
- Beenham Affordable Housing Initiative -

**Summary of Public Meeting about Beenham
Affordable Housing Need**

Victory Hall, 26th October 2024

Introduction

This is a summary of the public meeting that took place on the 26th October 2024 at The Victory Hall. The meeting was set-up by Beenham Parish Council and Connecting Communities in Berkshire Rural Housing Service who are running the Affordable Housing Initiative. The purpose of the meeting was to:

1. In an open forum let members of the Parish give their reasons for supporting or opposing this initiative. In particular, have parishioners explain to those at the meeting:
 - a. their lived experience of not having enough affordable housing and the issues and worries it places on their lives and the lives of their families.
 - b. why they support this initiative, even if they do not have an affordable housing need
 - c. any objections to, or fears and concerns about this initiative they have
2. Present the results of the Affordable Housing Survey
3. Ask attendees to select potential sites that they believe are suitable places to have affordable housing built
4. Have attendees to give reasons why they believe any of the potential sites identified are unsuitable
5. Present the next steps of the process

It is very important to understand that the areas outlined in blue on the maps are those that attendees of the meeting thought would be suitable locations for new affordable homes – NOT a preferred site list and no landowners should read anything more into it than that.

A landowner's land is their land. They can do whatever they want to do with it. Furthermore there is absolutely no compulsory purchase, nor will there ever be – that is guaranteed.

Open Forum

The meeting was attended by around 40 people from the parish. It began with an introduction by David Hancock of the Parish Council. He said that:

“As young adults having families, many of us had the benefit of becoming house owners or having affordable rents because property prices were cheaper relevant to income. In Beenham today the cheapest house is 7 times annual income. Previously, we were able to choose where we lived, so we were able to grow up with family near us in a community we knew, if we wanted to. Communities could sustain local schools and some amenities. As people moved on from running the community’s clubs and associations we had their successors, young people rooted in the community. Today that is being lost in Beenham. We can change this and that is why we started this initiative with the full backing of the Parish Council and the indispensable support of CCB.”

A letter was read out from the Acting Headmistress of the school, Sophie McBean. Sophie wrote:

“As most people are aware, many primary schools across West Berkshire are suffering from low pupil numbers due to a falling birth-rate. We have seen this trend in our school and also from West Berkshire Council, who forecast our annual reception year intake number below our set Pupil Admission Number of 15 children per year group. This is also compounded by the fact that Beenham has very little housing that is affordable for young families. When applying for school places, families fall in the catchment of the school they live closest to, so making the village more accessible for young families will help to increase pupil numbers in the school.

Pupil numbers are vital for every school but make a particular impact on small schools such as Beenham Primary School. School funding is allocated per child, so in simple terms, the more children in school equates to more money to spend on providing an excellent education for all of our pupils. In order to provide the best experience for our children now and also secure the future success of the school, we work hard to market the school and attract new families. However, due to our remote location, we are sometimes not logistically viable for many families who live outside of Beenham. The school is an essential part of the community and already serves many families who live in and contribute to the village. Having lived in a similar setting in Oxfordshire. I know how special it is to be able to grow up somewhere such as Beenham. I believe the initiative to introduce affordable housing to the village will not only benefit the school but also protect the future of a thriving village community.”

People talked about their experience of living in rented housing today in the parish.

- One person said that whilst the rent in their private rental property is reasonable and good value, the landlord is elderly but sympathetic to the issue of affordability. Despite having worked all their adult life, when the landlord changes, they are worried that the rent will increase markedly

- Another pointed out that as they get older, they want to downsize from their rental property but still stay in the village with family but there is nowhere they can downsize to. This also means a larger property is not available for families to rent
- A common problem raised is that families cannot stay together in the community as there is no available affordable housing and children have to move away.
- It was observed that the village cannot attract workers to work locally as there is no affordable housing
- Another person spoke about how the village needs families and young people to not only sustain the school, but to allow the community to renew, adapt and thrive. They pointed out that many who live here who moved here 20 years ago, would struggle to move here today because of the price of houses.

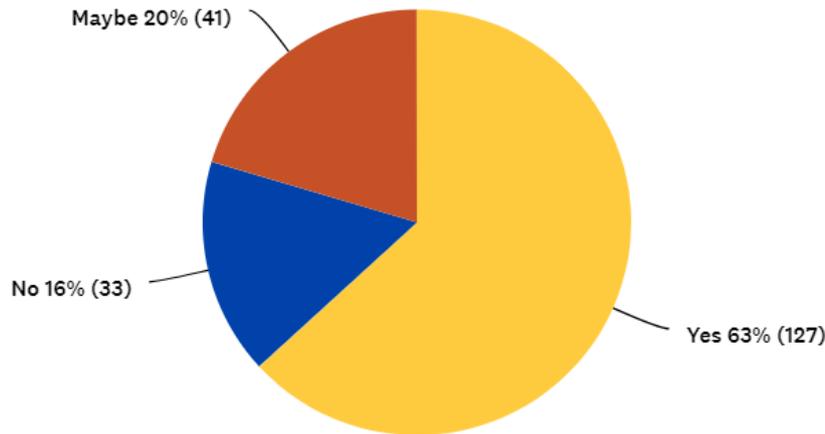
Through this affordable rural housing initiative, supported by Connecting Communities in Berkshire, we can do something about these issues, and the Housing Needs Survey, carried out throughout August and September 2024, was the first step.

Following this discussion, Maria from CCB presented the key findings of the Beenham Housing Needs Survey. Questions were asked and a lively and positive discussion took place throughout the presentation. Below are some of the key findings from the survey:

Key findings from the Housing Needs Survey

There were 228 eligible responses to the survey (surveys complete enough to contribute meaningful data). That is a response rate of 41% of Beenham Households (550 households in total).

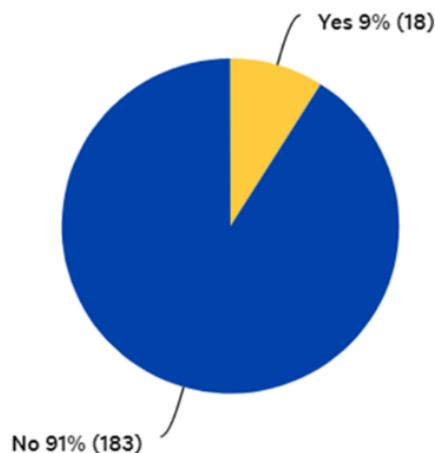
Would you in principal support a small development (4-10) homes for those in affordable housing need, with local connections to the parish of Beenham? N=201



83% of respondents were **not against** a small development of affordable homes for local people in Beenham

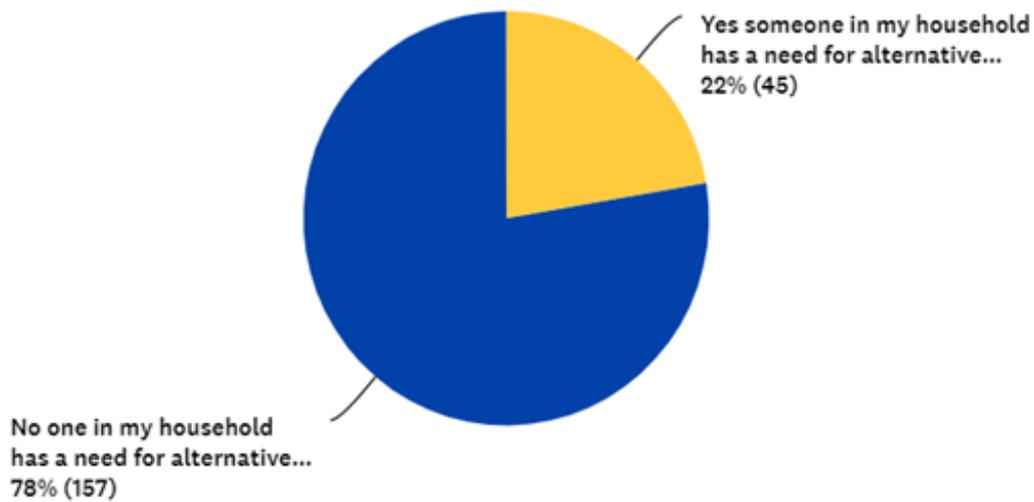
63% said they **would support** such a development.

Have any members of your household moved away from the parish in the last 5 years due to not being able to find a suitable home locally either on the open market (owned/rented) or with a housing association? N=201



29 individuals are reported to have moved away from Beenham in the last 5 years **due to not being able to find a suitable home locally**. This is an indication of the housing needs context in Beenham.

Is anyone in your household in need of alternative accommodation in the next 5 years and wishes to stay within the parish of Beenham? N=202

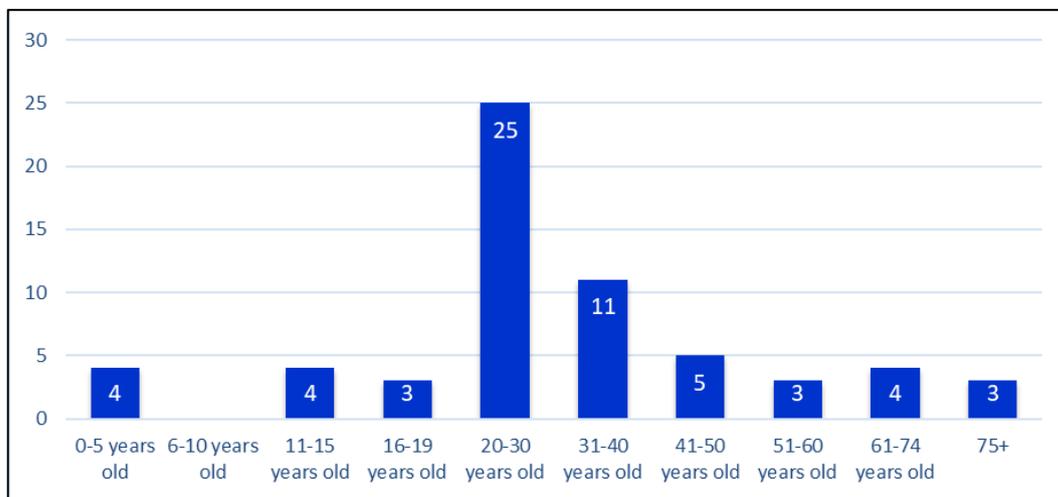


22% (45) of respondents stated that **someone in their household needed alternative accommodation in the next 5 years**. Of these, 40 went on to answer the questions in Part 2 of the survey.

Of the 40 households in need of alternative accommodation, **21 of these appear to be eligible for affordable housing**, based on the West Berkshire Council affordable housing eligibility criteria. *

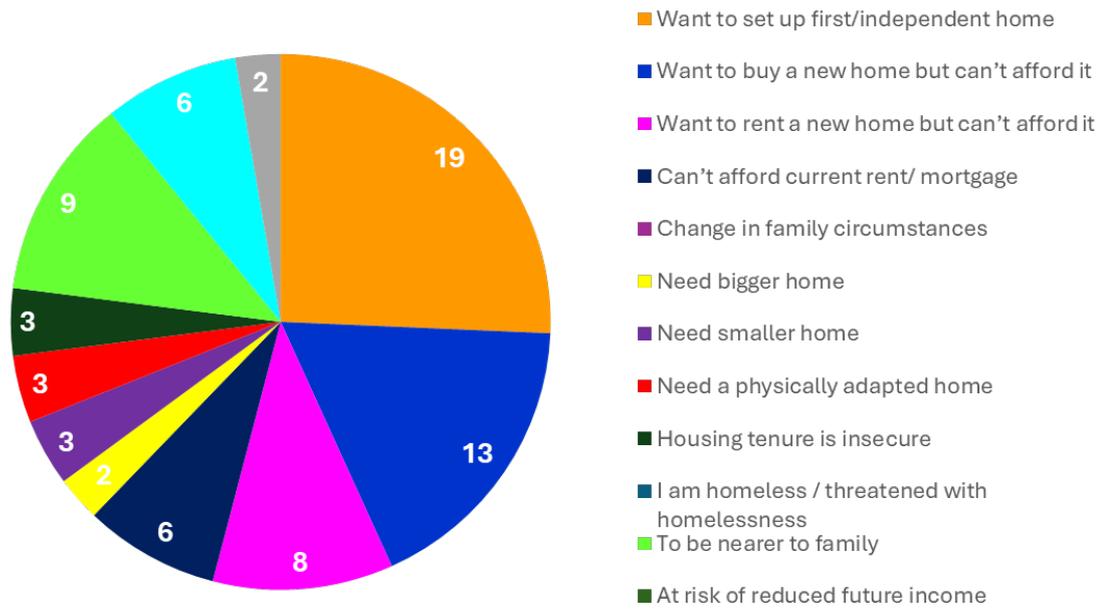
*according to the information provided in their survey responses.

Individuals with a housing need by age group N=62



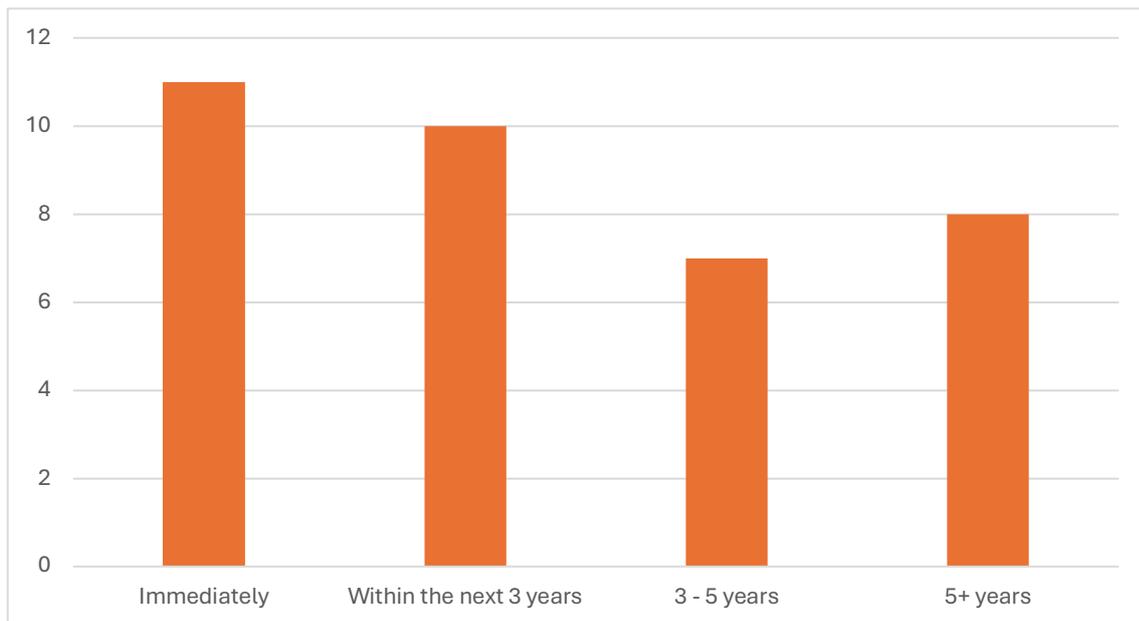
This data seems to support what residents have said about young adults, those planning to start families and families with school-age children not being able to find suitable and/or affordable first homes in the parish.

Reasons for needing a new home:



How soon would you be planning or hoping to move?

N=36



Maria also talked about planning rules and Rural Exception Sites which allow for the development of a small number of affordable homes on sites that would not otherwise get planning permission:

- A Rural Exception Site is literally an exception in planning terms. It allows for planning permission to be granted on land that would not normally be granted planning permission, possibly due to constraints like Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty,

Green Belt, or simply because it is outside the settlement envelope or boundary of the village.

- Almost all exception sites are adjacent to a settlement boundary, as land within the boundary often has development value. It is this very fact of not having development value that makes the land more affordable for affordable housing development.
- RES are typically very small, usually developments of 4 to 12 homes
- Exception site schemes rely on the land either being gifted or sold at a very low rate (typically 10,000-12,000 a plot) which ensures the affordability of the homes built on it. There are very specific rules relating to rural exception sites. They must provide affordable housing to meet the identified needs of people with a local connection to the community. The homes must also remain affordable in perpetuity, i.e. they cannot be sold under Right-to-Buy or any other means.

Maria also stressed the importance of creating homes which work for the community, which are well designed (with flexibility for future use in mind, and which meet high environmental standards) in harmony with the local building style, and which add something positive to the landscape of the village. A document created by English Rural called “A Design Guide: Building Tomorrows Rural Communities” defines this approach and can be accessed here:

<https://englishrural.org.uk/rural-housing-design-guide/>

Following this public meeting and initial site consultation (details on page 9, 10 and 11), the next step for the Parish Council and CCB will be to engage West Berkshire Council planners in the process and invite them to look at the preferred sites that have been identified by local people. They will be able to assess which sites are most likely to be suitable for a small development of homes, and highlight any issues relating to, for example, road access and safety, flood risk or other infrastructure issues.

CCB will collate this information into a site assessment document, and, with this information, the Parish Council will be ready to contact relevant land owners to ask if they would be interested in getting involved in this initiative.

Written Comments and Site Preferences

Below are the comments left by attendees on post-it notes on the feedback wall. Attendees were also given a map of Beeham (village) each and asked to place three sticky dots on sites around the village which they felt could be suitable for a small development of new affordable homes. The next 2 pages show the sites which attendees selected.

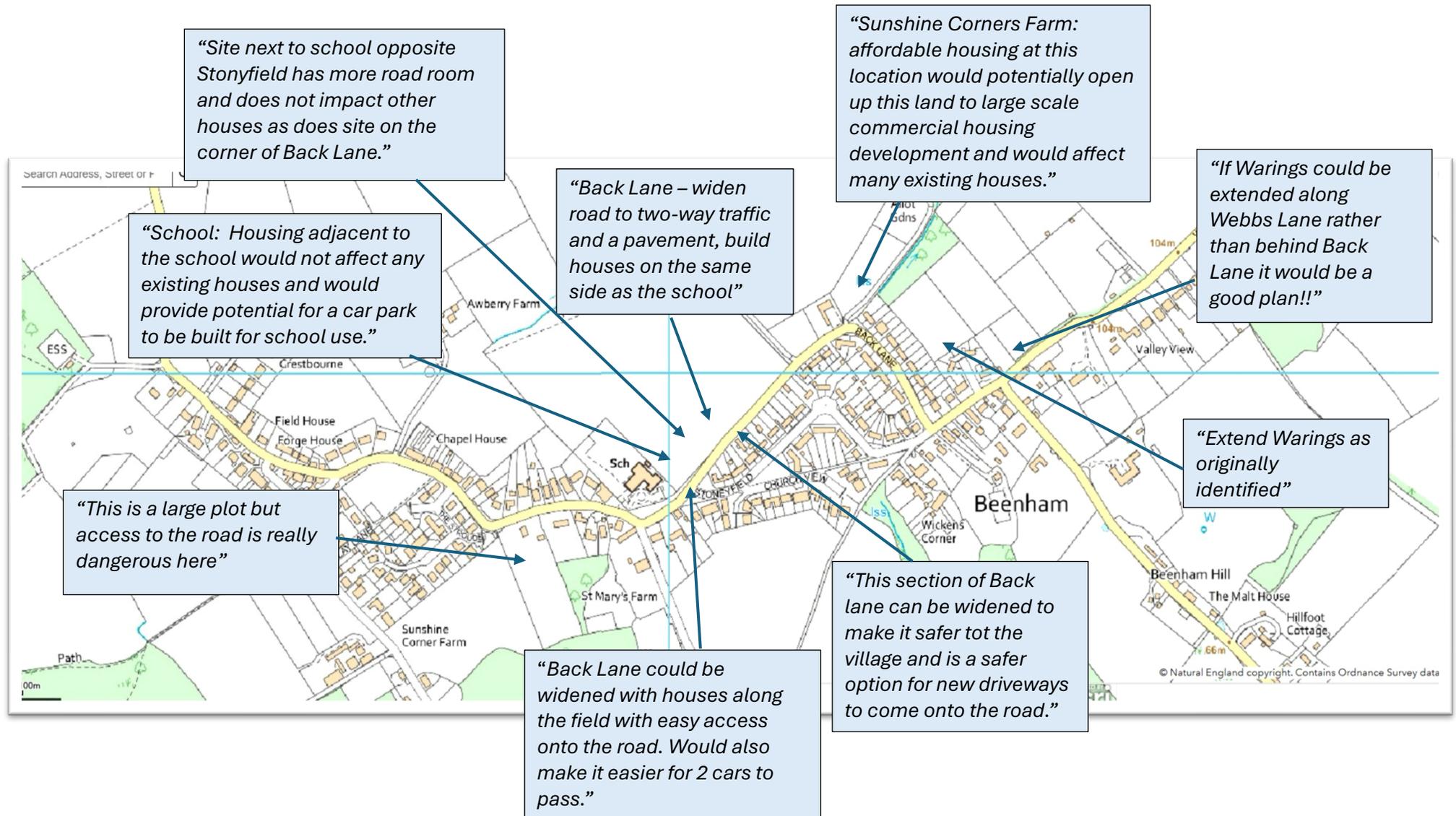
Benefits of RES scheme and impact of lack of affordable housing:

- *“Potential to downsize and release large properties for families”*
- *“If you keep an area ‘exclusive’ (financially) and insular, clubs, pubs and schools suffer”*
- *“Potential school closure”*
- *“[loss of] social cohesion”*
- *“[need a] mixed population – not just a bunch of aging people in big houses.”*
- *“Houses for Beenham people”*
- *“Security for homeowners and renters”*
- *“The vote on the map is for support of social housing not ‘affordable’ housing.”*

Comments about developments in general:

- *“Smaller houses, smaller site footprint”*
- *“First steps: 1. Are the existing utilities, water electricity etc capable of sustaining further development? 2. Is the existing drainage system/disposal capable and robust enough to sustain further development?”*
- *“Site should be on the main road or Webbs Lane – not on a quiet track.”*
- *“Any development in Beenham MUST include improvements to road/pavement and traffic control”*

Comments relating to specific sites in Beenham Village:



Map showing sites in Beenham which residents feel may be suitable for a small development of affordable homes (an RES development)

