



Notes from the HNCLT Allocations Information Evening

Held at Hook Norton Memorial Hall
at 7pm on 13/09/2023

Fiona Brown (HNCLT Vice-Chair) welcomed all 25 present and explained what would be covered during the evening. She invited everyone to introduce themselves and give a brief reason for coming.

Cathy Ryan (HNCLT Chair) then gave an overview of the project with the following points noted :

- In 2012 the Parish Council carried out a Housing Needs Survey that identified a need for Affordable Housing in Hook Norton.
- In 2016 at the HNLC AGM, the members confirmed that they would be in support of a Community Housing project.
- In 2017 HNLC received a grant to spend on the Community Housing Project – beginning with feasibility studies.
- In 2018 HNLC ran several Community Consultation events to find out what members of the Community wanted from the project – starting from the bottom up, rather than having big developers dictating what would be provided. Local people were recorded on film giving their views, and responses to key questions. The video is available to view [here](#).
- In 2019 HNCLT was formed to take the project forward.
- The aim of the Trust is to provide comfortable, environmentally sound, affordable homes for people with a connection to Hook Norton, in the hope that they can afford to live in well insulated homes that will have low running costs. This is particularly relevant during the current Energy, Housing, and Cost of Living crises.
- Charlie Luxton Design were selected as the architectural / design partners. They listened to, and worked with the information provided at the seven community consultations, to come up with the current layout of the site.
- The idea of 'spare rooms' being available for friends/family to rent was popular.
- The idea of a communal building was popular, with a recent suggestion that remedial therapists could offer treatments in one of the rooms, as well as income being generated by the larger communal area.
- The homes are split into 2 terraces, referred to as the North terrace (4 x 2 bed flats for rent and 4x 2 bed flats for sale) and the South terrace (2 x 3 bed rental homes and 2 x 1 bed rental homes).
- An area of communal landscaping is in the centre of the site, with a car parking area to the edge, which will also be used by the Car Club for charging 5 of their vehicles.
- The site will benefit from a microgrid – using a smart system to control the generation and distribution of clean energy from Solar PV on the roofs of the homes and the Sports and Social Club. Residents will benefit from reduced electricity bills, with rates at 10% less than the energy price cap.
- The estimated cost of the project is in the region of £3.7 million, and has only been possible due to the affordable price of the land, which was bought from Cherwell District Council (CDC).
- The homes are being built by Greencore Homes, who are an Oxfordshire based multi award winning company.
- HNCLT has secured grants and loans in order to get the project to this stage, and once built, the leasehold sale of the 8 rental homes to Soha and the 4 homes to local people will generate the funds to pay back the loans. We will be shortly be undertaking a community share raise for the remaining costs.
- HNCLT will retain the freehold of the properties so that they are available to local people in perpetuity.
- The affordable rental properties will be allocated through the CDC [Housing Register](#), and residents will take out a rental agreement with [Soha Housing](#).

- This is an exciting part of the whole project, now that we can see the homes being constructed, and we look forward to seeing the first residents move in. Completion is expected to be Spring 2024

Paul France (Strategic Housing Team Lead) from CDC explained the nominations process, and how social housing is allocated, with the following points noted :

- CDC have agreements with all registered social landlords who have properties available in the Cherwell region.
- They **advertise** their available properties on the [Cherwell Homechoice website](#) , with a short description of each one.
- There is a **weekly lettings cycle**, and those on the Housing Register can show interest in a property by 'placing a bid'.
- Information about the Housing Register can be found [here](#), but registration is submitted on an online form found [here](#).
- There are around 2000 households on the Housing Register at the moment, looking for 1, 2, 3 and 4 bed homes.
- Up to **3 bids** can be placed each week, and there are usually around 10 properties available each week.
- The system generates a **short list** of applicants (in order of priority) at the end of each week.
- There are **4 priority bands** – 1 being the highest priority, which is generally cleared quite quickly. Bands 2, 3 and 4 are bigger groups, some of whom have been on the Housing Register for many years.
- Each band is ordered by '**waiting time**' – the amount of time the applicant has been on the register, and if any amendments or re-submissions are made, the original date of submission is the one that is recorded. The only time the waiting time is re-started is when applicants move to a higher priority band.
- The **process for allocating** people to the different bands is all laid out in the Cherwell Housing Allocations Scheme :
 - Band 1 – Urgent need to move – often offered emergency temporary housing.
 - Band 2 – Significant need to move.
 - Band 3 – Moderate need to move.
 - Band 4 – Low need to move.
- Details of **how the need is assessed** can be found in the [Cherwell Housing Allocations Scheme document](#)
- The **HNCLT homes** have been built specifically for local residents, so priority will be given to people with a local connection to Hook Norton in the allocations process.
- The banding structure will still apply if there are more applications than there are homes, and within each band, priority will be given to those who have been on the register the longest.
- If there aren't enough people with a local connection to Hook Norton, the homes will be offered to people from Sibford, Milcombe and Wiggington, and then the wider Cherwell area.
- It takes around 5 minutes for a single person to register, and around 30 minutes for a more complicated family circumstance. Proof of ID, current address and income is required.
- There are text boxes on the allocation form that can be used to stress interest in the HNCLT homes and local connection. It is recommended that people use these to ensure their local connection is recorded.
- The recorded 'waiting time' starts as soon as the application is submitted – even if CDC have to come back to the applicant to request further information.
- **Applications** are currently taking around 3 weeks to process.
- Applicants wanting one of the HNCLT homes can register at any point and wait until they are completed before submitting any bids. The important thing is to register asap to record your 'waiting time'.
- There is a greater supply of 1 and 2 bedroom properties, so they tend to be available more often than 3 and 4 bedroom homes.

- **The Local Connection criteria** is laid out in the [Lettings Plan](#) and follows the Hook Norton Neighbourhood Plan. To have a Local Connection to the parish of Hook Norton a person will need to be aged 16 years or above and meet 2 or more of the following criteria
 1. The person was born to parents residing in Hook Norton or lived in the Parish as a child up to the age of 16. Parents residing in Hook Norton refers to the parent's address at the time of birth (as detailed on the birth certificate)
 2. The person normally resides in Hook Norton and has done so for a continuous period of at least 3 years. Normally resides means currently residing as the person's main or principal home.
 3. The person has immediate family who are currently resident in Hook Norton and have been so for at least 15 years. Immediate family is defined as per the Allocations Scheme.
 4. Hook Norton is the person's permanent place of work. A place of work is defined as per the Allocations Scheme
 5. People who have an essential need through age or disability to live close to those who have lived in Hook Norton for at least the last three years
People or households who have, for whatever reason, the written support of the Parish Council
- Although Swerford and Whichford are nearby villages, they are not in the Cherwell District area, so are not included in the allocations plan.
- **The size of property** that can be applied for is based on 'bedroom need', and matches the Housing Benefit rules. The Bedroom Standard is outlined in Appendix 3 of the [Cherwell Housing Allocations Scheme document](#).
- **A separate bedroom** is allocated to each :
 - Adult couple
 - Other single adult aged 16 or over
 - Pair of children aged 10 – 15 of the same gender
 - Pair of children under 10 regardless of gender
 - Carer
- Applicants can only bid for properties with bedroom numbers that match their requirements.
- Emergency temporary accommodation with more or less bedrooms than are required might be offered to homeless applicants, but once a more suitable property is available, that is the one that they will be allocated.
- Where couples have joint custody of children, only the primary carer is given the bedroom allocation for the children.

Alex Sheridan (Lettings Officer) from Soha Housing ran through the process from the Landlords position :

- **CDC will pass the nominations list on to Soha** around 6 weeks ahead of completion, and they then do their own checks to confirm identity and affordability.
- Bank statements or/and wage slips are required to ensure that the homes are affordable for the tenants.
- Once the lettings team are happy that all the information is in place, applications are passed on to a manager for approval, which can take a couple of weeks.
- Successful applicants are then offered a viewing of the property ahead of a rental agreement being signed.
- If the HNCLT homes are on target to be available by Spring 2024, bids for them can be made at the beginning of January.
- **The Neighbourhood Team** then looks after tenants once they have moved in, and Annie Jenkins went on to explain that process.
- Tenancy checks are carried out after 6 to 8 months to ensure that Soha records are accurate and up to date – including the number of tenants, the addition of pets, home working etc. Pets are allowed in the homes as long as the home has its own entrance and a garden.
- The team also deals with tenant's concerns, such as antisocial behaviour, parking problems etc

- The Localities team run community events where they will come out and offer drop-in sessions for tenants to discuss any issues or suggestions they might have.
- Several Board members visited a Soha managed property and were impressed by the standard of the homes and the positive comments from the tenants about the care, commitment and friendly personal service they receive. Soha have been keen to be involved with the HNCLT project although most of their properties are in South Oxfordshire.
- The rental rates have not been set yet, but it is hoped that figures will be available by the end of November.
- Social housing rates are set at 80% of market values, and are capped at local housing allowance rates.
- Example tenancy agreements can be provided by contacting Alex at ASheridan@soha.co.uk

The key message is to register on the [CDC HomeChoice site](#)

Homes being offered for leasehold sale at market rates

- No price has been set for the homes yet, but they are expected to be marketed for between £300,000 and £350,000.
- The sale of homes will be prioritised for people with a local connection, with homes being advertised locally.
- When the homes are sold on, there will be a requirement for them to be offered to others with a local connection initially. The details will be laid out in the leasehold agreement, which will be made available once the legal teams have finalised the details.

Next Steps

- **The HNCLT AGM** will be held at the Brewery Malthouse Kitchen at 7.30 on Tuesday 26th September. Everyone is welcome to attend, and more information will be available about the design and structure of the homes, and about community share offers.
- **New Board members** will be needed to take the project through the next stages where people will be living in the properties. The role is less technical now, and a variety of skills are needed. If anyone would like to join the Board, there is an [Online Application Form](#).
- **People who want to live in the homes** would be the idea people to have a say in how the next stages are developed – including the landscaping and communal building.
- **A Management Company** will need to be formed, which residents will be part of, so that they have a say in the management of the open spaces and communal building. Members of HNCLT and Soha will be part of that company.
- **Practitioners interested in renting the therapy rooms** need to be identified and kept informed about progress.
- **Volunteers** need to be identified who might be able to help with final touches such as landscaping.

Fiona thanked Paul, Annie and Alex for coming out and passing on their expert knowledge.

For more information about the project, please visit the website : www.hooknortonclt.org.uk or email hello@hooknortonclt.org.uk