

Hampshire

Alliance for

Rural Affordable

Housing

Building better lives case study

The Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing is working to improve awareness and the perception of affordable housing in order to meet housing needs in Hampshire's rural communities.

Situation

The county of Hampshire is mainly rural, with one national park and one proposed national park on its border. Over a fifth of its area is protected green belt land. With a population of about 1,250,000 it is the eighth most populated county in England. The average price of a home in Hampshire in May 2009 was £188,000. This was £36,000 more than the national average. In some rural parts of the county average prices can be over £300,000 with households needing to earn over £50,000 to get a foot on the housing ladder. Hampshire has two unitary authorities, 11 district councils, and many local parish councils, with 40 in the district of East Hampshire alone.

Task

Rural authorities in Hampshire have a track record of success in delivering rural affordable homes. However, some parish councils and communities have been more resistant to building new homes, raising concerns about the effects of new developments on their communities. One of the most common concerns is the stigma associated with affordable housing. Local citizens and the parish councillors who serve them are often unaware of the local need for more homes. With house prices rising considerably in recent years, local communities did not always understand that without affordable properties, local younger people are forced to move elsewhere. This could cause the economy and community of these small rural villages to eventually decline.

Rural housing enablers work with local authorities, local communities and landowners helping them through the complicated process of providing rural affordable housing. They commission housing needs surveys in the parishes where affordable housing is a known issue. They also work to increase availability of affordable housing by identifying potential sites and setting up the first discussions with the local community. But once sites are identified, local authority and parish council support is needed before work on new properties can begin. This can be a long process and the many parties involved can cause further delays. A coordinated effort to improve education and awareness of local residents and parishes is needed.

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Approach

The Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing was formed in 2005 to overcome these barriers and increase the number of affordable houses in the rural villages of Hampshire. The founding members of the alliance were the rural housing enablers, the Housing Corporation (now the Homes and Communities Agency) and the six rural local authorities in Hampshire: Basingstoke and Deane, East Hampshire, Hart, New Forest, Test Valley and Winchester. Hampshire County Council joined the Alliance in 2007, with the New Forest National Park joining in 2009.

Working with other associates, such as parish councils and a single housing association, the Alliance's mission is to develop and implement a programme to meet the regional priority for rural housing. The alliance does this by providing consistent information to parish councils, including housing needs information and by standardising processes and sharing good practice. This allows the Alliance to maximise investment and increase the number of rural affordable housing schemes delivered across Hampshire.

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The Alliance employs just one housing association, HydeMartlet, as its development partner. The Alliance chose HydeMartlet as the sole provider for housing on rural exception sites across Hampshire following a competitive tender. This has encouraged HydeMartlet's active participation in the Alliance. As the sole provider, HydeMartlet is guaranteed work on several schemes. It is therefore more willing to work on smaller, less profitable developments which are important to the Alliance, alongside larger, more lucrative schemes. For example, in 2006 there was only one scheme consisting of just eight housing units planned for the district of Hart, which may have been economically unfeasible for a housing association to undertake. However, as HydeMartlet was also working on four other schemes in Winchester consisting of around 30 units, as well as many others in Hampshire at the same time, it made the smaller scheme more commercially attractive.

By having just one housing association for the whole alliance, the Alliance can guarantee HydeMartlet future work and encourage it to explore the use of modern construction methods and building energy efficient units. Only having one developer has also reduced the bureaucracy associated with working with many building partners, and progress has increased as a result.

The Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing promotes the benefits of its work to local residents and parish councils to achieve its aim of building more affordable housing in rural areas. The Alliance has launched a large publicity campaign including production and distribution of a promotional DVD. The DVD shows several of the rural housing schemes as well as interviewing members of those communities about the benefits of building new local affordable houses. The DVDs cost £10,000 to film and produce, of which the Improvement and Development Agency contributed £2,000, with the members of Alliance providing the rest of the funding.

Result

The DVD has positively publicised the work of the Alliance by communicating the benefits of creating more affordable housing in the rural villages of Hampshire to non professionals, parish councillors and local people. The DVD has had a wide impact, with some parishes actively seeking Alliance schemes now that they know of the benefits of new affordable housing. This shows the benefits of investing in simple and user-friendly publicity tools to promote rural affordable housing and overcome opposition.

There are also several examples of the positive results that have come about through the Alliance and its other partners working together. The first Alliance scheme in the parish of Martyr Worthy provides ten homes for the exclusive use of local people. Another scheme in a parish in Test Valley saw two old houses on a brownfield site demolished and replaced by nine new properties. These do not sound like large gains, but for the small rural communities involved they have undoubtedly made a positive difference to the lives of those who live in them, their families and the local villages. In total, 84 affordable homes for local people for rent and shared ownership in villages across rural Hampshire were delivered between July 2005 and July 2009 with a further 91 on site or subject to planning approval.

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The Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing plans to further improve delivery of housing by developing a project management role which can monitor and shorten the development process. The Alliance aims to be in an even better position to offer affordable housing to the rural villages of Hampshire.



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