

## Barn change consent boosts MP's homes for locals battle

A CAMPAIGN to generate more affordable housing for local people in South Lakeland has had its first success.

MP Tim Farron has declared his *Home on the Farm* scheme up-and-running after planning consent was granted to convert a barn at Selside into accommodation for two local families.

The approval marks a landmark change of policy by South Lakeland District Council which in the past has tended to favour applications for holiday accommodation seen as farm diversification schemes, rather than those for local occupancy.

The policy meant local families wanting to buy or rent affordable

accommodation in rural areas felt they were often unfairly excluded.

It also led to claims that villages were in danger of losing vital local services and their community identities as more properties were given over to holiday lets and second homes.

The problem led Westmorland and Lonsdale MP Mr Farron to launch *Home on the Farm* last year by lobbying for an overhaul of planning guidelines at national level as well as a change in attitudes locally.

Now the MP says the planning approval granted for the High Above Park barn at Selside is a victory for his campaign.

Mr Farron praised the attitude of barn owner Joanna Gent and her husband Alan, who could have sought approval for holiday let conversion but refused to do so.

Mrs Gent said: "We could have converted the barn into holiday cottages years ago but decided it was

better for the community to have a local family living here. Now with the planning permission, the barn will be converted into occupation for two local families."

The barn - which is attached to the Gents' own home - will be converted by 41-year-old local electrician David Stevens, who will live in the larger of the two properties with his 38-year-old wife Anna and children Georgia, aged ten, Emelia, aged seven, and three-year-old Lillie. The second will be let to another local family.

Mr Stevens said: "We currently live just over the hill in Watchgate but our house is becoming too small for a growing family. I also need an office and storage area for my business.

"If we hadn't had this opportunity to convert this barn we would have been forced to move out of the area. Now we can stay in the area we love with the kids growing up as part of a close-knit community."

● **HAPPY FAMILIES:** Alan and Joanna Gent (left) outside the Selside barn with the Stevens family - Lillie, Emelia, Georgia, David, Anna and Bess the dog. (D9A089MH1)

