

22 June 2011

Cllr Steven Pugsley
Westerclose Lodge
Withypool
Minehead
Somerset
TA24 7QR

Dear Steven

**Exmoor Panel Meeting 10th March 2011
Community Concerns – Economic Development**

I noticed that the issue of temporary housing for workers from outside the area came up at the Exmoor Panel meeting on 10th March 2011.

I have spoken to Richard Webber of Shearwell Data about his particular issues with housing temporary staff and, within Magna West Somerset, we have considered whether we can assist his company (and other businesses in a similar position).

Unfortunately, based on what we understand of the situation, we can not. I thought you might be interested to read my response to Richard which sets out the thinking behind our decision.

Yours sincerely



**Christine Boland
Tenant Services Manager**

Direct line; 01984 635132
E-mail; christine.boland@magna.org.uk

Enc.

St Peter's House, Williton, Taunton, Somerset TA4 4NR

t: 01984 635100 for Typetalk users please prefix the telephone number with 18001 (Calls may be recorded)

f: 01984 635139 **e:** westsom@magna.org.uk **w:** www.magnaws.org.uk

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20th June 2011

Mr R Webber
Shearwell Data Ltd
Putham Farm
Wheddon Cross
Minehead
Somerset
TA24 7AS

Dear Richard

Shearwell Data – Possibility of residential property rental from Magna West Somerset Housing Association

We spoke briefly in April 2011 about the possibility of Magna West Somerset Housing Association letting one of its properties in or around Wheddon Cross to Shearwell Data. From our conversation and from a previous conversation with Amanda Reynolds, who I believe is your employee; I understand that you often employ staff on short term contracts who you accommodate in bed and breakfast accommodation. I understand that this is costly for your business. I have assumed that if you are putting these staff up in temporary accommodation, they are not local to Wheddon Cross and the surrounding areas.

Since we spoke, I have discussed the principle of letting one of our properties to your company with the MWS Director, Tony Murray and also looked into the practical implications. I realise this is an important issue for you and possibly for other companies operating on Exmoor and, as such the matter has been raised at Exmoor Area Panel meetings; I have, therefore, taken the time explain to you the thinking behind and reasons for our position.

Our Purpose (why Magna exists)

Magna's purpose is to help people meet their housing and related needs and aspirations. We are a not-for-profit community-based housing association and our principal customers are our existing tenants. Our potential customers are housing applicants registered with Homefinder Somerset Common Housing Register in Somerset and Devon Homechoice in Devon, and private residents who buy services from us; we offer a range of housing and support-related services to our tenants and to private residents which are above and beyond our basic landlord function; these include a gardener handyperson scheme; meals on wheels; MWS Careline Service; a domestic abuse support service and a home help service.

Our stakeholders are people, agencies, councils and businesses who are affected by or who have a direct interest in what we do and how we do it. We listen to their views and use them to influence what we do as long as it fits with our purpose.

We invest a lot of time working with district, town and parish councillors because we think it is especially important that they influence what we do and how we do it. Overwhelmingly, they tell us that there is a lack of affordable housing for local people especially on Exmoor National Park. Cutcombe Parish Council has been very proactive in facilitating and supporting the development of the ten affordable homes for rent which are currently being developed on the Cutcombe Market site. Exmoor National Park applies its own affordable housing needs criteria when approving who we should let new homes to on Exmoor and is very strict when applying its guidelines about letting new homes to people with a strong local connection to the area.

In addition to this, Cutcombe Parish Council (in common with other parish councils on Exmoor) has had a significant influence on us both in how we let new homes and how we let existing properties. They recognise that there is a small pool of affordable housing on Exmoor with limited opportunities to build new homes for local people and, understandably, put pressure on us to let all of our properties (even the older stock where there are no planning restrictions) to people from, or with a local connection to, the parish where the property is. There is plenty of demand for our properties both from local people and from other people in housing need in West Somerset and Somerset generally.

Disposals Policy

The Coalition government has made significant changes to the way new affordable housing is funded and expects social landlords, like MWS to fund a greater proportion of its development programme themselves and rely less on government grants. The MWS board has decided to 'plug the funding gap', by disposing of a number of properties (less than 14) on the open market over the next 4 years. We consulted widely on this with local councils who felt strongly that when identifying suitable properties for disposal, we should be sensitive to disposals in rural villages and National Parks, particularly in areas where there is very little land available to develop.

Practical Issues

MWS's Lettings Policy states that when letting its empty homes MWS will comply with the Homefinder Somerset Common Choice Based Lettings Policy for vacancies in Somerset. One of the covenants we have with West Somerset Council is that in the selection of tenants for vacant dwellings, MWS would act in accordance with the published allocations policy of the Association. If we depart from our policy we will need the consent of West Somerset Council.

We are regulated by the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) and comply with their Regulatory Framework. In order to let a property to Shearwell we would need to be sure that we were not contravening the Regulatory Framework.

Taking all of the above into account, our position is that letting a property to Shearwell Data does not fit with our purpose, our stakeholders' priorities, or our own internal policies (which in turn are influenced by tenants and other stakeholders). There is also the issue of getting consent from the Council and possibly our

Regulator, the TSA, but practical issues can usually be worked through if there is an agreement in principle to do something, so these issues have not been our primary consideration.

I am sorry we can't help you based on what I understand are the issues facing your company. If I have misunderstood what you have told me or the issues are different than I have described, please do come back to us and we will talk again.

Yours sincerely

Christine Boland
Tenant Services Manager

Direct line; 01984 635132
e-mail; christine.boland@magna.org.uk

cc. Steven Pugsley, Corrine Matthews, Roger Webber, Colin Savage