

EXMOOR YOUNG VOICES

Spring Meeting 2018

Wheddon Cross, Rest and Be Thankful

Sponsors and Supporters: see end of Notes

Present: 17 Members of EYV

Will Lock, Chair, opening the meeting briefly outlined the origins and purposes of EYV - to create and support opportunities for young people who wish to continue living and working in Exmoor National Park - concluding with an optimistic view of progress and influence so far.

Jade Evans, EYV's new Young Coordinator, introduced herself, describing her role as a link between young adults and relevant bodies. She wants to offer support to members where possible and has been researching self-build issues. She will follow up points raised at this meeting and circulate links and contacts.

EYV Members attending included:

- A local young shopkeeper in Porlock, hand made goods, teaching; would love to live in Porlock but financially out of the question
- A young teacher in Barnstaple, who lives in South Molton, with many Exmoor pupils
- A young farmer, married, one child; works in social media management, looking for ways to diversify
- A young shepherd interested in self-build
- A young worker at Hinkley; co-ordinator for Pastures for Life
- The young Exmoor Hill Farming Networker who has 100 next generation farmers on a data base; keen to support EYV
- A young resident of Timberscombe; aged 28 and still living at home; commutes 45 mins for work
- An Exmoor young couple, who both work at Hinkley, tried to buy an old Exmoor school but were blocked by policies, despite owner desperate to sell for 3 years; also looking for ground to build on
- A local young farmer and heating engineer; building a log cabin, encountering endless problems, costs and blocks; wants to help create an easier path for younger people in future
- A young builder who wants to be kept updated on issues affecting young adults on Exmoor.
- A young resident of Exford.
- A councillor concerned that the economy of Exmoor is out of balance re housing
- An Exmoor landlord and councillor who would like every village to have two houses reserved for local young adults; notes two unused plots in Wh X.
- A long-serving ENPA staff member who knew all the members present
- Two EYV founders, advisors and fundraisers
- A senior ENPA Planner.

Members key issues:

1. Concern was expressed about second and holiday homes destroying Porlock eg old loos were converted for a holiday home – could have been a starter home for locals.
2. Paying a high rent blocks the potential to save for a deposit; in school, some pupils see GCSE's as a 'graveyard ambition' – no work anyway so why bother
3. Difficult to interfere with the open housing market; affordable rents too high; loss of social housing, with sensible rents
4. Restrictions on type of tourism permitted; is Exmoor losing out for lack of luxury facilities?
5. SO many second homes empty for most of the year – many of the size we need – should be available to us to rent.
6. We don't need to build more houses, just get back the existing ones.
7. Magna rents rise every time someone moves out so local working families are excluded; Magna not helpful esp re ex-council houses
8. "I would LOVE to live on the moor if possible, but I had to move away"
9. I live in South Molton in an affordable house; huge aspiration to farm; housing 4 generations on the farm is difficult; also feels the size and style of affordables inappropriate for the area.
10. Addington Fund converted a group of farm buildings to create living and working spaces for young adults, with storage
11. Not enough promotion of the opportunities re affordables and not cheap enough; currently trying to build up a deposit, but will there be affordable and available houses when he has done so
12. Our young adults are needed NOW; those who try to stay love Exmoor
13. Millhams Lane, Dulverton is now mostly empty second homes

Discussion:

- could 2nd homes be taxed higher? 110% for Council Tax is no deterrent to the wealthy, who often buy for the capital investment
- the size restriction on self-build is hopeless if you want several children and a decent sized garden to grow vegetables
- under-occupation of second homes is general; 2 weeks per year is common and some even live abroad and never come
- "I have great faith in the young people of West Somerset; Exmoor is the only National Park with succession policies"
- getting a mortgage is the main issue; S.106 is not a block to the wealthy but is inflexible for locals
- We need a campaign for a cap on % of second homes in every village?
- Dan James produces an annual report on why people visit Exmoor, which highlights key issues (JE to send round link)

David Wyborn's (ENPA) input responding to points raised:

- Planners are anxious to get changes; the same problems exist all over the UK; there are investment purchases even in cities
- Exmoor's population dropped by 600, even as 300 new houses were built

- The Lake District has been pushing hard for many years, seeking eg caps on numbers of second homes; no luck so far.
- Now, new houses can be identified for use only as a ‘principal residence’
- ‘Affordable’ includes housing associations (HAs), self-builds etc; government grants towards new housing shrank from £75K to £10K so HA’s have to charge more for rents and build to a lower standard. Where a ‘social rent’ is charged, that is an older property with smaller mortgage costs. The only option remaining is to build open market housing to fund a small number of affordables.
- One new development is the ‘extended family dwelling’ policy, which allows a conversion on a farm, only as a separate dwelling, provided one person has a local connection and/or is related. This policy also allows dual use as a holiday let or family use and could also be used as a local needs affordable starter, in which case work on the farm/business could be offered in lieu of rent.
- All new builds are for people in housing need who have a local connection; a plot of land for this should be around £10K, but S106 can block outsiders
- The main problem lies with mortgage lenders who tighten the rules continuously, to avoid all S106 properties; the ‘adjoining parish’ restriction reduces the number of possible applicants and puts off lenders who want to be able to sell easily in the event of repossession. There is an option to buy repossessed houses but the lenders always force the open market option
- Could WESSEX CLT INVESTMENT TRUST be persuaded to fund them?
- A lending arrangement is needed for local philanthropists to safely invest in.
- National Parks swap policies that work. They know that where extensions are allowed, the property ends up on the open market, lost to locals in housing need
- The 4 Cutcombe plots are allowed a double garage in addition to their 93 sq m

Further discussion:

EYV: Could we arrange an EYV visit to one of them? The new Local Plan does give more wriggle room, but local, individualised solutions are our goal, what we need.

David.W: where a farm adjoins a village, there are possible changes of use to facilitate local housing needs; locals need to get together and co-operate

EYV: an older couple in a large house could downsize to release space for someone else’s growing family

David W: as of yesterday, the government is showing interest in our succession farming arrangements, which indicates that they are listening. The HA Right to Buy is being piloted. Magna opted IN to this, so the next generation will lose out. A large Magna house in Withypool was sold and the money used to support a development in Alcombe! Magna ex-council houses have no restrictions on them and can be offered to people in the greatest need – from ANYWHERE. More recent affordables have more restrictions on them.

SOLUTIONS: (David W) – you need land, planning permission and money.

EYV could start by approaching farmers on the outskirts of villages.

- An EYV Member built a log cabin under succession arrangements, but met difficulties in the process of buying out his mother; the paperwork and stress levels were awful.
- **David W:** a straightforward scheme can move through quickly; challenging creates delays. Justin Ruthven-Tyers paid £67K for the building itself; land was extra.
- **EYV:** we are all certain we need some clear model plans from ENPA that we could use and adapt to suit the site. This would speed up the planning process and reduce architectural costs.

Self build Seminar, 4pm, Saturday 26th May,

- At **Exton**, at Justin and Linda Ruthven-Tyers **self build straw house**.
- Inspirational advice and support, a real life example, plus tea and cake.
- Justin will tell how they did it and give advice about loan options.
- There is the potential to produce some pre-agreed plans.
- Book early.

Kathryn: will advertise it in her monthly EHFN newsletter, if JE sends her words.

EYV Members:

- people do have the choice of who to sell their properties to – the highest bidder or locals who desperately need a home
- Wessex CLT lend money for renovation and updating

David W: WSC has the power to act on long-term empty properties but the process is too expensive

Next steps:

1. EYV will be reporting on tonight’s meeting at the Consultative Forum, Withypool Village Hall, on Thursday 15th March at 7pm. EYV members very welcome to attend and briefly speak. JE to send details to members.
2. Contact CPRE again re Right to Buy HA houses
3. Find and contact lending partners
4. Develop basic model plans
5. Talk to the National Trusts, whose rents have gone disastrously high. This in the light of the Census describing 20% of properties standing empty as second homes. In Lynton it is 30%.

EYV: National Parks are supposed to be different from the rest of the country, special.

Chair: “Thanks to David Wyborn for his support over the last few years and good luck in the new role. Will you continue to support us?”

David W: “I would happily come back once a year, once installed in new job.”

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Post script from bar talk:

We’ve had lots of advice to ‘come and talk it over’ with planners, then when we do, we meet either:

- encouragement to go ahead, only to find it turned down or changed by a higher authority, causing extra expense and loss of time
- or: a succession of refusals, spread out over many months. On top of money worries, this feels like incompetence and is misleading.
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There was universal approval for pre-approved model plans, where minor modifications could be discussed. Lack of consistent advice was a real problem.

**Exmoor Young Voices is sponsored and supported by
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