

A BALANCED RANGE OF HOUSING

“A fundamental principle of sustainable communities is that everyone should have the opportunity of a decent home at a price they can afford, in a place in which they want to live and work.”

— The Deputy Prime Minister’s five-year plan ‘Sustainable Communities: Homes for All, January 2005.

Any town of 5,500 dwellings cannot be called sustainable if it is not home to a cross section of people regardless of their age, health and wealth. Mixing tenures is as important as mixing uses and it is vital that any design, from the scale of the Town Plan down to individual blocks, avoids the segregation tendencies of the past.

Sherford is a town that will be built based on timeless principles of good urbanism in a beautiful location. It should be desirable to many people from many walks of life. But it also needs to be available to all of them.

Beautiful towns that are centuries old have a range of building types, sizes and building ages that, over their lifetime, have developed a range of dwelling types, values and tenures, reflecting the infinitely complex social profile of their residents. See Figure 150.



Figure 150
Bradford on Avon.
An astounding range of building types in close proximity.

Even beautiful towns in sought after places, however, can struggle to keep this balance throughout their evolution. Those that lose their balance; those that no longer play the role they once did, will change, either by strategy or as a result of external forces that they cannot control. They may be desperate to boost their failing economies and proactively embark on gentrification or it may happen simply by virtue of the desirability to outsiders of the place in which they live. Either way, the resultant increase of par housing value can only result in a narrowing of the social mix and the housing stock becoming priced out of local reach. It is a complex balance to strike.

The South Hams region is gentrifying at a pace and leaving many behind in its wake.

Sherford is in many ways the product of the demand not just for housing, but also for housing that is affordable. The situation in South Hams is, of course, just an accentuated version of a national imperative. In the last 30 years the number of households has risen by 30% and over the same period there has been a 50% drop in the number of houses built. Only just over 50% of couples in their thirties can afford their own homes and this figure is projected to drop to 30% within 20 years. Since the experimentation of post-war housing it is very clear that trying to solve issues of affordability and supply through social zoning and cheap building only creates other expensive problems further down the line. The aspiration for Sherford, therefore, is to create an integrated, stable and diverse local community.

The Role of the Plan

A balanced range of housing is needed to meet both market and social demand in the proportions agreed with the regulating authorities. It is a complex equation and has a bearing on many financial, social and political issues.

What is all too often overlooked is the role that the design of the Town Plan can play in achieving a better balance.

A Walking Environment

As well as the provision of affordable housing, the daily cost of living in any town has a bearing on overall affordability. The transport poor have been referred to before. Being able to walk from home to work, shops, schools, parks or alternatively to a frequent bus service, clearly plays its part.

Whatever the definition and proportion of affordable dwellings may be for Sherford, the plan will allow for a slightly higher percentage of affordable housing to be located within 200 metres of the heart of the Main Street and the neighbourhood cores. It is also wholly appropriate that there is a higher proportion of smaller dwellings in the heart of these neighbourhoods and adjacent to the Main Street. See Figure 151.

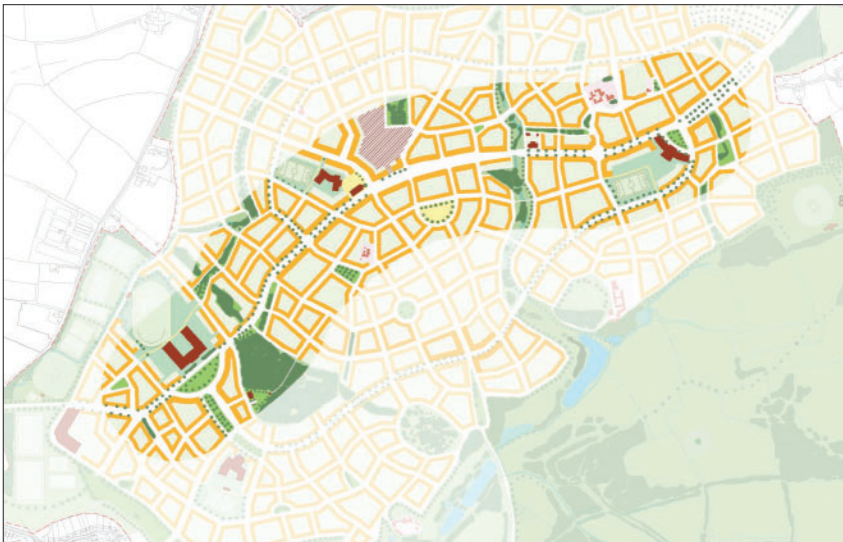


Figure 151

Sherford: A higher percentage of affordable dwellings close to daily needs and public transport.

A Diversity of Settings

The Sherford Town Plan has a myriad of different street and spatial types. Some streets and spaces are busier than others, many varying in width and height. Some of the spaces are more formal and urban, others part of a system of informal linear parks. Within relatively close proximity residents will be living over the shops on the High Street with a 5-bedroom house just a few blocks away. See Figures 152, 153, 154, 155 and 156.



Figure 152

Poundbury, Dorset. Affordable apartments above the local supermarket.



Figure 153

Marylebone, High Street. Living above the shops.

Figure 154

Close proximity of dwelling types. This busy street with apartments above shops is less than 200 metres from the large house in Figure 155. Such opportunities are rare in new development. They will exist in Sherford.



Figure 155

Figure 156

Val D'Europe. A new building of affordable apartments in a new development near Paris. The quality speaks for itself. Expensive dwellings are on the same street.



Again, this is the difference between designing a small town as opposed to a large housing development, a diversity and variety of settings. This diversity allows for a great deal of market choice but it also accommodates a greater choice of tenures intermixed within the same block, street or neighbourhood.

Pepper Potting and Tenure Blind

There will be a full range of housing types; market, low cost market, locally covenanted, shared ownership and social rented; but these will be neither isolated from each other nor separated by the quality or appearance of their design. By treating affordable and private housing in the same way, both in terms of physical structure and process, Sherford creates a range of opportunities in a continuum from most deprived to most well off in a way that is tenure-blind.

These different tenures will be distributed in small clusters from individual buildings to terraces of housing (see Figure 157). This is pepper potting.



Figure 157

Poundbury, Dorset. Within this one picture there are large private houses, affordable dwellings, apartments and homes for the elderly, as well as live-work.

It is here that the language of architecture has a key role to play. Once a common language is accepted and understood it is perfectly possible for that language to unite adjacent dwellings of marked difference in size, value and tenure.

The Mews and Ancillary Dwellings

Mews streets are associated first and foremost with Georgian London, some of the most expensive property in the country. But they began life as outbuildings, an 18th and 19th century ‘garage apartment’; the vehicle (the carriage and the horse) below, the staff above: an early version of affordable living. See Figure 158, 159 and 160.

Figure 158

The classic mews street, offering an extraordinary range of properties in a small geographical space.



Figure 159

Windsor, Florida. Affordable apartments associated with the main dwelling in a new mews street.



Figure 160

Poundbury, Dorset. Space above garages that can be used by the larger house, the extended family or as a rental property.



Sherford will recreate this building type with all its tenure possibilities. Built today they become live work units, ‘granny flats’ or ‘studio rentals’ that have migrated from a role ancillary to the main house to a small building in its own right. They can still be used by the main household or sold on without compromising the privacy of the main dwelling to which they belong.

These ancillary buildings can contribute in many different ways:

- A form of affordability immediately adjacent to larger dwellings
- Income for the owner of the major dwelling
- Allow an extended family to live together and apart at one and the same time

In time they may well evolve to become owner occupied mixed-use streets equivalent in their diversity and character to those so famous and sought after elsewhere.

More Than Affordability.

We are a mobile society. That mobility is costing more by the day. Moving house is a well-established tradition. ‘Moving up’ matters too. But how many have to move out in order to move up?

“...why must the move to a larger or more luxurious house bring with it the abandonment of one’s neighbours, community groups and often even schoolmates? Sadly the suburban system causes people to move not just from house to house but from community to community. Only in a traditionally organised neighbourhood of varied incomes can a family significantly alter its housing without moving very far...People buy the community first and the house second. The more a place resembles an authentic community, the more it is valued and one hallmark of a real place is variety”

— Duany *et al.*, Suburban Nation.

An effective mix of dwelling sizes by generic type will deliver 1 and 2 bed apartments together with a range of 2, 3, 4, and 5 bed terraced, attached, semi-detached and detached houses. The indicative mix proposed for Sherford is shown in more detail in Table 2 of the Housing Strategy.

Adaptability

It is likely that at least eight different households will occupy any one dwelling during its lifetime. Many outgrow their homes and move for that reason alone. People living longer have created the need for dwellings that allow occupants to age comfortably and practically. Change can often only be afforded in stages. The ability of residents to laterally and vertically relocate between house sizes, types, tenures and consequently values will offer a flexible dynamic which will defend Sherford against outward migration. Not only will Sherford attract residents and empower them, but it will also retain them.

Construction of the building envelope will ensure that there is flexibility in the future to alter the internal layout of the property. This will ensure that over time, the building can adapt to the changing lifestyles of its residents. See Figure 161.

All these factors affect community balance and affordability as well as the simple desire to stay where you are.

The concept of Lifetime Homes has acknowledged this in terms of coping with aging in the home. Dwellings will be designed to integrate Lifetime Homes standards allowing adaptability to changing needs within a house type across time.

In ‘The Adaptable House’ (Friedman 2002) four main areas of intervention are identified as critical to the adaptability of a dwelling.

- i. Manipulation of volumes, which refers to the considerations that a designer, builder, or occupant will give to the use of the entire volume, such as all the floors of a multi-storey building.
- ii. Spatial arrangement, which considers the way in which the spaces themselves within the volume are dealt with and used. A space can be an entire floor or a single room on that floor.
- iii. Growth and division, which refers to design strategies or means that permit the expansion or reduction of volumes or space either during design and construction or later throughout the occupancy.

- iv. Manipulation of subcomponents, which are the elements employed in the construction and use of a building, which can be as large as structural components or as small as a water pipe.

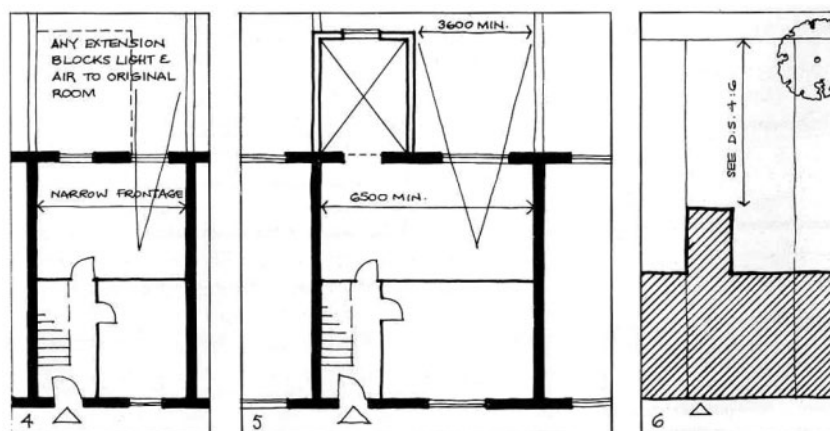


Figure 161
Building dimensions and plot size have profound effects on future adaptability.

The range of dwelling types used in Sherford will be based on those that have survived several changes in economic, cultural and social development over the years. As an example the current trend is for larger, more open plan living and kitchen areas so this must be recognised but the possibility that smaller more cellular rooms may be put back in the future for efficiency of heating purposes is also important. It is extremely difficult to predict or anticipate every demand for change on the fabric of a dwelling. Houses in Sherford will be built with an aspiration that they will exist for 300 years. This aspiration ensures that designers are required to anticipate a range of uses that a particular building could support and ensures that the building structures are flexible enough to support these uses. See Figure 162.

Viability cannot be ignored but Sherford can undoubtedly deliver a socially inclusive and sustainable community that responds to local housing need across the range of demand without prejudicing the viability of the whole. By making sure there is a full spread of dwellings focussed around walkable neighbourhoods with good mixed-use, Sherford will be an inclusive and dynamic environment to enfranchise all residents.

Figure 162
A common assumption not all that long ago

