COUNCIL HOUSING IN TEFFONT

The background to any building of Council Housing in Teffont must start from the beginning of the Twentieth Century and the passing into law of the Addison Act of 1919

In the years before the 1st World War private builders had supplied virtually all new housing in towns and cities and there was very little in the countryside. The war, however, changed everything. Building activity came to a virtual standstill whilst the country fought. By the time of the General Election in 1918 it was becoming clear that the country faced an acute shortage of housing. Building costs were inflated and this, combined with a scarcity of materials and labour, made it impossible for the private developers to provide houses with rents within reach of the average working class family. The end of the war also brought a new social attitude that focused the Government’s attention on a national responsibility to provide homes, giving rise to Lloyd George’s famous promise of  ‘homes fit for heroes’  referring to the many soldiers returning from the War.

The Housing and Town Planning Act of 1919 (The Addison Act) was seen as a watershed in the provision of corporation (council) housing. Councils were thrust to the forefront as the providers and they began to plan their post-war housing programmes. Housing Committees were set up, working largely from recommendations from central government’s advisory committee - the Tudor Walters Committee - and encouraged to build through the provision of generous subsidies. The subsidy arrangements shared the costs of this new housing between the tenants, local rate payers and the Treasury. Councils in areas of high housing need could apply for these subsidies. The London County Council (the predecessor to the Greater London Council) also raised money through selling London housing bonds which promised investors a 6% return and raised £4 million during the 1920s.

Planners promoted the construction of new suburban ‘garden’ estates, situated on the outskirts of cities. Mainly consisting of three bed houses for families, the design of the estates aimed to create self-contained communities of low density - often with no more than 12 houses per acre. Facilities, including churches, schools and shops, were provided; public houses were initially excluded from the plans. On most estates, houses were provided with a generous size garden to encourage the tenants to grow their own vegetables, a privet hedge at the front and an apple tree at the back. The interiors varied, some having a parlour, but all had a scullery and bath. For most new tenants these new conditions were a huge improvement on their previous slum housing where they had experienced overcrowding and often were without even basic facilities. The quality of the housing was generally high. Although some slum clearance took place during the 1920s much of the emphasis of this period was to provide new general needs housing on green field sites.

The most ambitious estate built to reward soldiers and their families after the war was the massive Becontree estate in Dagenham which was to become the largest council housing estate in the world. Work by the London County Council on the estate started in 1921, farms were compulsory purchased and by 1932 over 25,000 houses had been built and over 100,000 people had moved to the area. These new houses had gas and electricity, inside toilets, fitted baths and front and back gardens. LCC also, however, had strict rules for new tenants on housework, house and garden maintenance, children’s behaviour and the keeping of pets. The estate expanded over the Essex parishes of Barking, Dagenham and Ilford with nearly 27,000 homes in total creating a virtual new town with dwellings for over 30,000 families.

Most of these new council estates, like Becontree, provided good quality housing for the better off working classes but did not provide a solution for the poorer people in society. Rents were high and subletting was forbidden so naturally the tenants in the best position to pay were selected. High rents sometimes meant difficulty in paying, as more applicants from unskilled occupations were housed.

The Addison Act was passed initially as a temporary measure to meet the housing need felt in the country as an effect of the war and at a time when private builders could not meet the demand. It was generally assumed that the private sector would resume responsibility for working class housing once the British economy had recovered.

*So where did Teffont fit into all this?*

Workers on the farms were housed in very poor quality homes and we can surmise that the local District Councils, Tisbury in our case, took the duty of investigating the need for improvement seriously. Although we have not seen the Minute Book of Tisbury Rural District Council meetings, it is clear that each Parish Council were required to produce a report on the state of the housing in their village. For Teffont Magna this was the final agenda item at a meeting held on 14th April 1919. After considerable discussion, it was agreed that nine houses were “unfit for human habitation” while a further eleven were needed for the increased population. The clerk was instructed to draft a letter to the District Council embodying these as “Complaints” and asking that the matter should be investigated.

It would be interesting to know which were the nine “unfit” houses and how many of them are still in use today. They are likely to have been joined together, extended and resold at today’s exorbitant prices. Certainly one house that was declared as “unfit for human habitation” in 1964 is now worth in the order of £400,000.

Teffont Evias, as only having a Parish Meeting at this stage, rather than a Parish Council, was not part of this process but a Special Meeting was called by Colonel Kennedy Shaw in his additional new role as District Council member for the whole of Teffont - he was also on the District Council Housing Committee - on the 22nd June 1919. Colonel Kennedy Shaw explained what had been done so far by the RDC (Rural District Council) in the matter of the erection of houses in the different parishes (18 in all) and noting that there had been no return submitted for Teffont Evyas, had asked the Council to keep the scheme open until it had been ascertained whether the village required any cottages as, in any case, the rate (the costs of building) would be spread evenly between all villages. The minutes of this Parish Meeting goes on to say that “After the matter had been well ventilated Mr G Keatinge proposed and Mr J Fennell seconded that we should ask for three cottages. This was carried unanimously the Chairman being deputed to write to the Council and report”.

This all happened in the heady days following the end of the 1st World War - the Treaty of Versailles was just being negotiated at this time - and one suspects that people were expecting great things. Regrettably, at least from what the various Minute Books show, nothing more in this matter happened for twenty five years - which almost takes us up to the end of the 2nd World War.

In fact, it was at a Parish Council meeting on 4th February 1944 (by this time the two parts of the village had been united) that the subject was next mentioned when Mr Imrie brought up the question of the type of cottages (if any) which might be built in the Parish and said that other RDCs had approached their Parish Councils for their views on the matter. The Chairman promised to ascertain what Tisbury and Mere RDC’s views were and in April 1944, the Chairman was able to report that he had seen the Clerk to the Rural District Council who informed him that two houses had been allocated to the Parish under the RDC building scheme. However, Lord Bedisloe had objected to the building of the cottages at Teffont on various grounds and preferred to build his own cottages. Giving the delays to any such building that were to occur, this may have proved to be a very short sighted approach!

It would be perfectly possible to extract details from the minutes of every Parish Council Meeting of the next 34 years - yes that is how long the village was still to wait for four old people’s cottages to be built and occupied - but it would be somewhat repetitive so, perhaps, it will be better if we try and show the highlights of the battles and arguments, of the dashed hopes and of slowness beyond belief rather than every last word that was painstakingly minuted at almost every meeting. If we look at groups of years (normally of five) what happens in any individual minute entry makes more sense.

After the 1944 discussions, no action is reported for four years - with the completion of the 2nd World War followed by the dreadful winter of 1947 that is hardly surprising. 1948 was, however, different and was the first of a number of years, five or six, when there were occasional meetings between, on the one side, Mr W F Crouch as Chairman of the Parish Council and Major Keatinge as the RDC member and, on the other, representatives of the Town and Country Planning Committee. This and subsequent, meetings were to inspect possible building sites in the village and, though the results were not particularly successful, there was, in the early years, some optimism that a site would be identified “next year”. By 1953, the feeling of the Parish Council was changing and one gets the sense of a lack of trust in the RDC by the Parish Council.

It is possible to write two versions of the events of the period from 1954 to 1956, the first based on the Parish Council minutes of the period and the other on the minutes of the meetings of the Housing Committee of the Mere and Tisbury RDC which are not only much more comprehensive than the Parish Council ones but also, in places contradict each other. Let us start with the Parish’ Council’s version.

By 1955, the Parish Council was fed up with attitude of the Mere andTisbúry *RDC a*nd so at a Special Parish Council meeting on 27/5/1955 *t*he following resolution was proposed and unanimously passed*: ”That t*he Teffont Parish *Council is most dissatisfied with the efforts regard to the construction of houses in Teffont made by its representative on the Rural District Council; the Council considers that he has not urged sufficiently the necessity of the early commencement of building houses on the approved site at Teffont.*

*The Rural District is therefore called upon to fulfil the allocation of houses in the 1955 to 1956 programme on the approved site and to immediately employ all means in their power to proceed with the erection of the houses.* The Clerk was instructed to incorporate this in a letter to the RDC and although their reply was still awaited, a second Special Parish meeting was held ten days later to allow Mr Crouch to report from an RDC meeting which he was due to attend. It transpired that he was barred from reporting as the RDC had been “in Committee” mode when it discussed the Teffont situation. What he did report was that there would be no houses in Teffont on the previously approved building site and that a new one would have to be found. The minutes record that a “long discussion” followed with another letter to the RDC written in the strongest possible words expressing the Council’s dissatisfaction with the action the RDC had taken. From this it is also possible to assume that a site had, at some stage, been approved - even though the approval was to be later rescinded - and that the RDC member was no longer Mr Keatinge. Effectively whoever it was had had a vote of no-confidence passed on him.

The next Parish Council meeting was a few days later by which time the RDC’s reply had been received and it was read out. It confirmed that the original site had been abandoned on grounds of cost. Another long discussion followed where Councillors expressed their disapproval of what they had heard; they then passed a further resolution “*that the Council expresses a most emphatic protest as to the action taken by the RDC on the question of building houses in the Parish, and to confirm that the matter would now be placed in the hands of the County Council”.* A *further* resolution was passed *“that this Council invoke their powers under Section 169 of the Housing Act, 1936, and hereby petition the Wiltshire County Council to order a Public Local Enquiry to be held on the failure of the Mere and Tisbury RDC to exercise their powers under the Housing Acts.”.*

By the time of the next Parish Council meeting, on the 24th August, 1955 no reply had been received by the County Council and a chaser was agreed; by the end of September a letter had been received from the County Council stating that a sub-Committee had been appointed to deal with the “Complaint” and that the Parish Council would be informed of the date it should meet with this sub-Committee. The Parish Council decided that its representatives should be its Chairman, Major General Ranking, its Vice-Chairman, Mr Stokes and the Clerk, Mr T I Philipps.

It does not appear that there was too much urgency in pursuing the “Complaint” as the next meeting, a Parish Meeting on the 24th November, was dedicated to the matter of whether the village wanted Street Lighting installed - more details of this matter are in the section dedicated to that subject. It was 16th January before the Parish Council heard a report on the meeting between the Parish Council’s representatives and those looking into the Complaint. The report told the Parish Councillors that a first meeting had been held on 8th December at Trowbridge to hear evidence; this was followed with a further meeting on the 18th December in Teffont examining various sites. At its conclusion, RDC members there promised to inform the Parish Council when the matter was discussed at their Housing Committee. Following that report, the Council went on to discuss an article in the Western Gazette about the RDC meeting held on 5th January. The report in the 13th January issue inferred that the Teffont Parish Council representatives had apologised for making the “Complaint” to Wiltshire County Council about the non-erection of Council houses in the Parish. The Parish Councillors were furious about this - the minutes used the terms “vigorous discussion” and unanimously decided that a letter denying the inference should be sent to the Wiltshire County Council with copies to the RDC and to the editor of the Western Gazette with the request that it be published in the next issue of that paper.

The battles rumbled on with Mr Crouch being forced to withdraw from the next Housing Committee meeting and the Parish Council being upset about that. A suggestion of using the space next to the Black Horse Barn (now called Oakridge Barn) was proposed subject to arbitration for the price but nothing came of it. The Annual Parish meeting held at the end of March supported the Council’s position with another resolution being passed. For the next couple of meetings, the position seems to have reached an impasse, it has been unable so far to ascertain whether the Parish Council’s letter was published by the Western Gazette but in January or February 1956 the “Complaint” had been rejected by Wiltshire County Council’s sub-committee - not appearing in the Parish Council minutes.

At the Parish’s Annual Parish Meeting in March 1956, Mr R Lever proposed a long resolution suggesting among other points that the RDC should reopen negotiations with the owner of the “approved” site with a view to buying that site at a realistic valuation. It is interesting that the Minutes never reveal the site owner’s name though it must have been known generally at the time. After all the activity of the last two years, it seems that some behind-closed-door discussions must have taken place and the decision made to let tempers cool as it was not until 1962 before the subject was raised again - almost directly after the death of the current Chairman, Major General Ranking. The Council appear to have agreed that a low key approach at various meetings with the RDC should continue in parallel with investigations into possible available sites and potential tenants

Now let us look at the RDC’s version of events. The first critical point is that in July 1954, a site was “approved“ by the RDC subject to agreement on cost and availability and on planning permission being granted.; The wording of the RDC Committee minutes were:

It was RESOLVED that the Acting Clerk be authorised to purchase the Teffont Housing Site”

No mention of this appears in the Parish Council Minutes possibly because there were no minuted meetings of the Parish Council between April 1954 and November 1954! In September of that year, the Finance Committee of the RDC reported that the District Valuer had been unable to agree a cost and that, as a result Compulsory Purchase should be approved. It appears that Compulsory Purchase was time consuming and had not yet been approved over 6 months later; it took for the District Valuer to that long to bring his report on this. It was agreed that if discussions were hot successful, a sub-committee which included Mr W Fisher Crouch would try to negotiate. This failed and the agents for the owner suggested three other possible sites; another sub-Committee was appointed to review these possible sites again with Mr Crouch on it investigated. From the middle of 1955 the two versions, including the letters and resolutions passed by the Parish Council are very similar

So it was another 5 years - until 1967 - before the Parish Council turned its attention to the subject again and that discussion mainly covered the same major point about the need to identify one more suitable site. At the next meeting Mr Giles used the opportunity to offer Plot 160, for which he was the current owner, to put it up for sale; The Council thanked him and arranged to pass on the details to the RDC. A meeting later still, in 1969, Group Captain Willan added Plot 161 to the list of possible sites and the Parish Council heard that the RDC Planning Officers were reviewing its suitability; this was to result in the RDC deciding that no sites in Teffont were likely to be possible because of the cost of drainage (£2000) and of the installation of main sewerage there (£1700). That put a stop on any further negotiations until 1973 when a Parish Council meeting heard that there are now four possible sites for Council cottages, one offered by Group Captain Willan, one by Sir Edgar Keatinge and two by Mr Pitcairn; a fifth had just been added by Mr Giles. Better news was reported at the Annual Assembly of the Parish held in March 1973 where, despite initial opposition by the Planning officers at the County Council, a site meeting was now scheduled. The result of this was an agreement in principle to the building of four Old People’s Council Cottages on Sir Edgar’s land and that drawings were being prepared for these. What is not clear is what caused the change of heart between the Planning Officers’ negative approach to Council Cottages being built in Teffont for the almost 30 years from 1944 to a positive one in 1973.. One can speculate about any possible effects of the Village having Group Captain Willan as County Councillor where he held the position of Chairman for a number of years.

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The panel visited the four proposed available sites for old person’s bungalows in Teffont to the Rural District Council and discussed with them the general question of the provision of such accommodation.

It was argued that there is a genuine need particularly in small settlements such as Teffont for houses for elderly people who had spent their lives in the village and particularly for

Agricultural workers. The Rural District Council would not accept the suggestion that any

Permission should contain the usual agricultural worker’s condition as they felt that this

would be unnecessarily restrictive.

The panel noted that the Rural District Council were anxious to take up the offer of this

land for this development but pointed out that there were strong planning and

highway considerations to be taken into account before any planning permission should

be given.

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The next five years were very frustrating while the necessary stages of firstly agreeing on a price, of actually buying the site and of getting planning permission just when responsibility for this moved across from County Council and RDC to the Salisbury District Council with footpaths that crossed the site and were Rights of Way, and there were debates about the allocation of who will be offered potential places as tenants here. The changing of Local Authority raised difficulties with design - there were new architects - lawyers and finance people - was the money available in the financial year - the answer was positive and Planning Permission was granted: subject to conditions as in the following minute:

That permission be granted subject to the submission of layout plans and detailed plans and

Particulars of the buildings proposed to be erected and of any new means of access proposed to be formed for the approval of the County Council. It is considered that (a) the

proposed pull-in be large enough for vehicles to turn around, (b) Reconstituted stone

should be used in the construction of the proposed dwelling to harmonise with the materials

used and in view of the high amenity of the area.

Finally, at a Parish Council on 4th September 1975 the Chairman was in a position to announce the purchase of the land and that the tenders for the building were complete ready for submission.

A long winter ensued but at last on 24th May 1976 the building started; the contractors were to be Williams of Shaftesbury. There were some complaints about litter on the site and a little dissension about the allocation of tenants where anyone interested had to re-apply. There were two applicants for the two single-bedroomed cottages and three for the double ones.

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By November, progress has reached the stage were, at a Parish Council meeting, the name of Long Meadow was accepted and there was general approval of the design and the use of the site; there was particular appreciation of the materials used – Bradstone, North Cerney style. By the next meeting on 27th January 1977, Mr Mabey, the Salisbury District Councillor for the village reported that allocation, which will be done on a points basis should be complete by the end of February. Enquiries were to be received about the rents and the rent rebate procedure. Mr J Yeates and Mrs Ashley were regarded as the Teffont inhabitants in most need of consideration. It was also reported that the road and drainage system had been repaired.

By the time of the next Parish Council meeting on 22nd March all four cottages had been offered to Teffont residents but only two had accepted.

The new residents agreed were Mrs Ashley, Mr Coombes, Mr and Mrs Turner and Mr and Mrs Penny. One problem that had been identified was that there was no provision for garden tools and the District Council was to be asked if these could be made available at the bottom of the site.

By the time of the Annual Assembly on 17th May, all four cottages were completed and occupied, fifty eight years since they were first asked for!

The lack of garden tool and bicycle sheds had not been rectified by the District Council so the Chairman of the Parish Council undertook to investigate whether there was any available money from village funds, By the next meeting, the District Council had requested that some such local paying could be organised and helped with advice as to what dimensions would be suitable. This lack of sheds was raised at the Annual Assembly on 30th May and, unfortunately, the Chairman had to report that the village did not have enough money in any free funds to pay for these. A further problem raised was the cost of the overhead electrical heating; the Chairman was able to offer more help with this in that, if any approached the Chairman, the latter would make appropriate representations to the District Council.

The need for tool sheds did not go away and four years later, in 1981, the Clerk was instructed to write to the District Council raising the need for them if the economic situation improved.

A couple of months later what was to be a perennial problem was encountered when the main external drainage for the site was found to be blocked. In fact, though it was not always minuted, we know from verbal reports that the drainage from the site was frequently a problem, partly because whoever is currently cutting the grass tended to dump it and other materials such as leaves as well.

In January 1983, there were complaints about car parking and Mr Mabey agreed to try and get the District Council Officers to take the necessary action with a sign; because of industrial activity this took six months for any action.

In the middle of the 1980s, there were numerous unsuccessful requests, supported by the Parish Council and our new District Councillor, David Parker, for the installation of tool sheds. Equally unsuccessful were requests for a seating bench under the Village Enhancement Scheme. A more serious concern was raised in 1988 that the bungalows might be sold off to a Housing Association. The Chairman was able to get this put to bed as the Government Legislation only permitted this after successful consultation by the tenants and South Wiltshire was not having any of this – Teffont’s four bungalows are still owned and maintained by Wiltshire Council today though there are some Housing Association dwellings in Tisbury.

Mowing of the grass surrounds has been debated about over many years – was it a District Council responsibility as were the problems of blocked ditches? Or should it become part of the Village Mowing contract where we already spend almost £2000 per year.

One of the final entries, in January 1997, concerning the Long Meadow bungalows in the Parish Council Minute Book is slightly worrying; it reads:

“ LONG MEADOW problems have been reported and will be monitored” - No explanation and no follow-up!

THIS TAKES THIS SECTION ON THE VILLAGES’S “COUNCIL HOUSES” UP TO 2003 AS PART OF THE HISTORY OF THE COUNCIL.

*Subsequently The Parish Council agreed to include both the cost of the grass cutting at Long Meadow and to clear the ditch within its Annual Grass Cutting Contract. The County Council inserted a land drain just below Long Meadow to take off any excess water from Holt Lane.*