

THE THRESHOLD CENTRE

Cole Street Farm, near Gillingham



OPEN DAY 31st MAY 2009

AFFORDABLE HOMES AT COLE STREET FARM

These notes have been produced by the current residents group and East Dorset Housing Association (EDHA). We look forward to seeing this community expand and hope the information will help you decide whether Cole Street Farm would suit you.

1. What will it be like living at Cole Street?

In many ways living at Cole Street Farm is like living in a traditional neighbourhood or small village. We all know one another, socialise together and support each other.

As we aim to be an education centre we also have groups of visitors from time to time who want to know more about the way we live.

You will be asked to commit to work, unpaid, for half a day a week to contribute to the maintenance of the site and/or the education business. This might involve office work, cleaning, gardening, painting, helping run a course or anything else that needs doing. We eat a vegetarian dinner together twice a week which we take turns to cook or help cook.

We also hold a residents' meeting once a month. We try to rotate the date for the meeting between a day in the week and a day at the weekend so that everyone gets a chance to attend. It usually lasts about 4 hours.

Sustainable living is an important part of how we live, and we encourage people to reduce their carbon footprint as much as possible. Ideally you will work from home or in the local area and may be able to commute by bicycle or car sharing. Car ownership is limited to one per household.

In developing the new homes on the site we are aiming to build in as "green" a way as possible using a design and materials that make a minimal impact on the environment. This will mean for example NOT having a washing machine in your own kitchen but using the shared laundry. We will have a central heat source supplying all the homes with heat and hot water, as well as some electricity from PV panels.

We aim to grow as much of our own fruit and vegetables as possible and have rented an acre of adjacent land to do this. We currently have some raised beds and a polytunnel and have recently planted an orchard. Anyone is welcome to try their hand at a spot of gardening!

2. If I am renting, who will be my landlord?

Rented homes will be owned by EDHA, with rent and service charges paid to them. The tenancy will be an Assured Tenancy, the same as any other Housing Association letting, but with particular conditions about taking part in the life of the co-housing community.

3. How much will it cost to rent?

Rents will be in the region of £82.00 per week plus any service charges for a one bedroom house.

4. How much will it cost to buy?

The shared ownership homes will be sold by EDHA. The cost will be a proportion of their full market value which is currently 40%. (These Prices are fixed and are not negotiable.) As at January 2009 the property valuations are:

- 1 bed (Swallows Cottage) £125,000 Open market value.
i.e. £50,000 for 40% share plus approximately £40pw rent.
- 2 bed (Settebrook Barn) £185,000 Open market value
i.e. £74,000 for 40% share plus approximately £60pw rent.
- 2 bed (Cartwheels Cottage) £165,000 Open Market Value
i.e. £66,000 for 40% share plus approximately £53pw rent.

For example a 40% share would cost around £50,000 for a 1 bedroom cottage to £74,000 for a 2 bedroom Cottage, which you would need to fund by obtaining a mortgage and/or using any capital you may have.

You will usually have to pay at least 10% of this by way of a deposit (i.e. not funded by mortgage). In addition you would pay a rent for the remaining share to EDHA, in the region of £40 - 60.00 per week. The overall cost of buying a shared ownership home (i.e. the monthly rent plus mortgage payments) should be well below the cost of buying outright, but exact amounts are calculated for each applicant according to specific affordability criteria.

5. I'm interested in shared ownership: can I get a mortgage?

We have spoken to the Co-op Bank and the Ecology Building Society who have both said that in principle a mortgage would be available on these properties, of course

depending on individual circumstances. Other building societies/banks may also be willing to lend but we have not had individual discussions with them.

6. What else will I have to pay?

As well as your monthly rent/mortgage you will have to pay the usual household bills e.g. council tax, water, electricity and heating.

For tenants, maintenance charges are included in their rent or service charge.

Shared owners are responsible for maintenance themselves and will be expected to pay a service charge in the same way as those who buy a home here outright. The service charge will cover costs for sewerage, maintenance of grounds and laundry facilities and create a sink fund to meet long term costs of structural repair to the common house and other shared areas.

It is intended that our educational business activities cover the costs of running the common house. In the unlikely event that these costs are not covered all households will be liable to meet a proportion of these costs. For tenants this will be calculated as part of the service charge payable through EDHA. It is hoped that such a charge is unlikely to be levied – especially if everyone works to make the business a success.

7. Can my friends and family come to visit/stay?

Of course! If you have room – they can stay with you in your own home, or you might want to hire a room in the common house (currently £6 per person per night to cover costs).

8. When can I move in?

As you can see – work is currently in progress. We expect everything to be completed early January 2010. If you apply for one of the properties and are successful you should be able to move in around this time

9. How do I apply for a home here?

If you are interested in one of the affordable homes, whether for rent or shared ownership, you will also need to be on North Dorset District Council's housing register – if you are not already on the register you should contact North Dorset District Council.

Please see the document entitled "Resident identification and selection" for full details of our process. At this time we are particularly looking for people who are keen gardeners and good at administration/ book keeping! We are also particularly keen to see more young men and women here. Most importantly we need people who are committed to making a project such as this work

The final decision about who lives here rests with the residents, in consultation with the Housing Association.

10. I like to eat meat: will that be a problem?

As long as you are happy to eat vegetarian meals when we all eat together, you can eat what you like in your own home.

11. How much work will I have to do?

Half a day a week.

12. What are the rules here?

All of our agreements are set out in the lease and community agreement; check out the answer to question 1.

13. How are the rules regulated/enforced?

We operate a lot on trust. However if there is consensus within the community that someone is persistently not complying with the agreements a sanctions process is outlined in our lease agreement and handbook. Ultimately a resident may be asked to leave.

14. Can I bring my pet?

We already have a dog and cat on site. If you want to bring another animal to live at Cole Street Farm it must be agreed in advance by the other residents. You must also be prepared to clean up after it!

15. What happens if I fall out with someone?

In choosing to live here, you commit to making every effort to resolve disputes and differences as quickly as possible. Sometimes it may be necessary to ask someone else living in the community to act as a mediator. In serious cases we may appoint an external mediator.

16. How are decisions made?

We operate a consensus decision-making process. This means we seek to find a solution that is to everyone's satisfaction – or a situation where those that disagree with the solution are able to disagree with it but willing not to block it.

17. What happens if I want to leave?

You can! Just give us and EDHA written notice that you wish to leave (details will be included in the tenancy agreement or shared ownership lease).

Shared ownership residents must be prepared in the first instance to offer their property to someone nominated by EDHA in consultation with the Threshold community. If no such person comes forward they can put it on the open market. However any purchaser must be prepared to comply with the lease agreements/culture of Cole Street Farm. Full details of these procedures will be set down in the shared ownership lease.