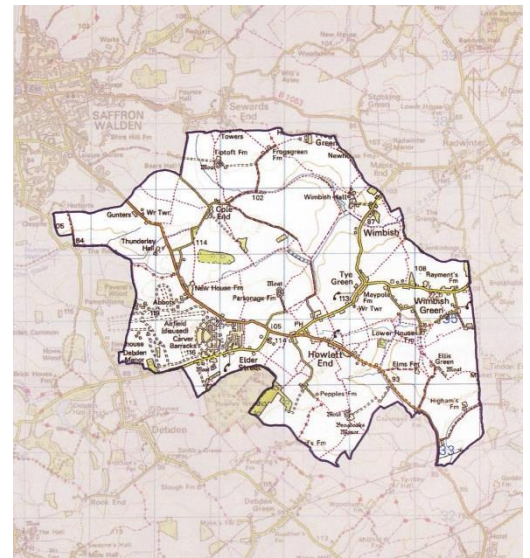


Affordable Housing

A case study of Wimbish, Essex

Wimbish is a parish comprising several small settlements including Tye Green, Howlett End, Wimbish Green and Elder Street in a rural part of the Uttlesford district of Essex, near to the town of Saffron Walden. With an estimated population of 1650 people spread across these settlements, as well as smaller hamlets and isolated properties, it is a typical rural area with many small businesses and a few light industrial units, as well as a primary school, a church and a public house.



In the 1990s as local house prices continued to climb, the Parish Council decided to work with RCCE to conduct a housing needs survey and the result paved the way for English Rural Housing to bring forward a six property development in 1996. Four of these units were sold on a shared ownership basis (i.e. part buy, part rent) and two were available for local people to rent.

Ten years later the Parish Council decided to renew the survey to see if there were still people in the parish who were in need of affordable housing. Again, working with RCCE, a survey was commissioned and the result showed a need for 14 affordable properties (10 for rental and 4 for shared ownership). This time the council took the bold step of specifying a Passivhaus standard for the new housing development which was completed by Hastoe Housing Association in 2011.

The Passivhaus standard was developed in Germany in the early 1990s for a super-efficient insulated building, where thermal comfort can be achieved by post-heating or post-cooling of the fresh air mass without the need for additional recirculation of air. By making a building far more airtight a traditional heating system is no longer considered essential.



This was the first rural affordable housing scheme in the UK to be built to Passivhaus specifications. An independent study assessing the first 5 years of this development concluded that the Passivhaus approach continues to deliver. Overall, the homes are performing largely as designed and provide the occupants, none of whom had particular prior interest in sustainability or energy efficiency, with homes that they find economic to run, healthy to live in and very comfortable and spacious for the size. Some residents stated that their heating bills were only £30 per quarter.

Because the demand for these affordable houses was so high, another survey with RCCE was sent out in 2013 and the results showed that there was still a need for affordable housing. The low running costs and specifications of the previous scheme were still popular so the council decided to repeat the Passivhaus criteria and use the remainder of the land that had not been used in the first development.



A further 8 Passivhaus standard affordable units were completed by Hastoe in 2016 along with 3 open market properties which were necessary to cross-subsidise the development.

Over time tenants and part owners have sometimes moved away, but such has been the local demand that every single time a property has become available it has always gone to someone with a connection to the village. This has been verified by the records kept by the two housing associations.

Summary

In many ways Wimbish is a typical rural community where local people have been squeezed out of the housing market by rising costs. However it is far from typical in the way that the Parish Council has sought to address this issue and continued to do so for the past 21 years. By working with the Rural Housing Enabler at the Rural Community Council for Essex (RCCE) the council has been able to make use of independent and professional surveying methods to gather data. The reports have shown the needs of residents whilst retaining their anonymity and enabled the council to work with housing associations to deliver an exceptionally high standard of housing for local people.

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