

Joy at borough's 'U-turn' decision over major development

Locals will be priority for affordable new homes

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Disappointment has turned to joy with confirmation that Tenterden residents will have first priority for affordable new homes in the town.

Tenterden town councillor Sue Ferguson spoke at a meeting of the council on Monday last week after correspondence she received from Ashford Borough Council indicated that Tent1 homes had been classified as "general needs" properties and would be open to any applicant on Ashford council's housing register.

A horrified Cllr Ferguson accused Ashford council of going back on an earlier pledge it had made to prioritise Tenterden people and called for a petition to canvass the authority to change its mind.

She claimed Tenterden had consistently been referred to as "rural" in numerous Ashford council documents, but it appeared to have lost that classification, meaning that Tent1 did not qualify as rural local needs housing – which allows people with a connection to a parish to have first priority for new homes.

But Ashford council announced on Friday that people with a Tenterden connection would after all have priority for the homes and claimed there was no confusion over information it supplied to Tenterden Town Council.

Cllr Ferguson said: "I am extremely happy that Ashford council has taken a U-turn on this issue. Housing is so expensive in Tenterden and many young people in Tenterden cannot afford to live here independently.

"I think it's excellent that they will now have an opportunity to stay in the town in an affordable property."

In its statement, Ashford council confirmed that the first time Tent1 properties are let, priority will be given to those with a



An artist's impression of how the homes in Tent1A will look



Town councillor Sue Ferguson



Town clerk Phil Burgess



Tenterden residents will have priority for affordable new homes in the town

connection to the town who are in housing need, and that subsequent lets would be open to anyone on its list meeting the criteria.

An Ashford council spokesman said: "Tent1 is not a designated local needs scheme. While Tenterden is obviously a rural

area, it is a rural town and not a village.

"Parishes that fall within Ashford Borough Council's rural local connection criteria must have a population of less than 3,000. This is defined by government and is its own definition of a small rural settlement.

"While we wish to sustain village communities, clearly Tenterden does not fit within that criteria. However, we are intending to let properties to those with a local connection if they also have a housing need."

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TOP OF THE LIST

Homeseekers in Tenterden and St Michael's are being given priority for the first phase of affordable homes in the new housing developments of Church View and Three Fields, says Tenterden Town Council.

Until recently, there had been some doubt that local people would be given priority, but Ashford Borough Council has now confirmed that applicants from Tenterden and St Michael's will be at the top of the list when the affordable homes are allocated.

The town council says it's been told by Ashford council that the rental properties will be let to "those with a housing need... we aim to offer the properties to a percentage of transfers, homeseekers and homeless applicants".

Ashford council's statement added: "We also aim to let a percentage to people in employment and also to provide a mix of ages of children in order to create a sustainable community."

Tenterden town clerk Phil Burgess said: "This is great news. Our town councillors have been working tirelessly to ensure that local people are given priority on these developments, and we are delighted that Ashford council has now confirmed that this will be the case.

"For the Tentia development this relates to just under 40 dwellings. Normally 30-35% of developments are earmarked for affordable housing and half of those are shared ownership."

Tenterden residents who believe they may qualify for one of the rental homes to be let by Ashford council should register online at www.kenthomechoice.org.uk