



20th OCT 2025 UPDATE ON WHEATFIELD BARNES:

RENTAL AND SHARED OWNERSHIP HOMES

Rental properties

The exciting news is that the electricity difficulties have all been resolved and we are moving swiftly towards the completion of the building element of the project. **That means the rental properties should be available for people registered with South Gloucestershire Council HomeChoice to bid for homes they are interested in, either this coming week Oct 23 or the following week Oct 30th. The adverts appear on the SGC HomeChoice website on Thursdays for only a week, so anyone interested in putting in a bid for one of the houses needs i) to be registered with HomeChoice and ii) be keeping a close eye on the HomeChoice website.** MCLT is not involved in allocating these homes which will be through SGC HomeChoice and Brighter Places.

Reaching this point is a real achievement and makes all the challenges we have faced worthwhile. Wheatfield Barns brings to life the original aim of the scheme which was to enable local young people to afford to live in the village rather than be forced to move elsewhere for accommodation and work. For many decades there has been a failure to build homes that are within reach of local people and MCLT are delighted to be able to help provide affordable housing for Marshfield which will give long term security to tenants.

There have been difficulties with the Shared Ownership properties, which we discuss below, but the main aim of the scheme was not to provide a route onto the housing ladder but to give a realistic opportunity for young people to stay in the village which has been difficult through the usual HomeChoice criteria and to ensure these houses remain available for people with a housing need and local connection in perpetuity. The project will now deliver on that fundamental aim.

Shared ownership properties

The Shared Ownership (SO) houses initially seemed popular. The Housing Need Survey at the start of this project had shown some demand for SO and this was reinforced by interviews MCLT held with Marshfield young people who expressed strong hopes of obtaining a SO house. Then at the Consultation for the Planning Application we were asked to provide more SO houses. Over 80 people registered an interest at the start of the construction phase, but the homes have now been available for purchase for six months and there are no sales agreed.

There are a number of factors that help account for this of which the recent negative publicity around SO has been one but probably the most significant factor is the financial market, meaning that the limited number of mortgage

companies willing to offer SO mortgages are risk adverse and operating very cautiously. It is not possible for Brighter Places to be more flexible about mortgage issues as under government regulations all SO mortgage assessments must be made by independent financial advisors.

Nor was it possible several years ago to predict how financial markets would operate or the circumstances of the individuals who would apply for these properties in several years' time. Initially the shared ownership homes were seen as a way of supporting affordable housing with a mixed tenure model, but circumstances have changed, and the current financial market has banished that hope. Brighter Places have tried to support the SO scheme by allowing applicants to purchase a smaller share of the property than is often the case but that has not led to any purchases. We are really sorry that some people have been very disappointed, and we understand their frustration.

What happens next

Brighter Places, who have taken the risks in financing and managing the Wheatfield Barns scheme, are now considering what happens next to these properties. They have been built with public funding and cannot be left empty. One option is to convert these to rental properties and to do this BP must follow a formal legal process to change the designation from SO to social rent, which can take some time.

This conversion would mean the houses would then be subject to the same local connection and housing need criteria as the existing 10 rental properties. We realise that will not help with the disappointment of those who wanted a SO home, but it will provide more rental properties available at social rent. There are very few rental properties available in Marshfield – only one on Rightmove at the moment- so this will meet a local need and ensure the scheme remains true to its original aims.

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