

## 5. Wealden Homes and Sevenoaks District Council – early engagement with residents on their needs

A collaborative partnership approach between Wealden Homes and Sevenoaks District Council has resulted in high quality homes that meet local requirements advocated by the community.

Wealden Homes purchased the Wheatsheaf Pub, a burnt-out pub in Kemsing, Sevenoaks on a speculative basis with no planning permission in place. The pub was in the middle of the village’s conservation area and in an elevated prominent position, next to a number of listed buildings.

The Company had early pre application discussions with Sevenoaks District Council, where both parties were able to make suggestions regarding design and siting matters that fed through into the final scheme. This required flexibility from both sides on issues of local character and the market demands for housing. Detailed advice was given by the conservation officer and development control officer.

The early and active involvement of local district councillors and the parish council was key to influencing the design of the houses as the scheme progressed. This meant that the planning application was already a familiar scheme by the time their comments were formally sought and their input to the final application was a positive one. The local community also influenced the design, internal and external space of the houses. The units of 1331 square feet were aimed at senior citizens wishing to downsize from large detached properties in the area. With this in mind, and as advocated by the community, each unit has generous space standards internally with a small manageable garden and secure garaging to the rear.

The finished scheme has been a success not only in commercial terms (all three units were sold prior to completion of the build programme) but it also has a positive visual impact within the village. The site also generated a financial contribution under local plan policies towards the council’s affordable housing budget. The scheme was recently viewed by committee members at the Council who concluded that it was the best scheme to be recently completed within the District.

The success of the scheme was driven by pre-application discussions that considered the overall design concept and the detail of the build. The time invested by both parties at the pre-application stage paid off with a straight-forward progression of the scheme to implementation.

“Wealden homes have provided a beautiful modern development totally in keeping with its location and in line with local housing need – smaller homes for older residents wishing to downsize. This case study could become a ‘best practice’ example proving that the commercial needs of developers, community needs and planning policy can work together to deliver an outstanding result.”

Councillor, Sevenoaks Development Control Committee

“We would like to say how pleased we were with the considerate way in which the houses were built.

Now they are finished, the houses look very much in keeping with the village and look like they have been there for many years.”

Local homeowner