other costs, such as travel, or heating, are kept in check, in which case maybe affordable housing could be re-defined based on the total cost of ownership over a property's lifetime. Using the best of building practices (i.e. at, or near Passivhaus standards) should mean that the true cost of living in a property will be kept low, ensuring it is truly affordable.

There are schemes, such as Community Land Trusts (CLT), which should be more widely supported to ensure that properties are made available to local residents at a substantial discount, which is protected when the property is sold on. One of the major drawbacks of a CLT is its ability to raise funds for the purchase of land to develop, particularly in the South-East, in competition with the seemingly bottomless pockets of the major housing developers. This may be the nearest thing we currently have to social housing, therefore land put forward for development by landowners should be offered to the local CLT, or equivalent, first.

The current definition of affordable housing is not fit for purpose, particularly in London and the South-East, as it favours larger developers, who can manipulate local market values on which the discount is calculated. The developers often appear to do this by only building larger, more expensive properties, or by

¹ www.insidehousing.co.uk 2nd May 2018

² <https://www.propertyreporter.co.uk/landlords/proportion-of-income-to-rent-hits-75-in-parts-of-england.html> 16th January 2020

limiting the supply, keeping prices high. Furthermore, it must be remembered that, should the property not sell at the affordable price, developers can put it back into their normal housing stock.

The true cost of affordable renting also needs to be considered, since many individuals are reliant on Housing Benefit in order to be able to afford the higher rents now being charged. This puts an extra burden and stress on those individuals, and the civil servants responsible for administering the benefits system. The logic is to reduce rents to a level where Housing Benefit does not need to be claimed. This may not be enforceable in the private sector, but should be in the public sector, which must also be looked upon to increase the supply of properties available for rent. We must enable more local authorities to build housing for local people.

Much useful information can be obtained from the House of Commons Briefing Paper 07747, 'What is affordable housing?' published 23rd December 2019.

Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish – a local view

Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish Council is in the process of producing its Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP), which will attempt to tackle the issue of locally affordable housing.

At the last census (2011) the parish had a population of 6,717. Every two years the Office for National Statistics publishes its estimates for population growth over the next 25 years, the latest being 2018. There are slight variations in these estimates, but using the average over the years 2012 to 2018, it is reasonable to assume a growth of 2% per annum. Using this projection, the population of the parish is estimated to be 8,000 by 2020 rising to 11,000 by 2036, the end of the current Local Plan period.

In 2011 there were 2,740 households in the parish, a density of only 2.5 people per household. Of these households 65% were owner occupied, 20% were social rented and 11% private rented. The average cost³ of a detached house is £755,000, semi-detached, £397,000 and terraced, £282,000. The average house price is £506,000. Identifying average earnings is problematic as the only data published covers the local authority (TWBC) or the local constituency (Maidstone and the Weald). However, the parish is one of 6 areas identified in the DLP as being areas of income deprivation and research carried out in 2017 suggested the average earnings for workers in the parish was £28.2k per annum. Assuming this figure has increased in line with inflation, this will now be approximately £30k, and would mean that the average house would be 16 times the average salary, compared to the national figure of 7.8 times⁴, and 12.8 times for the Tunbridge Wells borough. This makes the parish one of the most unaffordable areas in the country for local people, or those with strong local connections.

The parish is attempting to go down the CLT route and the Crane Valley Land Trust⁵ has been set up by concerned individuals in recognition of the lack of truly affordable housing available locally, and in response to an employment survey carried out, on behalf of the NDP, which identified 300 local workers who couldn't afford to live in the parish (including key workers such as teachers and nurses). This is a number that can only increase as the population increases.

³ Source: Right Move, January 2020

⁴ Office for National Statistics: Housing Affordability in England and Wales 2018

⁵ <http://cvlt.org.uk/>

Conclusions

- **Affordability covers many aspects, including:**
 - **Cost to buy / rent / light and heat;**
 - **Travel costs (sustainability);**
 - **Overall cost to the environment;**
 - **“Whole life” costs, including maintenance.**
- **The Mayor of London has clearly recognised that it is possible to identify a local affordable rate; this should be applied across the board at a Parish, Local Authority, and County level.**
- **The NPPF definition of affordability must be the minimum adopted.**
- **The Community Land Trust should be the model for all future developments, to ensure truly locally affordable properties, which can be retained under local ownership. This must be positively supported at all levels. Any land put forward for development must be offered to the local CLT, if one exists, first. A knock-on effect of adopting this policy could be a reduction in putting land forward speculatively.**
- **Artificially high local housing costs may add to the burden on the benefits system.**

Definition of Affordable Housing from Annex 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework:

Affordable housing: housing for sale or rent, for those whose needs are not met by the market (including housing that provides a subsidised route to home ownership and/or is for essential local workers); and which complies with one or more of the following definitions:

a) **Affordable housing for rent:** meets all of the following conditions: (a) the rent is set in accordance with the Government's rent policy for Social Rent or Affordable Rent, or is at least 20% below local market rents (including service charges where applicable); (b) the landlord is a registered provider, except where it is included as part of a Build to Rent scheme (in which case the landlord need not be a registered provider); and (c) it includes provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision. For Build to Rent schemes affordable housing for rent is expected to be the normal form of affordable housing provision (and, in this context, is known as Affordable Private Rent).

b) **Starter homes:** is as specified in Sections 2 and 3 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 and any secondary legislation made under these sections. The definition of a starter home should reflect the meaning set out in statute and any such secondary legislation at the time of plan-preparation or decision-making. Where secondary legislation has the effect of limiting a household's eligibility to purchase a starter home to those with a particular maximum level of household income, those restrictions should be used.

c) **Discounted market sales housing:** is that sold at a discount of at least 20% below local market value. Eligibility is determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices. Provisions should be in place to ensure housing remains at a discount for future eligible households.

d) **Other affordable routes to home ownership:** is housing provided for sale that provides a route to ownership for those who could not achieve home ownership through the market. It includes shared ownership, relevant equity loans, other low cost homes for sale (at a price equivalent to at least 20% below local market value) and rent to buy (which includes a period of intermediate rent). Where public grant funding is provided, there should be provisions for the homes to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for any receipts to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision, or refunded to Government or the relevant authority specified in the funding agreement.