

North Horsham Parish Council

Notes from an informal meeting of the North Horsham Parish Community Land Trust Working Party and representatives of the Angmering Community Land Trust held on Tuesday 21st May 2019 at 6.30pm at the Spotted Cow PH, Angmering, West Sussex.

In attendance:-

The Chairman and Treasurer of the Angmering Community Land Trust. (CLT)

Alison Best- Dufour – North Horsham Resident

Cllr James Davidson – North Horsham Parish Council

Cllr Joy Gough – North Horsham Parish Council

Graham Maunders – Community Led Housing Advisor, Sussex Community Housing Hub, Action in Rural Sussex

Pauline Whitehead – note taker.

Apologies

There were apologies from Cllr Ray Turner.

The aim of the meeting was to ascertain the experiences of Angmering CLT and to learn more about the practicalities and pitfalls of setting up and running a CLT.

Angmering is a large village and civil parish between Littlehampton and Worthing in West Sussex on the southern edge of the South Downs National Park. It has a population of 9,000 people and it is in Arun District. Angmering CLT was initiated from Angmering Parish Council (APC) in 2015. APC had a councillor who recognised the difficulty that local people had in finding affordable homes within the village to enable them to stay in the village and wanted to help by providing housing for rent at realistic, affordable costs. APC owned some suitable land and were willing to pass it over to a CLT to be held in perpetuity for those purposes. APC felt that providing affordable homes in the village was a positive legacy from the Parish Council and throughout the process APC has invested in and supported the CLT process.

One of the main factors in providing affordable homes to rent through a CLT is the availability of low cost land or buildings, possibly owned by the parish or a rural exception site or to allow builders to offset their affordable housing obligations.

Initially handing over community land for development was contentious and caused tension between APC and the community, who felt excluded. However, in 2016 APC regenerated the CLT and worked to include the community by holding a consultation event where the final vision for Angmering was explained and where the community could buy £1 membership shares in the CLT. The CLT registered as a Community Benefit Charity. Concerns held by the community were reduced and 173 signed up as share holding members.

Angmering CLT advised that ensuring the community is well informed and that everything is open and transparent is very important, but that it has associated costs. Therefore, it is recommended that taking a realistic account of various running costs such as advertising materials, stationary, postage, telephone costs, planning and architectural drawings and advisory costs (for example, having legal advice about the membership shares) is very important from the start. They were fortunate that APC were willing to pay for some of the support in the early days.

Having people with a variety of backgrounds and skills on a CLT is advisable, but there is clear guidance on how CLTs should be operated as they are a legal entity in their own right, so there are rules that must be followed. One aspect is being audited to demonstrate good governance. In Angmering, the Parish Council helped with this process. Angmering CLT has a raft of policies to demonstrate good governance so having someone on board with administration and policy writing skills is helpful. Angmering CLT has a Project team managing the collaboration agreement and a Housing Allocation Team developing the forms that will be required.

The 173 share holding members have been retained throughout the project and the CLT has tried to keep interest and encourage further 'buy in' to the project through local newsletters, magazines, social media and by local events such as the Annual Parish Assembly. They also use those methods to keep the community informed of their progress.

House building was taking place in Angmering at the time the Angmering CLT was formed and the CLT brokered an agreement whereby they delivered the 30% affordable housing for one particular housing site, meaning that the developer could provide 24 premium housing units and give the CLT a fixed amount per property (£80k) towards building 7 units on the CLT's development of 12 units of affordable housing. The 12 units would be broken down into 6 x 2 bedroom properties, 3 x 1 bedroom properties and 3 x 3 bedroom properties. Graham advised that to make a development of affordable housing viable more than 6 units are required. Initially the developer was going to build the houses, but after a year of negotiations, the developer backed out. This meant that the £80k per property given by the developer would be less in real terms when engaging other builders and therefore, more money was required on loan from the bank. When the Section 106 agreement for the original development and the affordable housing arrangement with the CLT was written, it included a clause which validated the CLT by stating that the homes can only be let to people with a strong, proven link to Angmering first, then people in nearby villages.

In 2016/17 Angmering CLT undertook an Expression of Interest survey which found that there were 60 people interested in renting properties in Angmering. The CLT will be contacting them again to ascertain if they are still interested and what sort of accommodation is required, as this will influence the final mix of properties.

Angmering CLT talked to Arun District Council (ADC) early in the process and they were very supportive, giving £40k towards the project, with an additional £20k per unit when the houses were being built. APC also supported the project financially by giving a total of

around £10k towards legal fees and other associated running costs. Funding the project has required constant work and it has cost over £70,000 to get to the planning stage. Grant funding has supplemented money donated by APC and ADC.

Angmering CLT advised that sounding out funding bodies early in the process gives a greater understanding of what is available. They cautioned that it is necessary to work with real figures so that the real cost is understood and so that there are fewer chances of overrunning on the spend.

Angmering CLT will be taking out a loan of £1.2 million to cover the cost of building the 12 units, which will be characterful and in keeping with the village vernacular. This is in addition to the £80k per unit from the developer and another £20k per unit from ADC.

Angmering CLT would like to see the houses occupied as soon as possible and hope that their recent submission of a planning application will prove successful so that they are in a good position to develop the houses by 2020. Angmering CLT's vision is to provide more affordable homes to rent in the village and are looking at two additional potential schemes in Angmering providing another 22 affordable homes. Should they come to fruition, they would be on line by 2023.

Angmering CLT recognise that they are volunteers and therefore, there is a limit to what they can achieve. When the homes are built they will need to be maintained and managed, therefore, they will have to start thinking about employing management companies or making local arrangements for maintenance such as grass cutting with either the Parish Council or local companies.

ADC promote working with CLTs as a way of delivering their policies on affordable housing rents in the district. Horsham District Council is still developing its policies in this area and working on their own Housing Development Company and Housing Management Company. Therefore, they may not have the same funding strategy for CLTs that ADC has. The link into Horsham District Council is through the Planning Department rather than through a specific officer in the case of ADC.

Summing up, the advice from Angmering CLT was to take things slowly, identify land, find a strong leader, get community buy in early on, work closely with the Parish and District Councils and identify sources of funding early in the process. The CLT may need to buy land and may need to build saleable homes on the site in order to provide those for rental. Building a mix of rental properties with some saleable properties in a fully serviced plot could provide financial capital to maintain the rented properties, pay back loans more quickly and move forward with any future developments.

It was suggested that approaching other neighbouring parishes to join in with the CLT might be helpful, but there were pros and cons with this arrangement.

Appreciation was expressed to the representatives of Angmering CLT for giving up their time and to Graham Maunders for his continued support.