

Hexton Parish Housing Need Survey

September 2004

Conclusions

The housing need survey shows no evidence of a need for affordable housing to rent.

There is interest from the survey in market purchase or self build homes in the £70,000+ to £250,000+ price brackets. Others living in rented accommodation, although not considering that they needed to move now, said that would want to buy a home in Hexton on the open market if it were available at a price that they could afford.

The closest inexpensive housing to Hexton is probably in Hitchin, Luton or elsewhere in Bedfordshire.

Hexton is an unusual parish, both in its small size and in the proportion of privately rented and tied accommodation it contains. Due to the small size of the parish and the small numbers responding to the survey it is not believed that the survey alone is conclusive. Many of those returning questionnaires indicated a belief that there was a need for certain types of housing within the Parish. This included several people saying that there was a need for housing for young families. Another of these suggestions is to build 2 or 3 elderly person bungalows to free up larger homes at present occupied by only one person. However, no one in this situation completed the need questionnaire as needing to move, although there was some evidence of older or people with a disability living in houses where a bungalow may be easier for them to manage.

The extent of this survey does not examine private rented housing in any detail. It is not known how private rents in Hexton compare with rentals that a housing association would charge for similar, but newly built property. The size, level of adaptation for disability and allocation policy of the private landlord is not known. Nor is it known whether there are households living in unsuitable accommodation in privately rented or tied housing due, for example, to their age, infirmity or family size. This could be explored further, but only with the consent and co-operation of the private landlord.

Some comments from the survey (as for the recent Offley and other surveys in Hertfordshire) indicate that some people would wish to build for a family member in their gardens or on land that they own. One district council (outside Hertfordshire) has introduced a policy of allowing this as an exception to normal planning policy provided that the family member is in need. Once there is no family member in need the property reverts to a named registered social landlord and is available for others in need in the local community. East Herts District

Council has also been looking at such a policy during its Local Plan consultations and it is suggested that North Herts District Council investigate the likely effect of introducing such a policy as part of the next local plan review or Local Development Framework.

Due to the small numbers involved and the lack of evidence of need for rented homes, affordable housing in Hexton is not a priority.

Recommendations

If the private landlord consents, CDA to investigate further rental levels, stock types sizes and allocation policies and perhaps needs of elderly residents in Hexton with a view to re examining the conclusions drawn from this survey.

For NHDC to investigate the status of self build schemes (which are now better understood and increasing in popularity, perhaps due to several TV series focussing on self-builders) in relation to rural housing exception policies. For example what requirements would there be for a self-build scheme to qualify – what size or income level restrictions would there be? Once planning policies in relation to self build are known it will be possible to consider such schemes where a number of residents show an interest in them.

For NHDC, during the next local plan review, to consider whether building affordable housing for relatives could be brought under rural exception policies, subject to suitable caveats that any such homes would be used by the wider community when there was no longer a relative in genuine need.

That, on the basis of the survey as completed, Hexton is not a priority for investment in affordable housing.