

## **Assynt Development Trust**

### Draft Minutes of the Housing Sub-Group Meeting of the Assynt Glebe Development

Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2021 3.30pm

Present: Willie Jack, Liam Taylor, Iain MacLeod, Morven Taylor, Adam Pellant, Kirsty Crichton and Ronnie Macrae

Housing design - WJ advised that an important consideration would be the energy efficiency of the houses to be built. If the level of efficiency could reach Passivhaus standard there would be almost no need for heating systems. MT advised that under previous greener homes schemes that a silver standard offered just these advantages.

Number of houses and layout of site – WJ and MT advised that the initial SLF stage 1 feasibility study was under budget as the Rural Housing Fund could not top up the SLF grant fully. MT advised that CHT can speak to Scottish Govt and Highland Council to see if they can assist with funding for further site investigations.

Land Ownership – WJ advised that agreement to buy the land from the Church has almost been concluded and we are looking at a completion date by the end of March.

Types of tenure of new homes - MT asked the meeting what tenure of houses were required in Lochinver. She went on to outline the different types.

1a) Social rental homes provided by Highland Council

Tenants of these homes would be allocation to these houses by the Highland Council housing list via their points based system.

1b) Social rental homes provided by ADT or CHT

Tenants of these homes would be allocated via the agreed Assynt allocations policy. According to the business plan it would be normal to have mortgage repayment over 25 years and at the end of this period the ownership would be with ADT or CHT. If ADT own the homes then maintenance of the homes and management of the allocations can be provided by a third party such as CHT. It is widely recommended that this is the case.

2) Self build

Self build serviced plots can be sold off and discounted with a Rural Housing Burden; this discount is then applicable in perpetuity ensuring that the house remains affordable. Self build plots may fit in well with the idea of woodland crofts.

3) Rent to buy homes

4) Discounted house sales

### Allocations policy

LT asked for an explanation of the system of allocations. MT explained that for example it would be possible for a plot of land within the development to be bought by Highland Council and then be developed by HC for social rent. HC would allocate homes based on the Highland wide points based system. It is also possible to ask HC to introduce a local lettings initiative attached to the development within their points based system which is something that CHT could facilitate if HC were going to be a developer in the Glebe project. Due to changes in Scottish Govt legislation and policy this is harder to achieve than it used to be, but it's certainly worth a discussion with HC.

RM explained that a local allocations policy can be developed by a 'private' provider such as ADT or CHT (but not HC). It still has to work within the provisions of the Houses Scotland Act. The policy can be built around our own criteria and could target a specific group of people that are in need of homes but not any specific individual. For example it could target young families or elderly or say mechanics to keep a garage open.

RM explained that it is possible for a house built for social rent and owned by ADT or CHT to be sold with a rural housing burden as this would ensure that the house remains affordable; this applies the other way round as well for. A case would have to be made for this as Scottish Govt do see the need for flexibility in rural housing.

The management of housing allocations was discussed and all agreed that it should done at a distance. RM advised that this is HC policy now with all allocations processed and decided centrally. He said that ADT and local people

should decide upon the allocations policy and then leave someone else to enact it. LT and IM agreed with this approach.

IM asked if there was already information available about likely individual applicants and their need for housing, for example through HC. He also asked if it could be ascertained how many people were in need of homes so that supply could meet demand. RM advised that this information is available in the form of the HC housing waiting list but for many reasons this is highly unlikely to reflect the real demand in an area. There is apathy in many areas as people don't see anything becoming available in their area. He said that when activity starts in an area to provide new housing, interest in the waiting list often shoots up. It also depends on what options you are going to provide. For example if you're providing some low cost home ownership units, the highest priority people could be those who, when they moved home, would be releasing a council house. So for every one new affordable house two would become available.

AP asked if it would be worth revisiting the housing needs survey and RM replied that the timing of this is very important because if you undertake a housing survey too soon and no houses get built then people will become disillusioned, so it needs to be done almost like a marketing exercise closer to the timing of delivery of the homes. If there is more activity around the local consultation process it will generate more informed discussion.

### Site investigations

RM said that houses can be built on any land but obviously depending on site conditions and access the cost will vary tremendously which won't work for affordable homes. We will need to appoint an engineer who will come on site and will work to a brief which is to find sites for a buildable development. RM stated that there will be sites on the Glebe that can be developed but it will be a balancing act due to the bog and rock, drainage and service provision. We don't want to build expectations about lots of homes and then the SI's show that only two homes can be built. There are developable areas but the site just needs to be realistic and to be planned well.

This can be done by modelling of the area and getting an engineer on site together with a contractor and an excavator. This is what was done at Glenanisp in 2009; CHT will try and retrieve the Glenanisp proposals and forward them to everyone to give an indication of what type of SI's are required. We will need to get a quote from engineers as the Arch Henderson investigations followed Matt Bridgestock's original sketches. From RM's last visit across the site, he is confident that there are developable areas across the site. AP asked if it's a balancing act between being tempted to develop land closer to the road which may not be as good as land further from the road as the better site could require a longer access road. RM said that it is always a balancing act but he is confident that there are areas there that can be built on.

### Developing a wider Strategy for Lochinver and Assynt.

RM feels that the necessary next step is to develop a wider strategy for Lochinver and Assynt. Once this has been developed then an allocations policy can help to fulfil the strategic objectives. RM said that the allocations policy which will be adopted will reflect many different aims and objectives. For example: creating employment, keeping the school open, ensuring that elderly can stay in the community, growing existing businesses, attracting new families and new businesses to the area. It is important to understand how this housing development can help the local economy by supporting shops, schools, nurseries and businesses. Where do you think Assynt will be in five years time and how will housing help you get there? Maybe allowing elderly to move from existing larger homes to smaller homes on this site would help to release larger homes for younger families and would also help to keep elderly people within Lochinver.

WJ asked how feasible it would be to develop such a strategy during the current pandemic restrictions. MT and KC advised that consultations were undertaken in July 2020 at Loch Carron and Knoydart and were possible with the restrictions in place at that time. The meeting felt that it was unlikely that this would be possible until at least June of this year. MT said that we know that local people are very much in favour of the Glebe development due to the online survey undertaken last August; once the project has been worked up a bit more and we have developed more detailed proposals then we can go back and consult the community again.

IM observed that there are already many organisations within Assynt already in existence and which are key to the way the community works; he suggested it would be an idea in the first instance to bring some of these organisations together through ZOOM to map out some of the challenges that affect the area. Bringing a few of these folk together would help to set the scene: where is Lochinver & Assynt going as a community given all the challenges. People are

already thinking about this at present. That would then feed into what we're doing in this project to discuss a wider strategy for a more resilient Assynt. LT said he wholly agreed with that approach. RM recommended that the review should look at all elements within the community as it's not only about housing.

The minutes and action points of this sub-group will be considered by the main Steering Group on 2<sup>nd</sup> March. Future meeting dates will be set at this meeting.

The meeting closed at 14.40

Action points:

1. Seek funding for further Site Investigations to identify the best sites for a buildable development
2. Consider facilitating a wider group of Assynt organisations which could help to identify how Assynt and Lochinver could look in 5, 10 and 25 years time