

Meeting of Round Meadow Community Led Housing Project Steering Group – Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> June 2015.

I wish to make this statement at what is probably the last meeting of this Steering Group, and ask that a copy of this be attached to the minutes of this meeting.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge that representatives of Severnside Housing met with me on Monday this week, and it is right to report that the outstanding issues concerning drainage of the site, and landscaping of parts of the site were discussed, and an agreed way forward was reached. I would like to express my thanks to Severnside in working with me to achieve this outcome.

I would like to make a few comments on the progress this 'Community Led' project since the community first became aware of it in January 2012 with the visits by Wem Rural Parish Councillors to the individual households that make up the community in this part of the parish:

1. The very title 'Community Led' is a complete misnomer. It was not community led, it was led very much by Wem Rural Parish Council and Severnside Housing. To this end, it has been confirmed by Shropshire Council Housing Enabling Team that they encouraged Severnside to pursue this as a 'Community Led' Project, and the first approach by Severnside to the Parish Council made no mention of housing need, but was quick to highlight the financial incentives available to the Parish Council if they supported the project. I would ask Shropshire Council Housing Enabling Team to consider renaming its Community Led scheme to 'Parish Council and Developer Partnership Scheme' – this would more properly reflect what we as the community have seen happen with Round Meadow.

2. The formation of a Steering Group, and the setting of the Terms of Reference, was more about ticking the appropriate boxes to meet the criteria for the award of the grants to Severnside and Wem Rural Parish Council. One of those terms of reference included design of the project. Had this been fulfilled to the extent that it should have been, we would not be here 2 years down the line with disputes about site drainage etc. Consulting on some matters such as colour of roof tiles is really quite low down the list of priorities, when there are much more fundamental issues that impact on the community and the neighbours of the site. In hindsight, I would say that the decision to suspend Steering Group Meetings when it became known that Severnside were putting in their planning application was ill-founded, and was not conducive to a true 'Community Led' project. I would also question the appropriateness of the Parish Council representation on this Steering Group, given the personal interest of one Councillor, in development being allowed to the east of Wem level-crossing.

3. Shropshire Council Housing Enabling Team put forward detailed figures to demonstrate the supposed housing need in Wem Rural Parish, for Wem Rural Parish. We have yet to hear whether that need has been met by this project. Despite repeated requests, the community have been denied the answers as to whether occupation of the 23 properties has been by families and individuals with a local connection to Wem Rural Parish – the very reason for this project in the first place and a key aspect of the Exception Site status. Whilst I fully understand the terms of the confidentiality agreement signed by Wem Rural Parish Council, Severnside Housing, and Shropshire Council, I feel that Data Protection Act is being used as an excuse for avoiding reporting on the success or otherwise of this project. The community is not asking for disclosure of personal information gathered in the local connection assessment process. In order to respect and maintain the integrity of that confidentiality agreement, I would ask that the Shropshire Council Housing

Enabling Team report publicly, through this meeting and the Parish Council, on the number of applications registered on Shropshire Homepoint today, from persons within Wem Rural Parish seeking housing within Wem Rural Parish, and to show how this has changed since the figures previously provided by them to justify this development.

Whilst I realise that these comments may be perceived as negative, and critical of the partners involved in this project, I would hope that they will be viewed in the way they are intended, ~~and~~ that they may influence the way any similar projects are managed in the future.

Neil Robinson

25/6/2015