

National Forest Land Scheme

Evaluation Panel Report and Comments

Applicant: Highland Small Communities Housing Trust
Land: 0.3 hectares of land adjacent to Farr Bay House, Bettyhill
Purpose: Land for Affordable Housing

Recommendation

The Panel unanimously recommended approval of the application for two fully serviced plots.

Background

Malcolm Wield informed the Panel that extensive discussions between HSCHT, the Community Council and FCS over this site have been going on since 2001.

Young families in the area find it hard to afford properties due to the very high prices in the area and a number have moved away from the locality.

No affordable housing has been built in Bettyhill since 1990.

It is proposed to sell two fully serviced plots on this site with detailed planning permission to applicants eligible for Rural Home Ownership Grants.

Plans submitted to the planning department show suitable house types.

The Trust held a housing needs surgery in 2006, which identified 4 households with a housing need.

In The Highland Council's Local Housing Strategy, Bettyhill is identified as a priority area for affordable housing development. THC's current waiting list shows 7 applicants giving Bettyhill as their first preference for accommodation.

Albyn Housing Society has 26 applicants on their waiting list for the locality.

HSCHT will strongly recommend that timber and woodfuel is utilised by purchasers.

Local sourcing of timber is recommended, timber frame is considered most likely and timber cladding is shown on the house plans used for planning permission.

The Community Council are very supportive and a community surgery has also indicated strong support.

The properties will have the Trust's Rural Housing Burden attached to ensure the housing perpetually stays in the affordable housing market.

Key Issues

1. The land has been decrofted.
2. The District Valuation is £18,000.
3. This is the only area of land remaining in FCS ownership in Bettyhill.
4. There is no competing interest in the land, although at one time the FCS neighbour did express an interest.
5. FCS staff are supportive of the proposed sale.
6. The site is very accessible and feasible for housing.

Criteria under the National Forest Land Scheme

1. Change of land use to affordable housing

The panel was entirely happy that the site should be used for affordable housing. The site was a difficult one with hard rock outcrops and wet flushes between, but was adjacent to other houses and all services were close to hand.

2. Maximum appropriate use of timber/timber products and woodfuel

Outline plans indicated a suitable house design with wood cladding. There was evidence of a willingness to maximise the use of timber and woodfuel heating from the Trust and interest had been expressed by potential occupiers.

The Panel understood that it was not possible to guarantee that timber would be adopted to the maximum extent when detailed planning permission was obtained but felt that the goodwill being expressed was supportable.

3. Assessment of local need

Good evidence had been presented that showed the local need was acute.

4. Evidence of community consultation

A site visit by Jon Hollingdale and Malcolm Wield had confirmed that community consultation was extensive and long standing. The Community Council had given a very strong endorsement to the proposal.

5. Retention of housing in the affordable sector

The proposed Rural Housing Burden would ensure this requirement.