

Council is accused over homes hold-up

By Scott Hamilton

shamilton@c-dm.co.uk
01872 247440

CORNWALL COUNCIL has been accused of delaying work on 16 affordable homes for local people in Lostwithiel by a year because it has dragged its feet over legal issues.

Prospective buyers in Lostwithiel have saved up thousands for a deposit on a home at the Castle Hill development, with the first due to move in this coming Christmas.

Others have secured mortgage agreements which could now run out before the work on their new homes even starts.

In January this year council planners backed the scheme, for 16 affordable homes and 16 to be sold on the open market, but it has taken until the end of last week for the legal paperwork to be sorted out.

Angela Warwick, the scheme's planning consultant, said because development at the site could only start at certain times because of laws designed to protect wildlife, it was now too late for work to start on time.

"There are ecology rules that affect when we can be on site," said Mrs Warwick, of planning and sustainability consultancy Situa8, based in Lostwithiel. "There's a particular window in which we can put the first shovel in the ground and we'll miss that now."

Mrs Warwick, who has helped pioneer the scheme, said: "I'm livid. There's no housing association involved; this is a really positive innovation with a developer and Lostwithiel Town Council working together.

"We did a housing needs survey and there are more than 50 people in-

terested. These are real people and businesses in the town.

"They're all holding on and hoping for these homes.

"We were saying people would be in the apartments, the development's first phase, by Christmas. We've had to break that promise.

"When you're getting a house for £80,000 to £90,000 in a beautiful town like Lostwithiel and you've been kept hanging on like this, it's so upsetting," she said.

The town's Cornwall councillor, Gavin Shakerley, said he approached council planners at the end of last week after being contacted by the Cornish Guardian.

Unacceptable

"The whole thing has now been resolved, so that's good news," he said. "The bad news is this has quite clearly been an unacceptable delay. There are no clever words to allay the anxieties of the people who were waiting for these homes. That's where it hurts. I just wish I'd been informed earlier so I could have got involved earlier."

Mrs Warwick said a complaint had been lodged with the council over the delay but it appeared to have made no difference.

Mark Kaczmarek, Cornwall Council's Cabinet member for housing and planning, said he hadn't been made aware of the problem.

"If I'm made aware of a problem I'll do everything I can to make sure we move things on as quickly as possible," he said.

"What we don't want to do is to get into a slanging match. What we want is to deal with it as quickly as possible to make sure these people get into their houses."