



## Notes from the HNCLT Start on Site Celebration Event

27 people braved the wet and windy weather to attend the Start on Site Celebrations held at The Sports and Social Club at 2pm on 14/07/2023

- At 2pm, Cathy opened the meeting and thanked everyone for turning out in such awful weather. She ran through some housekeeping and introduced Chris Floyd (photographer), giving people the option of not being included in any photos.
- Cathy ran through the purpose of the event, noting that the 1<sup>st</sup> consultation event was on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2018.
- A Community Engagement Survey showed that 75% of respondents were in favour of the project.
- The community worked with HNCLT and CLD to come up with the current layout and design.
- The project is an example of construction of homes that the community wants, rather than what the developer decides to provide. 8 affordable homes for rent, and 4 for sale or rent at market value.
- At a time of multiple crises – environmental, housing, and cost of living, the project is more vital than ever.
- People with a connection to Hook Norton will be able to apply to live in the community that they grew up in.
- The homes are being built to passivhaus standard and will be fully sustainable, using renewable energy.
- These qualities are usually out of reach for affordable homes.
- The project has been through many high peaks and deep dips, and at times those involved thought it would never happen. The building phase has now begun, proving that you should never give up hope.

Cathy introduced **Ewan Stewart** – the Strategic Housing Officer at **Cherwell District Council** (CDC)

- CDC were pleased to be able to transfer the land to HNCLT at an affordable price, enabling this project to become an exemplar for the area.
- Ewan noted the bureaucracy challenges that have sometimes delayed elements, but is delighted that this rare opportunity of truly affordable housing is being offered within a rural community.
- The high price of rural land and shortage of it means there is often very little choice of affordable housing in rural area.
- He is delighted that the project will enable local people to remain or return to their preferred community.
- CDC are pleased to support the project, which he believes is being efficiently led by the community for the community, not only providing homes at an affordable rent, but also with affordable running costs.

Cathy introduced **Marc Gregory**, who was representing **SOHA**, the Housing Association who will purchase the leasehold and manage the rental of the 8 affordable homes.

- SOHA are based in Didcot and are pleased to support the HNCLT project. They would like to see more schemes like HNCLT being set up elsewhere.
- This is the first time that SOHA have been involved with such a community led project that has such a good affordable and sustainable element. He noted that Hook Norton should be very proud of the project.
- Marc noted that the section 106 part of planning applications stipulates that any 'new build' projects must provide a certain percentage of affordable homes.
- SOHA have worked with Greencore previously and are very happy to be doing so again.

Cathy introduced **Ian Pritchett**, a Co-Founder of **Greencore Homes** (a multi award winning company based in Bicester), and the current Growth & Innovation Director.

- Ian opened by noting that the 3<sup>rd</sup> July was the hottest ever average day on the planet. Although that wasn't evident in Hook Norton, this world wide temperature rise will have an effect on all of us.

- Greencore homes are very conscious of the need to tackle the current climate crisis and reduce the carbon elements of building new homes. Their ambition is to deliver over 10,000 climate positive homes by 2035, and this project is an important part of Greencore's journey
- The government has set a carbon budget of 26.3 million tonnes between now and the end of the century – for all areas, including homes and transport. The current rate and style of housing construction will burn through that budget in the next 10 years.
- Ian noted that Hook Norton is a very special community, with 2 organisations (Hook Norton Low Carbon and Hook Norton Community Land Trust) tackling the climate crisis head on, with the provision of an existing car club, large scale PV arrays and now a sustainable housing project.
- Although the project has been going for 5 year, 3 of those were Covid years, bring their own challenges.
- This project will create ripples that will be felt both locally and nationwide.
- The 12 homes will be built from natural materials, with both the sub and super structures locking in more carbon than they will emit.
- The very low carbon footprint combined with the PV smart grid, will make them almost self-sufficient.
- Ian thanked Piers and his team for their patience and perseverance, along with everyone else who has been involved with this HNCLT project.

Cathy introduced **Rachel Cronin**, a **local resident** who is interested in living in one of the homes.

- Rachel, who has been a Hook Norton resident for 6 yrs opened with a reference to a recent news article about a 24-year-old woman with a decent job and a £50,000 deposit who she still couldn't get a mortgage. She didn't meet the threshold requirements to borrow £200,000.
- Rachel is in a similar position, after having previously rented in Banbury and experiencing many setbacks in life that have left her unable to get a foothold in the housing market.
- She noted that 'the net that should catch us when things don't work is full of holes'.
- The welfare state, the NHS, social housing, and mental health services all exist but are not robust and when it comes to housing, no one is coming to save us. There is no real incentive for any housing development to make its housing affordable beyond the bare minimum. Their priority is to raise the most amount of profit possible per square metre of land. Altruism doesn't come into it, and then when the rich shareholders and 1%ers feel like spending money again, we can perhaps hope that some of it trickles down to the rest of us.
- Rachel is an artist and tutor who, in her own words, 'won't give in to a nagging suspicion that she doesn't deserve to stay here because she hasn't made the sacrifices or tried hard enough'.
- Rachel has been peripherally involved with the HNCLT project for the past five years and has seen that each passing year has bought a new obstacle to navigate. She can't quite believe that we are at the building stage now – not expanding the boundary of the village but using infill land, not having to make the choice between affordable and sustainable but able to do both, putting inclusivity and community at the heart of the development.
- Rachel summed up by saying that although she may not end up living in one of the homes, she is so happy that she has been able to watch this project unfold, as one piece of the net is stitched back together by the people here today.

Cathy thanked everyone for listening to the speeches and went on to talk briefly about the proposed Community Share Offer, which is planned to launch in October. The aim is to raise £600k, and there will be local events held to explain how share offers work and how people can invest.

Cathy also thanked Fiona Brown, a Board member of HNCLT who has put much time and effort into planning this celebratory event alongside other HNCLT members, but who is unable to join us today due to injury.

Informal discussions followed, and those who had signed up for a site visit were invited to don hard hats and PPE, and were escorted to the building site. Despite the awful conditions, 13 people took up the offer of the visit.