

## **Pawlett Q & A session. Monday 16<sup>th</sup> January**

All questions are reproduced as received

Questions have been grouped for ease as reference as duplication of questions and answers has inevitably occurred as they were drawn from several sources

Answers provided by Esther Carter, Sedgemoor DC, are shown in red

Answers provided by either Matthew Crucefix or Michelle Newman, Stonewater, are shown in blue

Answers subsequently provided to the Parish Council after the meeting are shown in green

**How much influence or what are the procedures that Sedgemoor housing employ on the application of people for new houses?**

The process of applying is through Homefinder Somerset. This is a county wide register covering five Somerset district authorities. There are various bands that applicants are assed at

- 1) Emergency- require urgent housing due to be classified as being vulnerable
- 2) Gold – high housing need
- 3) Silver- medium housing need
- 4) Bronze – low housing need

More information on the banding and application process can be found on [www.homefindersomerset.co.uk](http://www.homefindersomerset.co.uk)

**Those seeking rented accommodation in Pawlett.**

**It would appear, for various reasons, that those already residing in Pawlett, who were seeking fairly urgent rented accommodation at Springfield Close, found their dealings with Stonewater/SDC to be less than ‘satisfactory’! ‘They’ appear to have been kept ‘dangling’- constantly receiving no news when they made enquiry upon enquiry upon enquiry. This amounted to nothing less than ‘mental cruelty’.**

**Q. Would it be permissible to ask whether SDC has been satisfied with their dealings with Stonewater??**

**Q. Have lessons been learned with the processing of Applications in conjunction with Housing Associations**

Lessons have been learnt. The whole process is complicated as it runs over five authorities and although the properties in Pawlett were advertised on Homefinder Somerset with the s106 requirements, anyone could place a bid on these properties and then the applications were filtered whilst being processed

The document handed out shows the volume of bidding experienced on these properties – some properties had up to 125 bids placed on them and people could bid on as many units as they wished. Stonewater had no intention to delay the allocation process but processing the bids takes time – the bids are processed in order and each has to be processed to resolution before the next bid down the list can be worked on. There is no 'filter' on applications on Homefinder so bids have to be processed thoroughly. S106 'local connection' has many levels starting with those currently living in Pawlett...the claims of local connection have to be verified one bid at a time. These verifications take time and it was Stonewater's intention to carry out the process with thoroughness and transparency

**Pawlett is 1 of 17 identified Key Rural Settlements outside Bridgwater and the Market Towns of the District**

In the Supporting Information of a recent Planning Application currently being considered, it is stated that "there is a requirement for a total of 664 homes to be provided in Key Rural Settlements during 2010 – 2027 to meet the housing need".....

**Q. Could Ms Carter let us know, at this stage, what percentage of those homes are likely to be in Pawlett?**

**What are the building plans for Pawlett in the foreseeable future?**

There is no set % for development, each village is different. The new Local Plan for Sedgemoor is anticipated to be in place soon to take the district to 2032. Pawlett is classified as a tier 3 settlement in this plan and the new policy is similar to the policy already in place. There is a requirement for Sedgemoor publicly to identify potential sites for development – as demonstrated in the map distributed at the meeting (and available on line) some sites in the parish have already been assessed and rejected as being unsuitable for development

**These days we have to work with total openness and transparency in our council dealings. Taking into account the data protection act, we felt that Stonewater played their cards very close to their chests, with very little information forthcoming. Why is / was that?**

**Why has the treatment that has been given to some of the affordable housing applicants, by both Sedgemoor D.C. and 'Stonewater' been so bad? Note: 'chapter and verse' of reported incidents can be provided on this.**

**What criteria was applied in both sets of the selection? Note: Presumably it would be different between the sets.**

**Why is Sedgemoor D.C. and 'Stonewater' speaking only now to the village?**

**Note: house keys are to be issued shortly.**

The process takes time each bid has to be pursued to completion before, if it is not successful, moving on to the next bid down on the list. Often what was claimed to be a local connection was deemed to be too distant (ie not an immediate relative that had a connection to Pawlett but one several generations away)

A meeting was recently held on how to improve the process in the future

**When allocating homes Stonewater seemed to keep people in limbo for a long time. Why was that as this is people's lives you are dealing with?**

It takes time to verify and check applicants qualifications. It is not ideal to give such short notice to applicants that were successful in their bid but if problems had been caused by the timescale, Stonewater would have been willing to delay handover to accommodate this to ensure that no one missed out. There was no intention to cause delay

**The PC championed several families that had been told they did not qualify for a home. We questioned how can that be as they filled most, if not all, the criteria. Subsequently 3 families were allocated a home. How did this happen and appear to fall through the systems safety net?**

Unwilling to discuss individual cases in public but if details could be provided then those cases would be looked into

**Stonewater asked for and held an open day at the Pawlett Pavilion. You turned up with no information, details or costings. Why did that happen?**

**The target with gold, silver etc only confused people who were expecting section 106 details.**

Have to admit to errors at the Pavilion presentation and expressed their apologies. The event was intended to promote the shared ownership properties but the sales information was not ready in time.

The gold, silver and bronze bandings mirrored those found on Homefinder Somerset – to be able to place a bid an individual must firstly be registered with Homefinder Somerset and be on the housing waiting list. The s106 criteria were applied but also

other factors have to be taken into account such as the likelihood of being able to sustain rent payments and previous tenant history in other properties. The event's purpose was to promote that applicants needed to be registered on Homefinder in order to be able to bid on the properties once they were released.

If another event is held in the future, Stonewater appreciates that more literature and information could be provided

**If you have so many building projects around the country, why do you have such a small team dealing with allocations? This was the excuse given when the PC chairman spoke with your office.**

2 people were assigned to this development, 1 full time and 1 joined at the checking stage. Parts of the process are more labour intensive than others and at that point more help was assigned to the process.

During the Pawlett development allocation process it was unfortunate that Stonewater was undergoing significant internal changes and so apologies if members of the public experienced difficulties in contacting team members

**How many people with bona fide links to Pawlett applied to either rent or part purchase/rent one of the new houses and, of these, how many were offered a home? Of those offered a home how many took up the option?**

Everybody who was offered a rental unit took up the offer. 11 properties had the s106 applied to them but additional properties were also let to people with a local connection

Currently 3 of the shared ownership properties have been allocated to locally connected people – none of these properties were subject to the s106

**When is the expected completion date for the 'path to nowhere'?**

No definitive answer could be provided at the meeting

With regard to the footpath, Stonewater is in the process of getting a detailed update on this, unfortunately there isn't a simple, quick or cost effective design solution for the path, Stonewater are seeking further advice from RG Spiller.

**Parking allocations – could each space in the development be numbered to identify which house it belongs to?**

Yes, it will be done

RG Spiller have been instructed to carry out the car parking numbering, this should now be in hand.

**I am concerned that the allocation of homes has not conformed to the 106. Parishoners who applied have not been allocated a home even though they meet more than 1 of the bulleseye targets. And preference has been given to outsiders with a tenuous link. Will all questions be answered or will you adopt a more selective approach?**

**How many of the affordable houses have been allocated to Pawlett & Stretcholt residents out of the twelve, which I understand was initially set for the Parish in the 106 agreement? - Note this does not mean the allocations to people with 'some connection' to the village, which was the initial question asked on line.**

**How many of the eight shared ownership houses, if any, have also been allocated to Pawlett parish residents? - The same note as above applies.**

**Are names or at least originator locations (e.g. Bridgwater, Highbridge) of the successful applicants going to be disclosed, for both sets of the housing?**

11 rental properties were subject to the s106. Out of 19 rental properties, 15 have been offered to tenants with an immediate local connection as defined by the s106

3 shared ownership properties have been offered to those with an immediate local connection (although these properties were not subject to s106), 3 to people with a connection to local towns and villages and 1 is as yet un-allocated

Transparent process was adhered to, as explained in answers to previous questions

**Looking at full rental properties only what is the rent per month of the various sized homes on offer by Stonewater and the rent of similar homes available from SDC in this area?**

**Ten of the shared ownership houses are being offered to 'all takers' currently on 'Right Move', with 125 year leases and certain criteria. Is this normal practice and the same criteria?**

Rental figures were not to hand for the meeting but typically affordable rent (such as in Pawlett) is at 80% of open market value and includes the service charge. Social rent (local council housing) is typically at 60% of open market value but does not

include a service charge. A professional valuation is obtained on the properties to establish open market value for each property

To explain the different affordable housing rents as discussed at the Q & A session see the table below:

Social Rent	Affordable Rent	Local housing allowance
Social rent is provided by Council or Registered Housing Providers (Housing Association). The rent level is subject to a national rent regime as set by the Government. Social Rents do not include any additional service charges associated with the property. Social Rents might typically equate to circa 60% of the prevailing value of a similar property in the private sector	Affordable rent is more expensive than Social Rent and is provided by Registered Housing Providers (Housing Association). The rent level is not subject to a national rent regime as set by the Government. Affordable rents include any additional service charges associated with the property. Affordable rents might typically equate to circa 80% of the prevailing value of similar property in the private sector	The Local housing allowance is used to calculate how much housing benefit you would receive if you rent your home from a private landlord. The maximum amount of Housing Benefit received will be set by the Rent Officer. The maximum amount received will be the same for every same-size household in the area you live in, no matter what differences there are in the actual rent paid.

Springfield Close rents are Affordable Rents typically charged at the rates below:

	1 bed per calendar month	2 bed per calendar month	3 bed per calendar month	4 bed per calendar month
Springfield Close	£390	£537	£578	£698

**Was any thought given to the idea of having a Parish Councillor present as an observer when housing allocations were being made? A councillor would also have been useful in answering any queries raised whilst considering the applications. If this idea was not considered, why not ! Decisions behind closed doors should be a thing of the past!!**

The application forms contain a lot of personal data that it would not have been permissible to allow access to. Additionally, as applications were not considered in a

block but, as explained earlier, one application was fully investigated before moving onto the next of criteria were not fulfilled it would not have been practical to have an observer present at all times

**As two applicants appear to have failed to be allocated a house after indicating mobility problems whilst meeting all other criteria, should not some thought have been given to this possibility at planning stage and at least a couple of houses been built with walk in showers?**

When the housing needs survey was carried out prior to the development being commenced the need for those with mobility issues was not identified and so the houses were built to standard construction