



## Rural Area Working Party 18 November 2010

### Village Hall to Village Hub Concept

#### Summary

- 1.1 At the meeting held on 30 September 2010, the Working Party received a presentation on the concept of Village Hall to Village Hub. This report follows up on the recommendations made by the working party in response to the presentation:-
- (1) identify those villages where the initiative might be applied and in this regard Members were asked to advise officers of parishes in their wards which they felt were appropriate for consideration; and
  - (2) examine in more detail the issues which would have to be confronted if the idea is to be utilised by individual parishes.
- 1.2 This report examines in more detail the potential of the Village Hall to Village Hub Concept and the issues that need to be considered if parishes were to progress this initiative. Possible parishes where the initiative might be applied are also identified.
- 1.3 The Working Party is asked to consider whether it would be desirable for the Borough Council to consider hosting an event to promote Community Land Trusts and facilitating parishes to explore the option of the Village Hall to Village Hub initiative further.

#### 1. Introduction

##### 1.1 Village Hall to Village Hub

The Borough Council is currently considering whether to adopt the Local Development Framework Core Strategy. It identifies that, in rural areas, the low provision of services, affordable housing, few local employment opportunities and poor public transport as a key strategic challenge. The Village Hall to Village Hub Concept introduced to the Working Party at its meeting on 30 September 2010, provides one possible response to these challenges.

- 1.2 The concept suggests focusing on intensifying the use of the Village Hall to facilitate change that might facilitate, through the creation of a Community Land Trust, the provision of small pockets of affordable rural housing; the creation

permanent intermediate housing; the provision of workspace; and/or community facilities. A premise of the concept is that some village playing fields that are adjacent to village halls are under used and could therefore be partly developed to provide a vibrant Village Hub with a development delivered by a Community Land Trust.

## 2. Community Land Trusts (CLT)

- 2.1 A CLT is a non-profit, community-based organisation committed to the stewardship and affordability of land, housing and other buildings used for community benefit in perpetuity. CLTs take a variety of forms: they may build on existing organisations such as development trusts or almshouse associations; properties may be on a rental, shared-equity ownership, co-operative basis or even sold on the open market (cross-subsidy).
- 2.2 They generally have in common the aims of meeting local housing need and providing community benefit. Where CLTs are used to provide affordable housing they sell an equity share in properties and thus restrict their value to the homeowner. This unsold equity is used to ensure the property remains affordable to benefit others in the community.
- 2.3 The value of the land, plus subsidies and other equity benefits, is permanently locked in, on behalf of the local community and future occupiers, by the CLT. Local residents and businesses form CLTs in order to plan and deliver long-term affordable and sustainable development of this land, which will benefit the local area and its inhabitants for generations to come.
- 2.4 The Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 provides the legal definition of Community Land Trusts, being a corporate body which:-
- '(1) is established for the express purpose of furthering the social, economic and environmental interests of a local community by acquiring and managing land and other assets in order:-*
- (a) to provide a benefit to the local community;*
- (b) to ensure that the assets are not sold or developed except in a manner which the trust's members think benefits the local community;*
- (2) is established under arrangements which are expressly designed to ensure that:-*
- (a) any profits from its activities will be used to benefit the local community (without being paid directly to members);*
- (b) individuals who live or work in the specified area have the opportunity to become members of the trust (whether or not others can also become members); and*
- (c) the members of a trust control it.'*

They are usually constituted as Industrial & Provident Societies or Companies Limited by Guarantee, have charitable status, and are non-profit making. CLTs work by enabling occupiers to pay for the use of buildings and services at prices they can afford, while the value of land, subsidies, planning gain and other equity benefits are permanently locked in, on behalf of them and future occupiers, by the Community Land Trust.

### 3. Feasibility for St Edmundsbury

3.1 In assessing the feasibility of delivering a Village Hall to Village hub initiative in the borough, there are a number of matters that Members will need to be mindful of.

3.2 Community Land Trusts: The website of the Community Land Trust provides a range of information on CLTs including case studies, illustrating the motivation and key drivers behind setting up a trust and demonstrating what they can achieve. The Stonefields Community Trust case study, attached as Appendix A, identifies key issues behind setting up a CLT, which can be summarised follows:-

(a) **Local response to local need** – in the case study this was championed by an individual and included both affordable housing and work space. The case study describes the local authority's role as 'the willing ally' in the process!

(b) **Land** – this was pivotal in establishing the CLT, the land was donated in the first place. Once the land had planning permission the value increased allowing the CLT to use this to secure a loan, which was used to build the first house.

(c) **Legal costs of establishing the CLT** – in the case study the cost was met by a donation.

(d) **Funding of the CLT** - was complex and initial progress was facilitated via donations.

3.3 A further case study is attached as Appendix B of Miles Ward Court, Halesworth, providing a different perspective. In this case, the catalyst for the local community was the worsening condition of historical buildings and the need to act in order to save the buildings. Foundation East supported the local community by providing a range of professional services and advice, to help them to mobilise their aspirations. Phase two of the project is now underway; this includes a shop with accommodation above.

3.4 Moving ideas into a clear vision and deliverable plan is the crucial stage in setting up a CLT, there are resources available to assist local communities achieve this. These include:-

**The Feasibility Fund** will provide community groups or fledgling CLTs with one day of consultancy support and guidance by an expert from either Community Land and Finance Ltd (CLF) or another consultant in the field. This initial 'scoping' day will be used primarily to develop a concept note. Further advice is also provided by the consultant regarding the most appropriate way forward. **The**

**Technical Assistance Fund** will also provide further support for business planning.

**Foundation East** who assisted in the development of Miles Ward Court have recently appointed a CLT officer and they identify as one of their key objectives the development of CLTs, presenting Miles Ward Court as their first working CLT.

**Suffolk ACRE Community Consultation team** could assist. In addition to the Parish Plans and Community Led Planning and local housing needs surveys, their Village Hall Advisor can provide help on playing fields etc legal structures, health and safety, energy audits etc. They hold all Village Hall files going back many years. Suffolk ACRE Business Support and Consultation Manager can advise on setting up social enterprises and other community enterprises as community shops and pubs. In addition they can give much advice on grants and do funding searches etc.

**St Edmundsbury Borough Council's** role in the process would be to support, enable and facilitate, although it is evident from the case studies that the leadership and drive for the initiative has to come from the local community.

- 3.5 Planning Considerations: The current planning policy in the rural areas is contained within the Replacement Local Plan that was adopted in 2006. However, should the Borough Council determine to adopt the emerging Local Development Framework Core Strategy, then, for the purpose of planning, there will be a revised hierarchy of settlements across the rural area as well as a new long term planning strategy that has been the subject of local engagement. The revised hierarchy is Key Service Centres, Local Service Centres and Infill Villages.
- 3.6 The retention of existing and provision of additional services in the rural area is something that planning policy generally encourages, within the overall objectives of achieving an appropriate scale of development and managing any potential environmental impact. Generally, the Key Service Centres and Local Service Centres identified in the draft Core Strategy already have a range of local services, including a shop, village hall, pub and school. These settlements will be expected to accommodate new housing development in the form of estates ranging from 10 to around 70 homes per site, depending upon category of settlement and environmental and infrastructure capacity. These allocations will be subject to the planning policy requiring that a percentage of the new homes are affordable and managed by RSL's. It is recognised that the 'Infill Villages' do, however, have a more limited range of facilities but the Core Strategy enables development within the existing housing settlement boundaries while the ability to deliver affordable housing outside the boundary as an exception to policy remains. In the context of the Village Hall to Village Hub initiative, it is probably the Infill Villages that the concept of Village Hubs would initially be more effectively aimed.
- 3.7 The Village Hub initiative provides a potential opportunity to provide and maintain services in rural communities where prospects are otherwise limited, although improving the viability of village shops, for example, is much more complex than just building more homes in the village. There may, however, be some potential policy constraints to the initiative. As noted in paragraph 1.2 above, the initiative suggests using underused playing field space for development. However, playing fields have traditionally been protected from development as they are vital to the needs of a village in terms of providing access to open space for recreation.

Although they may only rarely be formally used for events, they are often used for informal gatherings for children's games, dog walking etc. Their loss, or partial loss, may therefore have a detrimental impact on the well-being of residents of the village where other opportunities for recreation are limited. In this context, it is likely that Sport England would object strongly to the loss of any playing field unless it can be demonstrated that it is no longer required or that new facilities can be provided that is of equal or better quality.

3.8 There may be opportunities in villages to create community shops in village halls, pubs etc without the need for additional housing to raise funds. Hundon Community Shop, for example, has been established within an extension to the village hall. Policies relating to affordable housing require that any provision under an exception to planning policies should have 'secure arrangements to ensure that initial and subsequent occupation of the dwellings can be restricted to those having an identified local need for affordable housing through the use of appropriate safeguards, including conditions or legal obligations.' The ability to 'sell off' housing on the open market, as proposed by the CLT approach, would run contrary to this policy, but if the site is within the housing settlement boundary anyway, as many playing fields are, then the only hurdle to overcome is the loss of playing fields, referred to above.

#### 4. Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats of the Initiative

The table below provides a summary of officers thoughts on the strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats of the initiative.

| Strengths   | Weakness  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are locally-controlled and democratically accountable</li> <li>• Locally driven – need strong local support, vision and desire to make it work</li> <li>• Provides opportunity to deliver affordable housing, community facilities and workspace responding to a key strategic challenge regarding low service provision etc in rural areas.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locally driven – need strong local support, vision and desire to make it work</li> <li>• Can be a complicated process</li> <li>• CLTs are not seen as appropriate if only aspect is affordable housing as traditional route via exception sites and working with a housing association is generally quicker and most Parish Councils are pleased as Council and Housing Associations do most of the work.</li> <li>• Setting them up tends to be lengthy process.</li> </ul> |
| Opportunities   | Threats   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They aim to become self-financing and to end reliance on public grants</li> <li>• Could provide an alternative vehicle for delivering affordable housing i.e. land owner more likely to</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potentially locally resistance</li> <li>• Collapse of process due to length of time it takes.</li> <li>• Long term viability, will all the keen community enthusiasts still be around to manage it?</li> <li>• What happens if a community</li> </ul>  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| donate/provide at a reasonable cost land for affordable housing | shop, for example, becomes unviable after time?<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding of CLT is not straightforward and a business plan would be required in all cases.</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

**5. Identifying villages where the initiative might be applied**

5.1 As noted in paragraphs 3.5 to 3.6 above, the Infill Villages identified in the emerging Core Strategy may be the most appropriate potential location for exploring this particular initiative. The following are identified as Infill Villages in the draft Core Strategy:-

|                   |                        |                    |
|-------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Barnham           | Bradfield St George    | Chevington         |
| Coney Weston      | Cowlinge               | Fornham All Saints |
| Fornham St Martin | Great Bradley          | Hawkedon           |
| Hepworth          | Honington and Sapiston | RAF Honington      |
| Horringer         | Lidgate                | Market Weston      |
| Ousden            | Pakenham               | Rede               |
| Stanningfield     | Stansfield             | Stoke by Clare     |
| Stradishall       | Thelnetham             | Troston            |
| Whepstead         | Withersfield           |                    |

5.2 Some of these villages do not have playing fields and therefore the concept of identifying underused playing fields for development would fail. In other villages the playing field is remote from the main built-up area of the village and any development here would potentially create homes isolated from the rest of the village. Therefore, having appraised the above settlements, the following would appear to potentially better meet the criteria proposed in the presentation to the Working Party at the September meeting:

|                   |               |                    |
|-------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Barnham           | Coney Weston  | Fornham All Saints |
| Fornham St Martin | Great Bradley | Ousden             |
| Pakenham          | Stansfield    | Stoke by Clare     |
| Stradishall       | Troston       |                    |

5.3 The identification of these villages does not, in itself, mean that they would automatically be suitable for or welcome the initiative. In some instances the playing field may already be fully utilised. In others, it may not be viable to create a village community shop, for example, because one already exists or there would be insufficient potential trade in the village.

5.4 It will be possible to supplement this information by working with Suffolk ACRE they maintain a database of parishes where parish plans have been completed and the issues raised.

5.5 While the Affordable Housing Exceptions Site policy remains as an additional means of delivering housing in villages, other new planning initiatives are also emerging from the Government, such as the Community Right to Build and the potential for converting farm buildings to affordable housing for local needs which

could supplement the work of Community Land Trusts. Details of the delivery of the latter new initiatives are still emerging and the Borough Council's approach to their delivery can be considered by the Working Party once more details are known.

## **6. Way forward**

- 6.1 If the Working Party wishes to support this initiative further, it may be desirable to host a workshop on the concept to enable parishes to consider the concept and the challenges. Although hosted by the Borough Council, it would be important to invite representative from Foundation East the Community Land Trust organisation and possibly other Community Land Trusts as well as Suffolk ACRE. Members of the Working Party would also be invited to the seminar.
- 6.2 A further report on this initiative would be made to a future meeting of the Working Party, if required.

## **7. Recommendation**

- 7.1 The Working Party is asked to consider whether it would be desirable for the Council to consider hosting an event to promote Community Land Trusts and assist parishes explore the Village Hall to Village Hub initiative further.

## Case Studies : Stonesfield Community Trust, Oxfordshire

### **Stonesfield Community Trust responds to shortage of affordable housing in high-cost Oxfordshire.**

The work of the Stonesfield Community Trust is a local and effective response by local residents to the shortage of affordable housing in the Oxfordshire village (population 1,900). Set up in 1983, the Trust has produced 14 affordable homes and 2 workspaces with very little public subsidy.

Driving force behind the Trust is Chairman Tony Crofts. In the 1980s he became concerned about the falling roll in the local primary school and the rising tide of wealthy incomers who were driving up housing costs in Stonesfield and other villages.

'I watched villages dying all over the Cotswolds,' he says, 'and I didn't want Stonesfield to suffer the same fate.'

#### **Land donation**

With two friends he set up the Trust and donated a quarter-acre site in the village for the first scheme. A donation of £3000 from an enlightened local company that had grown up in the village covered the setting up costs, legal fees and the planning submission for the scheme of four houses.

Planning permission was granted, instantly increasing the value of the land from £3,500 to £150,000 and giving the Trust the security to raise a bank loan to build the first four houses. One of the houses was later converted into two flats and a granny flat was added to another, making six homes on the site.

#### **Ethical and charitable funding**

A second quarter-acre site in the village was bought with a loan of £80,000 from West Oxfordshire District Council. Five houses were completed by 1993 with funding from a variety of sources, among them:

- Loans from the Triodos Bank and the Ecology Building Society.
- Advertisements in *The Friend*, the Quaker magazine, which raised £119,500 in gifts and fixed-interest loans from private ethical investors.
- Quakers attending in the Witney Monthly Meeting area who donated almost £7,000.
- The Quaker Housing Trust converted a £20,000 interest-free loan into a grant.

As is so often the case, the ethical concern that led to the creation of the Trust contains a strong green element. The houses are designed for maximum solar gain and insulated to a high standard.

The 11 homes are let to people with local connections and modest incomes. They are managed on the Trust's behalf by a professional letting agent, who for many years supplied a free service and now charges only £80 a month. 'Many local people have chipped in to help keep the housing affordable', says Crofts.

#### **Factory conversion**

Next door to the Trust's second scheme, Tony Crofts and his architect wife Randi Berild have fashioned two houses, a flat and two work-spaces from a former silk-screen factory with bank loans and a grant from the Rural Development Commission for the work-spaces. The scheme was completed in 1994 and the loans are serviced by rents from the properties.

Ten years and many repayments on, the bank has relinquished its claim on one of the work-spaces. Home to a pre-school group, it has been transferred into Trust ownership by the Crofts for the perpetual benefit of the village.

The Crofts are about to acquire and transfer to the Trust the second commercial space, which houses the village post office at a fixed rent, the flat above it and one of the houses.

#### **Community initiatives**

'When the loans on the schemes are cleared, the Trust plan to use any surpluses from the rental income to fund better Home Help for the Elderly and to employ a youth worker. There is very little for young people in Stonesfield, where the last bus for Oxford leaves at 3.40pm and the last bus comes back at 6.0pm,' says Crofts. 'We are also looking at Individual Learning Accounts for youngsters from the village who are apprentices or in further education.'

The initial donation of land set the financial ball rolling and made all three schemes possible. In addition, many local people have given their money, time and expertise. The clerk to the parish council, a county councillor, a retired teacher and a local Quaker sit with Crofts on the Trust management committee.



**Local authority partner**

West Oxfordshire DC has been a willing ally. It has a strategic responsibility for providing affordable housing in its area and has supported housing association schemes in 13 other villages that have produced 200 affordable homes.

None of them is quite like the Stonesfield scheme, which will be owned by the community when all the loans are paid off rather than an outside body, however well-intentioned. The Trust's homes, the post office and the pre-school group are part of the village fabric along with the pub, the school, the church and the chapel. They are testament to the huge contribution a small organisation can make to sustainable village life.

**More information: Tony Crofts**

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## Miles Ward Court

### Before

Miles Ward Court prior to commencement of building works.



### Planned

Visualisation of the completed works.



### Completed



Miles Ward Court is a historic building located within the town centre conservation area of the East Suffolk market town of Halesworth. The building has been unoccupied and unused for over 40 years and had fallen into an advanced state of disrepair. Foundation East was contacted by the local community organisations, the Halesworth and Blyth Valley Partnership and the Town Council to see whether the building could be retained and restored for community benefit.

Foundation East undertook feasibility work which revealed a need for provision of new high quality supported office and workshop space within the town centre to encourage creation of small businesses. Plans were drawn up, with the support of community partners, to create 8 small B1 class units varying in size between 15 and 60m<sup>2</sup>, to be offered on low risk 'easy in/easy out' terms with access to free or low cost business support links, plus a small meeting room for use by tenants and local community organisations.

A key feature of the renovation is environmental sustainability; as much as possible of the existing building material, notably Suffolk red bricks and pantiles plus existing roof timbers, have been renewed and re-used, thus minimising the amount of waste material sent to landfill. The facility produced replicates the building's existing profile and will create pleasant and amenable environment for occupying businesses.

The building is controlled in partnership with the local community partners through the use of a Community Land Trust. This has been effected by local organisations becoming members of Foundation East and due to the mutuality inherent in our structure, they are then able to direct and control the future use and direction of the building. This means that it will remain a local asset used for the benefit of, and controlled by, local people.

The project has been financed via a wide funding partnership; major funding has been obtained from the European Objective 2 Transitional programme; EEDA's Regional Renaissance programme, and from the Adventure Capital Fund. Financial and philosophical support has also been received from Suffolk County Council and Waveney District Council.

Work commenced on site in February 2007 and was completion at the end of March 2008. For further information or details on the accommodation to be provided, please contact Foundation East on 01284 757 777 or email

[info@mileswardcourt.org](mailto:info@mileswardcourt.org)