



A 10-stage guide to developing an affordable housing scheme for local people in a rural community



Introduction

This booklet has been developed by the Rural Housing Enablers (RHE) on behalf of the Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing (HARAH). It is a basic guide for rural Parish Councils and rural communities across Hampshire to the process of developing rural affordable housing for local people, primarily on exception sites.

This guide is based on the 10 step guide produced by Action in Rural Sussex, which can be found in the publication 'A Good Practice Guide – Meeting affordable housing needs in rural communities'. A copy of this publication can be purchased from Action for Rural Sussex.

A glossary of the terms used in this booklet can be found in the accompanying 'Frequently Asked Questions' leaflet.

Note: This is a guide only. The steps may vary from one project to another.

More information is available on the HARAH website www.harrah.org.uk.

The 10 steps

The need for affordable housing for local people may have been identified by the parish themselves through a Parish Plan or by other discussions, or from individuals in the parish who expressed their own need to the Parish Council.

1 Consider the need for affordable housing in the parish

Contact the RHE at Action Hampshire who works in your District/Borough area.

Discuss the idea of affordable housing for local people at a Parish Council meeting. What level of need is there? The need can be identified more accurately through a parish based housing needs survey or a housing surgery. Please see point 3 'Assess the need'.

Is the majority behind the idea? Are there one or two enthusiasts who have the time and energy to work with the RHE to help develop the scheme? Is there likely to be opposition to the scheme? What form is it likely to take? Think about wider issues in the parish at the same time. Apart from housing people, what benefits, or otherwise, would a scheme bring to the village? Examples might be additional support for a local shop, an increased roll at the local school, or help towards sports facilities. Collect information about affordable housing projects. Maybe visit a scheme in another village.

2 Involve your community throughout the project

Take time to educate as well as consult. Often hostility to projects develops because people are basing their views on rumour and misinformation. People can only develop an informed view if they are properly advised about the project. Make sure the project reflects the views of people in the village. A housing needs survey or housing surgery can measure support for the project as well as the housing need. The greatest task is to listen to those people who are the least vocal – often the silent majority not the vociferous minority.

Do not overlook those people who are in housing need themselves. In order to retain and develop a mixed and diverse community the parish needs to consider a range of housing types and prices...this may include accommodation for single younger or older people and people with special housing needs as well as couples and families. Take care to distinguish between objections that are ill-informed, and those which are on genuine environmental or aesthetic grounds, or based on material planning grounds such as access, drainage or utilities. Keep consulting throughout the project, using the media available to you in your parish. The public can attend Parish Council meetings where the proposal is discussed and parish newsletters and the local newspaper can be used. A public drop-in day may be needed to fully discuss the project once it has been agreed in principle. Above all, many objections can be met by face-to-face conversations with well-informed councillors.

3 Assess the need

Does the Parish Council have a general awareness that there are local people in need of affordable housing?

Has an assessment of need already taken place – for example as part of the Parish Plan or through a district wide survey? Is this information up-to-date or of sufficient detail? Seek advice from the RHE who will be able to assist you with this. In conjunction with the RHE and District/Borough Council, decide if a local parish-based survey needs to be carried out. Would it be helpful to look at wider issues within the village at the same time through a Parish Plan? The RHE will assist the Parish Council to undertake a local/parish- wide Housing Needs Survey. A questionnaire will be sent to every household in the parish and to local people who have had to move away to find an affordable home, but are known to want to return. The survey can be used as a register, encouraging people to give their names and contact details. They can then be sent an application for the District/Borough Housing Register to apply for affordable housing. The RHE will present a report of the Housing Needs Survey to the parish council and local authority, which will consider the findings and agree how many homes should be provided to meet the need identified. A survey usually takes 2 or 3 months to complete. A housing surgery may be an alternative way to assess housing need and help people to apply for housing.

4 Identify potential sites

Find a site. This is probably the most critical stage of the affordable housing process. No site...no project. Is the Parish Council aware of land in the parish that could be used as an Exception Site and might be available for a housing scheme? Consider all possibilities. The RHE will coordinate a site appraisal involving Parish Councillors and District/Borough Councillors, officers from the District/Borough Council and the National Park Authority if appropriate, and the housing association. There may be suitable land owned by Hampshire County Council, the District/Borough Council or even the Parish Council, or it may be offered as a result of canvassing local landowners. Land may be put forward by landowners or developers, or a site may have been offered to a housing association. The available sites will be assessed. Are there planning problems? Is the site suitable in terms of access, landscape setting, services etc and can it be purchased at a price appropriate for affordable housing on an exception site? A drop-in day may be appropriate to gain the views of the local community towards the site(s).

5 Work with the housing provider

HydeMartlet has been selected as the development partner by HARA to develop all affordable housing on exception sites in Hampshire settlements. A detailed selection process was undertaken to ensure that the best affordable housing provider to meet the required criteria was chosen. The HARA partners continue to regularly monitor the performance of HydeMartlet on these criteria. HydeMartlet is a Registered Provider (RP). They own and manage affordable housing across Hampshire and the South East and have offices in Lymington, Alton and Blackwater. Their development officers have considerable experience of developing affordable housing in rural villages. The Parish Council and landowners may be approached by other Registered Providers and developers to provide affordable housing in the parish. The Parish Council should seek advice from the RHE or the District/Borough Council officers. If the land is an exception site, only HydeMartlet will be able to obtain funding from the Homes and Communities Agency to develop affordable housing.

It is important that the right type of housing is built in the parish. The homes should take into account factors such as the household size, age, disposable income and special requirements of those people in housing need. Information from the Local Authority and Help to Buy South housing registers, local knowledge and survey information will inform the discussions with the housing association, architects and the planning and housing departments.

6 Obtain Planning Permission

The housing association will take the lead, but with the help of the RHE, make sure you are consulted about the proposed houses and understand as fully as possible the planning and legal details of the scheme. Be prepared to voice comments on the design of the scheme. If possible, involve the whole community at this stage, perhaps through a drop-in day. Invite comments on the design of the buildings, particularly by those people who may live in them. A legal agreement will be drawn up by the Council to ensure that the homes will remain affordable for local people 'in perpetuity'. This is called a Section 106 Agreement. The District/Borough Council officers should discuss the local connection criteria with the Parish Council. The Parish Council should also carefully consider the draft Section 106 Agreement. Make sure that neighbouring parishes are eligible for the local connection in future allocations in case local people to your own parish have all been housed. A copy of the standard s106 terms and the local connection criteria is available from the RHE or can be found on the HARA website. The actual agreements will vary. Contact your District/Borough Council for details.

7 Secure funding

The Housing Association must apply for funding. This is normally obtained from Central Government through the Homes and Communities Agency. The funding subsidises the housing costs to ensure they are affordable to the occupiers. To be successful in obtaining funding, a scheme must be 'deliverable'. HydeMartlet must compete with other Housing Associations across the South East Region for the funding allocations. There must be a suitable site and preferably planning permission for the site. Once the funding is allocated, the scheme must meet agreed deadlines. The Parish Council need to be aware that funding is limited and to work with HydeMartlet to meet the deadlines, or their scheme may be at risk of losing funding. However, there is still an element of flexibility within HARA.

8 Build the houses

Enjoy watching the homes being built. Parishes feel great pride when they see their vision become a reality. Keep an eye on construction. The local community can have a role to ensure that there is not undue nuisance or inconvenience to local residents. The contractors that work for HydeMartlet must meet the 'Considerate Constructors' standards.

9 Understand the nomination process

This is one of the major concerns of parishes – that the homes built are used to house local people. Yet for obvious reasons, it is the one area where the Parish Council is likely to be in a sensitive position. It is important that the Parish Council understand the process to advise local people, but it is not appropriate for the Parish Council to be involved in the detail of the selection process as this would compromise both their position and the confidentiality of applicants' details. It is vital to disseminate information and advice to people in housing need. Some people complain that although they were aware that the housing was about to become available (they could see it being built), they did not know what they had to do to be nominated for a home. To be eligible to be nominated, a household must have their name on the District/Borough Housing Register for an affordable property to rent and on the Help to Buy South register for intermediate housing (such as shared ownership).

The Parish Council has a role in making people aware that they must register and how to do so (by word of mouth, through a note in the parish magazine or on notice boards). Do not forget those people who have had to leave the parish to find affordable accommodation elsewhere, but wish to return to their own parish. It is important to explain that, although people may not be high priority on the Housing Register, in the case of rural housing on exception sites, local connections will be the most important criterion, over-riding other factors. Verification of an applicant's local connection will be undertaken by the District/Borough Council, which may include a home visit if necessary. The Parish Council will be sent a list of the local connections of the selected applicants, but not the applicants' details due to data protection requirements. A copy of the allocation policy for exception sites is available from the RHE and the District/Borough Council.

10

Celebrate!

The day the new tenants move into the newly-built homes is a day for celebration. All those involved in the long and complex process of developing a scheme deserve to be recognised and praised...especially the parish councillors. An open day is often organised some time after tenants move in, to celebrate the new scheme. This is a good opportunity to show other Parish Councils the benefits and advantages of a local affordable housing scheme.

Reference:

'Good Practice Guide –Meeting affordable housing needs in rural communities' available from Action in Rural Sussex', price £10.

Who do we contact?

The main points of contact for Parish Councils are the Rural Housing Enablers. Contact them through:

01962 857361 info@actionhants.org.uk

Action Hampshire
Westgate Chambers
Staple Gardens
Winchester
Hampshire
SO23 8SR
01962 854971

www.harrah.org.uk

