

La Frenaye Place, South Wonston – the development of affordable rural housing for local people



South Wonston is a rural parish some 6 miles north of Winchester. The main settlement within the parish is the village of South Wonston with a population of around 2,700 people. Its facilities and amenities include a primary school, a church, a G.P. practice, a shop and post office, indoor and outdoor sports facilities and a children's play area.

The Rural Housing Enabler first made contact with South Wonston Parish Council in July 2002 and presented the role of the RHE and the process for providing affordable housing for local people at a Parish Council meeting at their invitation. It was agreed that a Housing Needs Survey should be undertaken to investigate the housing need of local people. The RHE completed the survey in January 2003 and presented the report to the Parish Council in April. The survey indicated that 17 households with a strong local connection were in need of affordable housing. Households were encouraged by the RHE

and Parish Council to register their need on the Winchester City Council Housing Registers. By December 2005, 22 households with a local connection had registered.

In response to the need indicated in the Survey, the Parish Council decided to support the development of a small scheme of affordable housing for people with a strong local connection to the Parish. They were concerned that people on lower incomes that wish to remain in the parish or return to the parish should be able to do so.

The RHE arranged for two Housing Associations to make presentations to the Parish Council, who then chose one of them, Winchester Housing Group (which later became A2W) to progress the development of the project.

Following this decision the RHE, in close discussion with A2W, the Housing Association and Winchester City Council, undertook a site appraisal of all potential exception sites around South Wonston.

The sites were presented to a Parish Council meeting in April 2004 and all parties agreed on the site on Westhill Road North. A2W commenced negotiations with the landowner and started drawing up proposals for the site.

Once the proposals had started to take shape, A2W with the RHE organised a drop-in to discuss the proposal with residents of the parish. This was an important event that gave local people an opportunity to express support for the scheme as well as objections. Some useful suggestions were made about design and layouts, that A2W were then able to incorporate.

Over the following months, A2W worked on the design of the scheme and applied for funding. The RHE kept in regular contact with them and the Parish Council. The RHE also provided updates for the parish magazine to keep the community informed of progress.

During this period, a small number of people made regular and vociferous objections to the project. The Parish Council, RHE, Housing Association and City Council kept in close contact, and met the objectors to try to both take on board any constructive criticisms and to allay their concerns.

In February 2006, the planning application was considered at the City Council Planning Committee. Objections were made, but it was unanimously approved. The scheme of 10 affordable homes, 6 rented and 4 shared-ownership started on site in March 2006. In December 2006, the RHE organised a meeting with a lettings officer of Winchester City Council, the A2W's housing officer and the Parish Council, in response to concerns voiced by the Parish Council that potential applicants were receiving unclear or conflicting advice about potential nominations to the scheme. The nominations process was clarified. The scheme was completed in February 2007 and the official opening organised by A2W took place on 10 March 2007, attended by representatives of South Wonston's twin village in France, La Frenaye. All the new residents have a strong local connection to South Wonston.

The RHE played a critical role throughout the development of the project in South Wonston. In the early stages, they took the lead role first in researching the need for affordable housing for local people and then in advising and assisting the Parish Council to establish the project to meet that need.

As the project progressed their liaison skills were essential, as they maintained contact between all the parties, the Parish Council, the Housing Association, the City Council and the wider community.

Delays occurred throughout the project as with most rural affordable housing schemes, but the RHE continued to press the Housing Association and City Council to keep the project progressing.

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