

# MARK COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

## Newsletter - May 2017

During late April and May the new board have been busy researching potential new funding streams and following up on new land enquiries. Many new members have joined and the membership now totals 171. Two members have withdrawn their membership.

As promised in our last newsletter, at the beginning of the month directors had a very productive meeting with Duncan Harvey and Esther Carter from the affordable housing team at Sedgemoor District Council.

They are extremely keen to work with the new board and the Parish Council to find a solution to the affordable housing situation in Mark. Although they support the current South West Housing Society (SWHS) application, they are concerned about the lack of community buy in and engagement regarding the Northwick Rd site and have been careful not to comment on the sites suitability in their report.

Should the SWHS application not be successful then the opportunity still exists for the grant they are receiving from Sedgemoor of £240,000 to be used by the MCLT on any future site that may come forward. There is also a pot of money that the Trust could bid into to undertake feasibility work.

Duncan and Esther are in the process of updating the Affordable Needs Housing Survey for Mark as it is 3 years out of date. They suggested that members write to Cllr Gilling c/o Sedgemoor District Council to express concern about the anomalies that exist in the current Home Finder system, that results in Mark residents in need of rented accommodation not getting first option on vacant council house stock that already exists in the village.

The board have also asked to meet with SWHS on a number of occasions to see how we can work with them to deliver affordable housing via the proper vehicle, Mark Community Land Trust. This meeting has not been forthcoming which is very disappointing. After seeking legal advice we have also asked South West Housing to remove the previous boards consultation from their current planning application. Not only is it flawed, the copyright is vested with Mark Community Land Trust and should not be used in any way shape or form without our permission.

The board continue to believe, as do the majority of members that the SWHS scheme is premature both in respect of the consideration of other sites but also coming in advance of the emerging Local Plan. Put simply it has not been proven that Northwick Rd is the only and most acceptable site for affordable housing in Mark and we feel that it should either be refused consent or not be determined until the proper processes of consultation and assessment of site options has been properly undertaken. We will call a members meeting after the SWHS planning decision has been made to determine the future of the Trust.