

# Wells Town Council

May 4<sup>th</sup> 2021

## Neighbourhood Plan

# A Call for Sites

(What follows is a presentation based on the paper proposal already sent to members of the Town Council in which further details are contained.)

# What is a call for sites?

The Neighbourhood Plan includes the following objective:

To provide new housing for local people, for those who come to work in the town and for the elderly, to allow local people to remain in the town, and to meet the desire of people to move to the area, so as to retain the balance of young and old, working and retired into the future.

In order to fulfil this objective the plan has to provide preferred sites for such development. For that reason it has to invite offers of sites in and around the town from landowners.

(Sites can be offered for other purposes such as employment land, recreational space etc. )

# The Proposal

- The proposal is that the Town Council should offer part of the West End Allotments for development of affordable housing for rent as part of the Neighbourhood Plan process.
- The land proposed is the easterly ten acres of the site leaving nine acres of allotment land untouched.

# Where is it?

It is right-hand (green) section of the triangle to the left of the map defined by Two Furlong Hill, Mill Road and the old railway line.

The whole area covers 19 acres. The proposal is to use the right-hand paddock land which is 10 acres, slightly more than half the total.



# The reasons

- The land is the only available property owned by the Town Council – it came into its possession in September 2020 when an option to purchase by NNDC lapsed.
- There is a well demonstrated need for affordable housing for local people.
- Houses for sale even at so-called affordable prices have escalated way beyond the average household income of Wells people

# Alternatives

- Any commercial development could be afforded only having 75% of houses either for sale on the open market or at commercial rents i.e. only 25% would be affordable.
- Shared equity sales recently have been beyond the range of local people on average incomes.

# How can it be done?

- The land in question is owned by Wells Town Council. For that reason a major cost of development, the cost of land, would not be a factor.
- A community-led housing association, *Homes for Wells*, is able to attract grants not available to other developers which would enable the provision of sixty houses, forty-four (75%) of which could be affordable housing for rent.

**Costings by Homes for Wells have been done and are available for inspection**

# What could be done

- The need is for a mix of housing for the elderly and for young families. (NNDC/HNA 2020)
- The mix could include a small amount of housing for the elderly for sale which would help fund the other affordable housing.
- *Homes for Wells* could be able to prioritise local families rather than taking names from the NNDC housing list.
- The actual development would be conducted in conjunction with NNDC and Holkham.



# What are the difficulties?

- Holkham estates hold a restrictive covenant preventing development which was imposed in 1948 when Wells UDC bought it.
- If they were to release the covenant they would reasonably wish for a share in any commercial return if the development were commercial.
- The scheme depends on the cost of the release of the covenant being closer to agricultural land prices than to development land prices because it is not a commercial scheme.(This has been factored into the costings.)
- We would need the permission of the Secretary of State because although not used for allotments it is designated as allotment land.
- We would need to convince the town that this scheme provides a greater benefit to them than for the land to remain an open space. Provision might need to be made for alternative grazing for horses.
- We would need to be sure that *Homes for Wells*, perhaps working with others, has the ability to deliver such a large-scale development.

# What happens if we agree

- The land would go on the list of possible sites among others submitted by landowners in the town.
- It would be necessary to include evidence that this is the best policy for housing development in the town, and for this to be included in the draft Neighbourhood Plan – along the lines of this proposal.
- It does not bind the Town Council to sell the land to anyone.
- It does not bind Holkham to release the covenant.
- It would result in further talks with Holkham and NNDC over the issue of new housing in the town allocated by the NNDC Local Plan.

# **The Proposal before the Council**

The proposal, supported by the Neighbourhood Plan Working Party, is that Wells Town Council as owner of the land bounded by Two Furlong Hill, Mill Road and the old railway line, offer ten acres of this land for affordable housing for rent as part of the Neighbourhood Plan process.

This is an unrivalled opportunity, not given to most councils to provide a number of houses for local people in a genuine partnership with other bodies which we hope the Council will take up.