



PROBUS PARISH COUNCIL

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Cllr Olly Monk
Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning
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Mr Sam Irving
Head of Housing Development & Delivery
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Dear Cllr Olly Monk & Mr Sam Irving

Housing development – affordable housing scheme
Land North of Parkengear, Probus. PA19/09344 and PA21/00353

During 2018/19 before the development of 95 new homes at Tregony View, Probus, was completed, Wain Homes Ltd, along with a number of housing developers, were approached by the Head of Housing Delivery and Development as part of a search for developable land for affordable housing schemes.

Wain Homes Ltd, was approached as it held an “option” on Land North of Parkengear, Probus. Following these initial discussions Wain Homes Ltd began preparing a planning application for 55 houses on the land north of Parkengear, Probus.

Prior to being approached by Cornwall Council, Wain Homes Ltd were not pursuing any further housing development at this site and had received a negative response to a request for pre-planning application advice.

The decision to prepare a planning application had been influenced by Cornwall Council’s declared aspiration of taking ownership of all 55 houses, once completed, and to be offered as

a 100% affordable housing development scheme. No contractual agreement was prepared nor drafted at this time for the purchase of any completed development.

In August 2019 probus parish council, in conjunction with the elected divisional member at the time, Cllr Egerton, pressed for a meeting with Cornwall Council housing dept & planning dept to discuss the proposals for further housing development and any associated S 106 requirements.

The aim of the meeting was to ensure that “community engagement” and “transparency” were established and built into the development process at an early stage. This was seen as particularly important given Cornwall Council’s aspiration for owning the completed development

A meeting was agreed and held on 6th August. It was attended by Peter Crawford & Jamie Grant from Wain Homes Ltd, Sam Irving, Peter Bainbridge. (planning & development), Cllr Egerton, Cllr Andrew Mitchell (portfolio holder for housing), Amanda Kendall (clerk) and Cllr Nicholas Gillard from probus parish council.

The outcome of the meeting included the preparation of a set of likely Q & A s which would be relevant to a pre-application community engagement (PACE) event ahead of submitting an outline planning application for 55 houses on Land North of Parkengear, Probus. It was discussed and understood at this meeting that any planning application would be prepared based on the section 8 requirement for the appropriate percentage of affordable dwellings within a scheme of 55 houses.

After the meeting there was a follow up exchange of e mails & communication with Sam Irving & his staff to complete the likely Q & A’s. To the best of our knowledge the people attending the meeting were copied into the ensuing exchange of e mails.

The PACE event in respect of this proposed development was arranged for 19th Sept and publicised by Cornwall Council and the parish council. Cllr Egerton also publicised the event in his own right as the elected divisional member. The flier/leaflet he produced made specific reference to Cornwall council’s intention/plan/aspiration for the completed development to be 100% affordable housing.

The meeting was held in Probus Village Hall and was chaired by Cllr Jackie Bull (at that time Cllr Bull was also Chair of the Central Sub-Area Planning Committee). Also in attendance were:

- Cllr Fred Greenslade
- Cllr Andrew Mitchell
- Cllr Bob Egerton
- Peter Bainbridge (planning & development)
- Sam Irving (housing development & delivery)
- Jamie Grant + 2 colleagues (Wain Homes Ltd)
- Probus Parish Cllrs

The meeting was well attended by 70-80 local residents. Several of the expected questions, addressed in the Q & A sheet were asked. It was clearly communicated that there was an intention on behalf of Cornwall Council through its recently established Housing Provider (Treveth Holdings LLP) to purchase all 55 of the proposed dwellings as part of its housing development programme. Reservations about the scheme were expressed by local residents, including a lack of trust in Wain Homes Ltd and in Cornwall Council. These reservations were based on local experience of the development of 95 dwellings at Tregony View. The meeting is a matter of record. And a good account is included in the Nov 2019 issue of Probus News.

The application for outline planning permission was submitted and then validated on 8th Nov 2019. Sam Irving was invited to a parish council planning committee meeting on 20th Jan 2020. The purpose in attending was to provide an update on continuing discussions with Wain Homes Ltd on the design and specification for the proposed dwellings and to explain that Cornwall Council was able to access additional Govt funding which could be used in support of such a scheme and to increase the percentage of affordable housing to be achieved within the planning application for the Land North of Parkengear, Probus, as part of its housing development & delivery programme.

In February 2020 at its Cabinet meeting on 12-2-20 Cornwall Council resolved: That authority be delegated to the Strategic Director for Economic Growth and Development (in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Homes, the Section 151 Officer, and the Monitoring Officer) to acquire the following homes (as described in exempt appendices 5, 6 and 7) within the Housing Revenue Account, subject to satisfactory completion of all due diligence:

- 55 homes in Probus;
- 67 homes in Launceston;
- 55 homes in Padstow

In March 2020 the application PA19/09344 was discussed at the central sub-area planning committee meeting. At the meeting, Cllr Egerton reported that “the scheme was supported by Probus Parish Council and there were no objections to the proposal”. Cllr Egerton also advised that “if approved Cornwall Housing were in discussions with the applicant regarding the purchase of the whole site which would lead to a 100% affordable housing scheme”. The Affordable Housing Officer (in attendance) confirmed that “CC was in discussion with the applicant regarding purchase of the whole site resulting in 100% affordable housing scheme, based on 50% social rented and 50% shared ownership”.

The application was supported with conditions including completion of a Section 106 Obligation. After a delay and an extension of time PA19/09344 was approved on 5th Nov 2020.

It would seem that the process of engagement and communication over progress with this scheme started to unravel in the period between March 2020 and Nov 2020 when requests for engagement in the process of completing the Section 106 process fell on deaf ears.

A reserve matters application PA21/00353 was submitted in Jan 2021 and validated on 26th Jan 2021. Probus parish council considered the application, reviewed plans, and made comments on the design proposals etc during this period. However, the parish council was neither privy to nor informed of the timescale which Cornwall Council had to meet in submitting its application for grant funding support towards the affordable housing element of this development.

The parish council was not provided with a progress report nor update on discussions between Cornwall council and Wain Homes Ltd on the specification required to inform Cornwall Council's application for grant funding and the intended purchase of the completed development. It was not made clear that an "approved, reserve matters, planning consent" was necessary as part of the application for grant funding.

If this was necessary, then it must have been clear in March 2021 that this could not be achieved in good time. Those parties involved in the planning and engagement process should have been informed of this and of the fact that the development could only proceed with planning consent in keeping with the level of affordable housing being limited to 17/55 in accordance with planning policy 8.

In the period from March 2021 to Jun/July 2021 Cornwall Council confirmed with Wain Homes Ltd, its requirements for sprinkler fire detection systems in each dwelling; air source heat pumps and a minimum number of electric vehicle charging points on site.

The timing of these issues coming to light, and their achievability, were beyond the deadline date for the grant submission.

Without any further engagement nor communication at a local level, planning approval for the reserve matters application was achieved on 11th June 2021.

The delays resulting in failure to secure grant funding by Cornwall Council in respect of its declared proposal to acquire this completed development for a 100% affordable housing were neither shared with nor explained. The declared scheme was essentially ditched at that time. To make matters worse, the decision not to pursue this project did not come to light at a local level until some 4 months later. Enquiries and requests, from the current elected divisional member and from parish Cllrs, for information and an explanation remained unanswered until Dec 2021 when Cllr Karen Glasson confirmed the Council's decision not proceed with this scheme. Further questions were put to elected members and officers and the parish council received a verbal and written update from Cllr Karen Glasson on 20th April 2022

It is lamentable, and it appears as disrespectful, that the council officers and elected members involved in promoting & pursuing this project for achieving a significant increase in affordable housing for Cornwall, saw fit not to communicate at that time with its local government representatives within the parish of the proposed development about the failure to take this forward. A timely explanation directly to the parish council of how and why this occurred was not communicated and remains outstanding.

Engaging, communicating with, and involving local people and their representatives in strategies and plans for changes in their local communities is important. Economy, efficiency, and effectiveness are all important attributes of a successful organisation, and so is managing its reputation.

This overall process has been unsatisfactory and served only to damage the reputations of Cornwall Council and by association, Probus Parish Council and Wain Homes Ltd.

In terms of public confidence and trust in the council's work through greater levels of transparency and accountability, the residents of Probus deserved better. Instead, the elected members and officers of Cornwall Council, on the face of it, neither demonstrated the proper levels of transparency and accountability nor followed through with good practice when engaging and communicating with the local community in pursuing this scheme.

It isn't possible to wind back time. It is important to learn from experience and put measures in place to improve on policy and practice. With this in mind, the parish council would like to invite you to a closed meeting as an opportunity for us to listen and hear about your experience of why this scheme did not succeed and to share with you our hopes and expectations about improvements for engaging and communicating with local communities in future.

I have discussed this proposal with Cllr Karen Glasson (Probus & St Erme). Cllr Glasson has kindly offered to liaise with you to identify a suitable date and time for a meeting with Probus parish councillors.

Yours sincerely

Cllr William Sutherland
Chairman
Probus Parish Council

Cfi by e mail
Tracie Langley Chief Operating Officer
Cllr Linda Taylor, Leader of the Council
Cllr Andrew Mitchell St Ives West & Towednack
Cllr Karen Glasson Probus & St Erme