



Commission for
Rural Communities

Tackling rural disadvantage

Making It Happen:

HARAH:

Hampshire Alliance
for Rural Affordable
Housing -

A countywide
approach to building
affordable rural
homes

HARAH: The Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing - A Countywide Approach to Building Affordable Rural Homes

HARAH offers an excellent example of how a pragmatic approach to addressing rural housing needs can really make a difference. The Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing is a partnership between rural local authorities, the Hyde Housing Association, the Housing Corporation, and the county's Rural Housing Enablers.

Working together, the partnership has adopted a positive approach to increase the supply of affordable housing and ensure that new homes meet the highest building standards, including energy efficiency. The confidence in their approach is underlined by the commitment of the Housing Corporation, which has allocated the partnership 20% of its regional rural programme.



Introduction

Hampshire's Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing (HARAH) was formed in 2004 to enable the county's rural local authorities, the Housing Corporation, and Hampshire's Rural Housing Enablers, to work together to meet the county's affordable rural housing needs effectively and efficiently.

Hampshire has a population of approximately 1,250,000. It is the eighth biggest county in England (www.hants.gov.uk/business/econindex.html). With the M3 corridor to the north and West Sussex and Surrey to the east, it is both influenced by, and relatively close to London. The easternmost part of the county will be in the proposed South Downs National Park, whilst the west is dominated by the New Forest, which was established as a National Park in 2006. To the south lie the major cities of Portsmouth and Southampton.

Hampshire's average house price of approximately £237,000 is high relative to the South East's and the national averages (£235,000 and £195,000 respectively). There are considerable variations within the county (e.g. from approximately £209,000 in Eastleigh to £325,000 in Winchester). Within this – typically – complicated picture are hidden an equally complicated pattern of housing needs, which the HARAH partners are trying both to understand and meet.

HARAH's aims are ambitious. As well as working to increase the supply and number of affordable homes, Alliance members are learning more about rural Hampshire's housing needs, and are working to improve the policies, processes and standards associated with the provision of affordable housing, which they define as, "Housing built on 'exception sites'¹ in settlements with populations of 3,000, or less".

After a thorough and competitive selection process HARAH appointed the Hyde Housing Association as their chosen Registered Social Landlord, and, in March, 2006, started to implement its development plan. According to Julia Potter of East Hampshire District Council (a Beacon Council for Housing in 2005/06², and a member of HARAH), "*The problem about the money allocated for rural affordable housing is that there's not enough of it.*"

Julia goes on to say, "*Of course, it's not just about money. There are practical difficulties. Our schemes are small, but can be difficult to implement, and if we can't finish them on time, we lose the money. HARAH is a way of overcoming*

¹ Areas of land, which are outside of the village envelope. This land can only be used for the provision of affordable housing for the local residents of that village. The land cannot be sold for private housing developments.

² www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=5098302

difficulties in delivery and funding by working in partnership.” HARAH members know this only too well, and are making sure that the money that is available is used in the most efficient and effective way, for the benefit of the people who need, but cannot find, affordable housing.

HARAH's structure and aims

The members of the Alliance are listed in Table 1. They work together to determine and meet housing needs, and to learn from, and influence one another. Their aims (Table 2) include the development and integration of policies, including those for statutory planning, and efficient and sustainable procurement and construction, possibly, in terms of the latter, along the lines used by Advantage South West.

Table 1 HARAH Membership	
Hampshire's Rural Housing Enablers	http://action.hants.org.uk/RHE.html
Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council	http://www.basingstoke.gov.uk
East Hampshire District Council	www.easthants.gov.uk
New Forest District Council	www.nfdc.gov.uk
Hart District Council	www.hart.gov.uk
Test Valley Borough Council	www.testvalley.gov.uk
Winchester City Council	www.winchester.gov.uk
The Housing Corporation	www.housingcorp.gov.uk
Hyde Housing Association	www.hyde-housing.co.uk

Table 2 HARAH's Aims	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximise investment in affordable housing in rural villages throughout Hampshire • Develop and implement a medium-term programme to meet the regional priority for rural housing • Become more strategic in order to increase the number of affordable rural housing schemes • Collect housing needs information to a common standard • Ensure that Hampshire's Rural Housing Enablers are used to best, most efficient, effect • Benefit from potential economies of scale • Improve standards of development, management, and community involvement • Ensure that information provided to Parish Councils and local people is presented clearly and to a common standard • Have sufficient schemes in hand to ensure that some are always in "reserve" should others fail or be delayed 	

The Benefits of Working Together

The Alliance's whole-county approach enabled the Housing Corporation (HC) to provide £7.7 million, to be spent between 2006 and 2008, to develop 21 exception sites (138 homes) from a county-wide "pool" of 39. It is the existence of this pool, with its built-in surplus of sites, that gives HARAHA's members the confidence to plan both projects and budgets. Developing exception sites for affordable housing is difficult. The sites are usually small, and can be problematic in terms of ownership, planning matters, locations, access to services such as main drainage, and criteria relating to the eventual occupiers (e.g. the nature and extent of their connection with the place in which they want to live).

It is, therefore, not unusual for proposed exception site developments to be delayed, or to fail. They are risky projects, and so, if a single local authority has only one or two possible developments its chances of securing – and then spending within a specified time – HC money are relatively slight. HARAHA, however, reduces the risk for all concerned, by allowing sites from the pool to be brought forward should one of the planned developments fail, or be delayed.

In addition to the above, the strength of the Alliance, coupled with its county-wide coverage, means that Hampshire's Rural Housing Enablers (RHEs) are fully involved in HARAHA's work. They work with Parish Councils, landowners, Planners, and Housing Strategy Development Officers, and to help conduct Housing Needs and Satisfaction Surveys, and Impact Assessment Studies. There are three RHE's in Hampshire (two full-time equivalents), and, again thanks to HARAHA's approach, it has been possible to find the £90,000 needed annually to employ them (the money comes from Hyde Housing, the Government Office for the South East, and the local authorities).

Partnership in Practice

HARAHA's project officer, who was appointed by Hyde, manages the partnership's day-to-day work, maintains contact with Parish Councils and Local Authorities, and liaises with the RHEs. The Alliance's steering group meets regularly to monitor and direct business, the main aspects of which, of course, relate to the development of the first 21 sites.

HARAHA members hope that by spring 2008, 57 new homes in six villages will be completed. If all goes according to plan, the first residents should move in towards the end of 2007. In addition, Alliance members are working to improve policies and processes, and to develop good practice for use **throughout** the county, and, perhaps, beyond. It should also be noted that all of

HARAH's schemes will meet the EcoHomes' "Very Good" standard³, and that learning - for mutual benefit - is not restricted to exception sites. An example of this is Hyde Housing's plan to build homes using The Pace Group's (www.pacetimber.co.uk) pre-fabricated construction method in the New Forest. As Jackie Strube, an Assistant Director of Development at Hyde Housing, says, "*The HARAH programme gives us the opportunity to explore the use of modern construction methods as part of a substantial programme, something which might not be possible on an individual scheme basis.*"

The combined knowledge of HARAH's membership also provides an ideal opportunity to reflect on the processes and problems associated with the provision of affordable rural housing. Like most housing markets, Hampshire's are complicated. East Hampshire's alone is affected by three: the South Coast urban growth area market (Partnership for Urban South Hampshire⁴), and the Farnham and Guildford, and Winchester housing markets. Similarly, New Forest District is affected by housing markets in Southampton, Bournemouth and Poole, and the New Forest itself. The ability to share experiences, and develop improved ways of doing things, is, therefore, an invaluable additional benefit for HARAH members.

Examples of the ways in which members are working together are given in Table 3.

Table 3 Topics on Which HARAH Members are Working Together
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 106 Agreements⁵ • Local Connection Policies for Occupiers (i.e. the length of time that applicants for housing need to have lived in the area in order to qualify) • Mutual Exchange Policies • Standardisation of rules and processes • Development and adoption of Good Practice Guide and Rural Housing Development Strategy (www.nfdc.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=5564) • Links to Rural Housing Board⁶ • Link With Rural Pathfinder (http://www3.hants.gov.uk/ruralpathfinder) • Joint Housing Market Assessment • Satisfaction and impact evaluation surveys • Development of a common design-led approach to procurement and sustainable, energy-efficient construction

³ www.housingcorp.gov.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.7261

⁴ http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/southeastplan/key/study_areas/june_05/s_hants/june05_submission.pdf

⁵ The legal framework which sets out the terms and conditions for the provision of affordable housing and other facilities. This agreement is part of planning requirements that the Local Authority will have with the housing provider.

⁶ http://www.seeda.co.uk/Publications/Developments_&_Infrastructure/docs/HFA2006.pdf

It is clear that the innovative strategic approach taken by HARAHA has already achieved a lot. Its inherent stability and flexibility, combined with the ability to take a long-term planning view, gave the HC the confidence to allocate £7.7 million to HARAHA's six local authority members. In other words, 6 out of the South East Region's 67 Local Authorities (9%) have been given 20% of the Corporation's rural programme budget. Rose Chadwick, Investment Manager with the Housing Corporation, comments, *"I am delighted that the Housing Corporation has been involved in this initiative from its inception. It is an innovative approach to maximising the delivery of rural affordable housing in villages in Hampshire and signals our commitment in the South East to working in partnership. I look forward to working with HARAHA to develop schemes in rural areas."*

The approach has attracted the attention not only of the HC, which mentioned it as a case study in its Future Investment Approaches discussion paper⁷, but also by the Affordable Rural Housing Commission, which used it as a case study in its final report⁸.

Needless to say, however, challenges remain! For example, although National Parks are the statutory planning authorities for their areas, responsibility for housing and homelessness lies with District Councils. There is, understandably, given that the New Forest National Park Authority (NPA) was only established in April, 2006, some nervousness about the implications of these changes for affordable rural housing. Alliance members are, therefore, working with National Park Authority colleagues to ensure that any problems that might arise are identified and dealt with quickly, for, as Lynne Croker, New Forest District Council's Housing Strategy and Development Manager, notes, *"Affordable housing must be a shared priority between the National Park and the Local Authority if opportunities to develop affordable housing in the New Forest villages are to continue. The Rural Housing Enabler bridges a gap between the housing and planning authority, and, with the support of the HARAHA partnership, can provide certainty to the NPA and local community on delivery."*

⁷ www.housingcorp.gov.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.8624

⁸ www.defra.gov.uk/rural/housing/commission/

Summary

The Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing is a pragmatic, innovative county-wide, cross-boundary partnership between the rural local authorities, the Hyde Housing Association, the Housing Corporation, and the county's Rural Housing Enablers. Its purpose is to increase both the number, energy efficiency and building standards of affordable rural homes, and to improve the processes that govern and influence their provision.

Alliance members "pool" their potential sites, thereby ensuring that reserves are always available should other sites fail, for example, to gain planning permission. The fact that a replacement site could come from a different Local Authority area indicates the flexibility and mutual trust that the partners have for one another, and the essential strength of the approach. That the approach gave the Housing Corporation the confidence to allocate 20% of its regional rural programme budget to the Alliance, is ample proof that HARAH is both effective, and an excellent example of good, innovative practice in action.

For more information, please contact:

Julia Potter
Head of Housing
East Hampshire District Council
Penns Place
Petersfield
Hants GU31 4EX

Tel: 01730 266551

Email: Julia.potter@easthants.gov.uk

**Commission for
Rural Communities**

Head Office

John Dower House Crescent Place
Cheltenham Glos. GL50 3RA

Telephone 01242 521381

Facsimile 01242 584270

London Office

20th Floor Portland House
Stag Place London SW1E 5RS

Telephone 0207 932 5800

Facsimile 0207 932 5811

Email info@ruralcommunities.gov.uk

www ruralcommunities.gov.uk