

## **THORVERTON COMMUNITY LAND TRUST – BOARD of DIRECTORS**

### **Report on the meetings held on Weds 23 October 2024 and Tues 5 November 2024**

#### **Present:**

Andrew Foster (AF - Chair), Steve Rendell (SR), Bry Uglow (BU), Andrew Wiles (AW), Andrew Saunders (AS), Noel Tancock (NT), Jan Wills (JW), Stuart Crebo (SC), Roger Cashmore (RC), Jim Roberts (JR)

Minutes Secretary: Helen Ratcliffe (HR)

#### **Apologies and Introduction**

Apologies were received from Geoff Pook (GP) – for 23 October meeting only

#### **Minutes from the Board Meeting held on 29 September 2024**

The minutes were approved.

#### **Matters arising**

Housing Association partnerships: AW reported that Teign were reconsidering their decision to pull out of the Brampford Speke scheme and may well go ahead with it after all. AW also reported that the meeting with Teign had been very positive and that they would give us a decision in early November about their potential involvement with our scheme. It was also noted that HAs are generally under pressure at the moment to get their housing stock up to scratch, especially given the recent cladding issues, but that there may be better news for and from HAs after the budget.

#### **Governance arrangements – update/input from Governance Group**

New Members: AF provided a spreadsheet detailing the 40+ people who have applied to be members of TCLT to date. It was agreed that the list should be appended to the minutes, but not made public.

The question of whether anyone's application for membership would ever be refused was raised, particularly in relation to inclusivity – it was agreed that it would be rare, but if someone could not agree to TCLT's Aims and Rules, it would not be appropriate for them to be members.

#### **TCLT General Meeting**

A paper relating to TCLT's first General Meeting was discussed and the recommendations in the paper were agreed. Our year-end was confirmed as 31<sup>st</sup> March, according to our Rules, resulting in the need for an amendment to our Finance Policy (which currently refers to 30<sup>th</sup> June as our year-end). It was also agreed that, once there are residents in place, we should aim for one third of Board members being residents.

#### **Financial Feasibility – update/input from Finance Group**

I & E Statement; the latest I & E statement was tabled and discussed. It was noted that:

The Bank Account is now up and running

The opening balance to the Parish Council now excludes VAT

The infrastructure survey amount has increased because the VAT cannot be reclaimed by the Parish Council

Receipt of the £17k stage 2 grant is reportedly imminent, following which the amount due (~£5k) to the Parish Council will be settled

Although the Finance Policy remains in draft form, we are still required to adhere to its stated procedures – for example, incurring costs requires sign-off from specified Board members and we can only incur the costs for which we have applied (ie which were included in the budget set to apply for the grant).

#### **Briefing Document**

The Briefing Document prepared by the Finance Group in August was received and discussed. It was noted that discussion of this very helpful paper had been deferred from the last meeting because key Directors had not been able to attend that meeting

The word 'social' should be added before 'rental' throughout the document

The paper follows the logic of the "mandate" we have had from the HNS and the village community

We are awaiting confirmation of the success of our Grant Application; we will need to see the conditions attached to the grant to determine both whether or not it might be possible to capitalise any other costs (eg legal fees) within this amount and also whether the original deadline for spend (March 25) still stands

Concerns were expressed about:

The agenda/brief keeping closer to the numbers originally presented to the village community (a total of 15-25 homes)

As an agreement seemed unlikely to be reached on this item at this stage, it was agreed that the meeting should move on to receive the report from the Technical Group better to inform further discussion.

## **Stage 2 Funding and Budget**

Discussion on this item was deferred until a future meeting

## **Site Due Diligence – update/input from Technical Group**

Potential Project Design: A potential project design was presented to the meeting

It was noted that this had been prepared to establish what sort of potential numbers each site could accommodate based on the technical surveys on both sites

It was also noted that, although (as agreed at the last meeting) the report had been used as the basis for a recent meeting with MDDC, it had not been approved by the Board or seen/approved by the community

A question was raised in relation to the location of the swales (to deal with the surface water run-off) and whether they might be better sited closer to the existing Court Barton arrangement, partly because of the risks associated with potentially deep water

There was much discussion, without resolution, about whether or not a development, either solely on the North side (albeit with a need for drainage to the South) or split across the two sites would be a) practical, b) viable or c) able to provide the required number of affordable homes.

## **Discussions with MDDC**

It was reported that the following points were raised/noted during the discussions with MDDC:

Whether the school would need greater capacity to cope with potential increased demand (MDDC to investigate the implications here)

Whether there would be any highways/sewerage issues

How the project would support custom/self-build aspirations

That the project responds to a need, fits with current planning policy as an exception site, is an efficient use of the site. Some Open Market houses could be allowed to help fund it.

That public open space could be provided off-site

That there would be a need to provide at least 10% of the homes to current accessibility standards

It was noted that MDDC appear happy with the potential design.

## **Discussions with the Church Commissioners**

It was noted that we had not held a meeting with the Church Commissioners for some while and that we ought to be updating them with progress in the near future

It was agreed that dates should be sought, that it would be helpful to know the conditions attached to the capital grant and that this Board should reconvene on 5 November to agree our position both on project design proposals and negotiating style

It was also noted that we ought perhaps to be gauging interest with potential developer partners in the near future as well.

**\*\*\* The Board adjourned at this stage agreeing to reconvene within two weeks\*\*\***

## **Meeting held on 5 November 2024**

The Chair opened the meeting by asking individual Directors to speak their thoughts following the last meeting.

SC started by reiterating his admiration for the remarkable set of skills and commitment from the Directors. He apologised to the Board for his frustration in our not having yet developed a Business Plan, based on the needs of the community, to drive the discussion/project at difficult, key decision points. He raised four key points: Our legal status as a Community Land Trust, which requires us to be democratically controlled by the community, he raised concerns about the maximisation of the site which may be at odds with the community and our capabilities. A handout was distributed, illustrating the differences between the numbers of houses and bedrooms required according to the HNS and those made available through the two options put forward at the September meeting. An alternative was distributed, which is closer to where we started and also addresses the issue of how best to satisfy the need to maximise the land. SC believed that we should reflect the original HNS needs in our proposal and then seek the necessary buy-in from the community and our various partners, both present and future.

RC agreed with SC's points and noted that he still cannot understand either the push to increase the number of houses or the need to acquire/use the south site at all.

AF agreed with some of SC's points and has concerns about the numbers of houses too. He presented a slide demonstrating the differences between what the current proposal offers compared with the HNS results – for example, there are many more three-bedroom houses for DMS and fewer one/two-bedroom properties. He did also note, however, that whatever the final size of the scheme it represents less than 10% of Thorverton's existing 450 (approx.) households.

JW reiterated that this is the start of the process to refine a project proposal and that this version demonstrates the maximum which the sites can accommodate and accepts that compromises will have to be made. She noted that social rental assessments are based on benefits and not necessarily good design and that a small one-bedroom property is not ideal for a couple, who may then have to move if they start a family.

GP noted that there are four factors which can stop a project such as this progressing:

What will be allowed by Planning

Acquisition of land

Finance – until plans can be put to potential funders

What the community wants

However, he feels we can't just go back to the community, establish what it is they want and then say we'll deliver it. His view is that, by talking to the planners about what they might allow, talking to the Church Commissioners about acquiring the sites and talking to potential funding partners about what they would be interested in developing with us, we can then go back to the community with proposals/options.

SC accepted the point about planning and agreed that we were on the right track in terms of funding partners until the potential HA partners pulled out, but noted that we have not yet spoken to any potential developers and that we need to keep the community engaged.

SR noted that we seem to be stuck on whether we should present options to the community and if so, which options they should be. Although one definition of leadership is to have a vision and lead people to it, he feels that we *should* present options because it is more democratic and also involves more active decision-making. He suggested an alternative option:

Buy both sites

Develop the north site as phase 1 for the moment – which, if the self-build options are counted as low-cost, would almost meet the HNS numbers

Use the south site for the drainage issue and the net biodiversity gain and to retain the open aspect approach to the village, for the moment at least

BU noted that there may be people in the village who are more interested in DMS than social rented, but didn't realise that they may have this option when the HNS was carried out. However, more data on this should become via Devon Home Choice once the project becomes more public – and this is one of the reasons why the technical group want to keep the scheme as flexible as possible.

AS reported that the vast majority of the affordable housing schemes he has designed have a predominance of three-bedrooms houses to facilitate future-proofing. He also noted that the Church Commissioners will be expecting

something tangible at our next meeting with them, which he believes we can now deliver. His view is that we should make a decision, whilst accepting that not all may agree with it, submit the scheme to the community, explain the reasoning for it and ask for views. He believes that this is an opportunity to improve radically the day-to-day lives of younger local people in housing need.

JR asked that the provision of bungalows for those in later life who may want to down-size be seriously considered within the scheme.

NT recommended that we should be finding out from Planning what is possible and then take that to the community so that we don't risk first getting backing from the community for something which we later find is not possible to deliver.

JW expressed her appreciation that the Board was working together constructively at this meeting to come to a consensus. She remains convinced that we should not take a proposal to the community until we know in principle what the other stakeholders (Planning, the Church Commissioners, Homes England etc) think is possible. She noted that we seem to be getting held up on debates about numbers of houses/bedrooms and that we will need to go through lots of iterations and take the community on a journey through those iterations to get to a conclusion. She does not believe that the Church Commissioners will be overly concerned with the detail at the moment as their primary interest will be in delivering the Archbishop's vision.

AW welcomed the useful suggestion from SR and asked whether we should consider taking two options to the Church Commissioners. AS believes that one plan should be presented, although with the acknowledgement that it might not all happen, especially at the start of the project. AF suggested presenting the plan as a starting point for discussion. SC disagreed, believing that there is a risk involved in presenting the maximum potential to start with. BU expressed a concern that the Church Commissioners might still want to charge for the land by the unit.

RC noted the risk associated with the Church Commissioners because of their historical interest in only the north site in 2018. SR re-confirmed that his proposal is predicated on owning both north and south sites because, if we don't own the south site as well, someone else might buy it and build something much worse.

AF confirmed that, apart from RC, all agreed that we should aim to buy both sites for the benefit of the community.

GP recommended keeping the momentum going by taking a proposal to the Church Commissioners having already talked to the planners. He suggested submitting a plan for homes on the north site, albeit incumbent on owning the south site as well, and with options for development for the south site in the future. It was noted that the Church Commissioners could only charge an overage on future development if that was written into the initial agreement.

There were mixed views about how open we should be with the Church Commissioners, but it was noted that they had already seen some initial images with houses on the south site (the same as had been presented by AS to the Public Meeting in April) so they are likely to be expecting development there too. The Board was also reminded that the Church Commissioners have stated that best value does not necessarily mean best *monetary* value.

AF noted that we need to act with some haste to take advantage of the opportunity we have and proposed that:

- We establish the availability of the grant and how/when it must be used
- We let the Church Commissioners know that we are expecting a grant and ask to meet with them.
- We confirm that we would like to buy both sites
- We ask that the fees are included in the purchase price
- We tell them that the potential plan is to build on both sites and present what we think could be possible
- We let them know that initial discussions have been held with Planning
- We also let them know that we don't yet have community backing, with a meeting to be held as soon as practical.
- We then go to the village to update, engage and consult.

The majority of Directors (not including RC or SC) agreed that we should proceed in this way, probably via a Zoom meeting. As a final note, it was agreed that the way in which our case is presented and the language used in this meeting will be of vital importance, so great care and diplomacy will be needed.

## **Community Engagement – update/input from Community Engagement/Communications Group**

Dates for Public and General Meetings

Discussion on this item was deferred until a future meeting

### **The Exeter**

It was noted that a group of volunteers were making good progress towards a reopening of The Exeter.

### **Any Other Business – 5 November meeting**

AW reported that he had not yet heard back from Teign and asked whether we should start to look into the implications and ramifications of our becoming a registered provider. It was agreed that it would be helpful to know more about what this might entail.