

## **Response to Stroud District Council re Proposal for Future of Swedish Houses**

**This response has been prepared by Stinchcombe Parish Council following a residents open meeting on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2024.**

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 The open meeting, attended by 24 Parishioners, was held to gather the views of the community in response to the proposals put forward by Stroud District Council in respect of the Swedish Houses. SDC are looking into the opportunity to develop the site consisting of house numbers 1 - 3 with a preference to develop the wider site of 1 – 4. Numbers 1-3 are owned by SDC with number 4 being privately owned. The houses are the only Swedish timber buildings in the village and have existed for around 75 years.

1.2 House numbers 1 and 2 are long term rental voids awaiting either major refurbishment or redevelopment. Number 3 is currently rented. The current homes perform poorly with regard to energy efficiency and general repair and SDC Tenant Services anticipate high expenditure to bring them up to a good standard. This has led to the site being proposed as a potential development opportunity.

1.3 It should be noted that previous applications to overclad the houses were rejected and that the prefabricated wooden homes have distinctive vertical timber plank facades. This was after the heritage body “The Twentieth Century Society” wrote to the council warning a 'substantial harmful impact' on the appearance of the houses from the proposed plans (2018).

### **2. Proposals put forward by SDC**

The proposals most recently put forward are:

**2.1 Option 1** - Explore the opportunity to purchase Number 4 and then redevelop the whole site, which would allow for circa 15 new homes to be built. This would also require SDC to source suitable alternative accommodation for the tenant of Number 3, either permanently or until the new homes are completed, at which point they would be offered the opportunity to return to one of the new homes.

**2.2 Option 2** – Redevelop the smaller site consisting of numbers 1 and 2 which would allow for circa 6 new homes to be built and would allow the resident of Number 3 to remain in their property, although due to the condition of the SDC properties, considerable further renovation works to Number 3 would be anticipated in the near future. It would also mean that the owner of Number 4 would not be disturbed.

The Parish Council understands that, subsequent to the Open Meeting, Option 1 is the preferred route that SDC wish to explore.

### **3.0 Meeting Feedback - Specific Points**

The following points were raised at the meeting by way of feedback from residents who rejected both option 1 and 2:

3.1 The owner of No 4 is unwilling to sell and would only do so if offered comparable alternative accommodation which has as yet not been forthcoming.

3.2 SDC do not seem to understand the structure of the houses as it is not clear that the proposals so far suggested take into account the recent plans to re-clad the outsides with regard to the timber finish.

3.3 The utility services for all four houses are shared and deliver at the rear of the properties.

3.4 The houses are solidly built and although only planned to last for 50 years, their lifespan can clearly be extended as evidenced by the works undertaken by the owner of No 4. It is understood that whilst this would be costly, it would be cheaper than redevelopment and would allow properties to be upgraded and conform to modern standards.

3.5 There was a recent rejection by SDC to the suggestion that House No's 1 & 2 be used to house refugees. The rejection grounds were that it would be uneconomical to bring the houses up to a suitable standard in spite of the fact that a private development company offered to carry out the work free of charge in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

3.6 Resident feedback supported the need for any new housing on the site to be low-cost social housing; it was noted that small numbers of social housing are not economical.

3.7 With no plans to improve the local infrastructure with additional schools, doctors' surgeries or transport provision, residents expressed concern about increased pressure on existing services.

3.8 Additional traffic would cause further problems on a road where there are already concerns regarding speed. Vehicular access into and out of the site, if required, is close to a bend towards the top of The Avenue and would be dangerous particularly as recent local surveys have shown cars travel well in excess of the speed limit up the hill.

3.9 The site is steep and water run-off is already a problem which would be likely to be exacerbated by additional building.

3.10 Environmental factors may need to be considered as the garden of No 4 has been designated as a prime habitat for great crested newts though there are none there at present.

3.11 The Swedish Houses have become a landmark of special historic interest to residents and visitors and an integral part of the historic heritage of the village.

#### **4.0 Feedback Summary**

4.1 There was agreement that there is a need for social housing in the area.

4.2 The two Options proposed in the SDC outline proposal were not supported as it was the strongly held view of the meeting that the housing density proposed was entirely unacceptable and impractical for the site and location as well as insensitive to the local environment, character and historical context of the village as well as inappropriate for local services creating danger for traffic and pedestrians.

4.3 The general feeling of the meeting was in favour of upgrading the existing buildings but in the event that this is not practical or economically feasible, then replacement with houses of the same design in order to maintain the status quo is favoured.

4.4 Deep suspicion was expressed regarding any statement of intent that redevelopment would respect the history of the original homes.