

Trustees' report, 4 February 2013

1. The Trustees met briefly after the end of the AGM on 8 January and elected Roger Cornwell to the chair, with Simon Squires as Treasurer and Ruth Chambers as Secretary.
2. The Trustees accepted an offer from Jean Rogers to continue to take the minutes of the general meetings.
3. The paperwork to register CCP as a Charity with HMRC has been completed and sent off.
4. Ruth has written to the County Council Leader and Chief Executive, because we had noticed that properties in the new Byland Lodge development were being let to students. In her letter she drew attention to statements made when the Planning Application was being considered, in particular "DVRC will attempt to ensure that the new properties are sold to people who will move to the development, and will actively discourage purchase by investors"
5. She has received a reply from Sarah Robinson, the Head of Economic Development and Housing at the Council. The key parts of this two-page letter are:

I must advise that whilst Durham County Council was aware during the planning process of Crossgate Community Partnership's concerns regarding the percentage of student housing in the area, it is not possible to impose a restriction within the planning approval that the homes are used only for owner occupation. There were also no restrictions contained within the land disposal from Durham County Council to Keepmoat Homes.

The majority of accommodation that has been provided is three bedroom homes, which are being offered at prices that may deter investors (around £250,000). Nevertheless, there has been some investor interest and we are aware that one three bedroom house (plot 11) has an advert stating that the house is available to students. Keepmoat/Durham Villages Regeneration Company (DVRC) has so far sold 17 homes (12 to owner occupiers (including 3 first time buyers) and 5 to investors). The level of interest in private renting is significantly less than the surrounding area.

Having discussed the matter with Keepmoat Homes, they have assured me that they have not encouraged larger scale 'investor deals' nor have they marketed the scheme to prospective investors. They have however, been prepared to negotiate 'one off' sales to investors.

Keepmoat Homes undertook in their statement accompanying the planning application in 2008 "to ensure that the new properties are sold to people who will move to the development and on the whole I think they have done this. The housing market has changed considerably since 2008 and whilst the original aims have been largely adhered to, in reality all developers are struggling to maintain viability and this scheme is no different.

Should plot 11 become a student home and/or a house in multi occupation then it may be licensable by Environmental Health (if it is occupied by 5 or more persons) under the mandatory licensing scheme. Even if there are less than 5 persons, the house would still have to comply with general environmental health standards.

The development at Byland Court shows to be predominantly owner occupier properties and Keepmoat Homes have assured me that they will continue to pursue sales to owner occupiers as far as is possible within current market conditions.