



**A 10 step guide
developing affordable
housing for local people
in rural communities**

Introduction

This booklet has been developed on behalf of New Forest District Council and New Forest National Park Authority by the Rural Housing Enabler, based at Community Action Hampshire. It is a guide for rural Parish Councils and rural communities to the process of developing rural affordable housing for local people, primarily on exception sites.

The New Forest Rural Housing Development Strategy gives more detail on how the parishes are prioritised for affordable housing provision, based on various assessment criteria. The Strategy is available from New Forest District Council (www.newforest.gov.uk) or Community Action Hampshire.

Note

If your parish is within the New Forest National Park area but not within the New Forest District Council area, please contact the Rural Housing Enabler (contact details at the back of this booklet). She will send you the appropriate booklet for either Salisbury District Council area or Test Valley Borough Council area.

The 10 steps

The need for affordable housing for local people may have been identified by the Rural Housing Enabler as a result of the process of prioritising rural parishes, as set out the Rural Housing Development Strategy, mentioned above. Alternatively the need may have been identified in the Parish Plan, or from individuals in the parish who expressed their own need to the parish council.

1.

Consider the idea carefully

- Contact the Rural Housing Enabler who works in your area to find out if any work has already been carried out in the parish
- Discuss the idea in the parish council.
 - Are the majority behind the idea of an affordable housing scheme?
 - 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
- Collect information about affordable housing projects. Maybe visit a scheme in another village.

2.

Consult your community

- 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. This may already be clear through work on the parish plan. If not, a local Housing Needs Survey can measure support for the project in addition to gathering information about the level of need . The greatest task is to listen to those people who are the least vocal – often the silent majority not the vocal minority.
- Don't overlook those people who are in housing need themselves. In order to retain and develop a 'balanced community' the parish needs to consider a range of housing types and prices...this may include accommodation for single younger or older people as well as young couples.
- 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 overcome by face-to-face conversations with well-briefed councillors.

3.

Assess the need

- Bring together what you know already
 - 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 Rural Housing Enabler, 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? Liaise with the Community Planning Officer at NFDC for advice.
- 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 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 form for the NFDC Homesearch Register to apply for affordable housing.
- The RHE will present a report of the Housing Needs Survey to the parish council. The parish council should consider the findings and decide whether to progress the development of an affordable housing scheme. A survey usually takes 2 or 3 months to complete.

4.

Identify potential sites

- Find a site. This is probably the most critical stage of the affordable housing process. If there are no sites there can be 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 Rural Housing Enabler will coordinate a site appraisal involving the parish council and local authority member, officers from the housing authority, NFDC, and the Planning Authority (New Forest District Council, or within the National Park the National Park Authority), and the housing association. There may be suitable land owned by public authorities such as Hampshire County Council, NFDC or even the parish council, or it may be offered as a result of canvassing local landowners.
- The available sites will be assessed. Are there planning problems? Is the site suitable in terms of access, landscape setting, services etc.? Is the landowner willing to make the land available for purchase 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).
- There is an agreed process for consulting on potential exception sites. This can be obtained from the Rural Housing Enabler.

5.

Work with the developer

- Local knowledge and survey information will inform the discussions with the housing association and their architects and with the planners.
- This should ensure that, the scheme not only fits in well with the character of the area, but also that the right type of housing is built in the parish, taking into account factors such as the household size, age, disposable income and special requirements of those people in housing need.
- Hyde Housing Association has been selected by HARA to develop all affordable housing on exception sites in Hampshire settlements of less than 3000 people .Hyde Housing Association is a Registered Social Landlord (RSL). They own and manage affordable housing across Hampshire and the South East. Their development staff have considerable experience of developing affordable housing in rural villages.

6.

Be patient whilst the Housing Association secures funding

- The Housing Association must apply for funding. This is normally obtained from Central Government. The funding subsidises the development costs to ensure the homes built are affordable to their occupiers.
- Be aware that funding problems may lead to frustrating delays.

7.

Obtain planning permission

- Allow the housing association to take the lead, but with the help of the Rural Housing Enabler make sure you are involved in commenting on the design of the proposed houses and understand as fully as possible the planning and legal details of the scheme.
- If possible, involve the whole community at this stage, perhaps through a drop-in day. Gain the views of a cross-section of residents, including those people who may eventually live in the houses.
- A legal agreement will be drawn up by the local authority to ensure that the homes will remain affordable for local people. This is called a Section 106 Agreement. The parish council will be consulted about this agreement. It will set out the local connection criteria used in the allocation of housing.

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.

9.

Assist with 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. The parish council cannot influence the allocations directly.
- However, 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 didn't know what they had to do to be nominated for a home. The parish council should use a variety of ways, such as notices and parish newsletters to publicise the homes and how the homes are allocated.
- To be eligible to be nominated, a household must have their name on the NFDC Homesearch Register .
- It is important to explain that, although people may not be high priority on the NFDC Register, in the case of rural housing on exception sites, local connections will be the most important criterion, over-riding other factors. You can obtain a copy of the Allocations Policy from NFDC .
- The local district councillor will usually be consulted on the allocations decided between the local housing authority and the housing association, to ensure the occupants meet the local connection requirements.

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

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', available from Action in Rural Sussex, price £10. Contact Michele Condon at AirS: Telephone 01273 407325 or email michele.condon@ruralsussex.org.uk

Frequently asked questions

What is affordable housing?

Rural affordable housing is housing provided in rural parishes for people who are unable to meet their housing needs in the general housing market. Affordable rented housing is usually owned by a Registered Social Landlord (RSL), normally a Housing Association, or by the local council and rented at a weekly rent that is affordable to people on low incomes. Shared Ownership and Shared Equity homes are partly purchased by the resident and partly owned by the RSL. In the case of shared ownership, the resident may pay rent on the part owned by the RSL. The RSL is able to provide the housing at affordable costs as they receive funding towards the development costs.

What are the benefits of affordable housing?

An affordable housing scheme can make a huge contribution to the parish, by:

- meeting the housing needs of local people – to be eligible for the homes, a household must be in housing need and have a local connection to the parish through residence in the parish; former residence and with close family still in the parish; or employment in the parish
- maintaining the viability of services and amenities in the parish, such as the local school, a village shop and post office; and
- supporting the social mix and social networks within the parish, and keeping alive local skills, traditions and knowledge.

Where would the housing be located?

Much of the affordable housing developed in rural parishes is located on 'exception sites'. These are sites within or adjoining settlements where residential development is permitted as an exception to normal planning policy. The housing must be affordable housing for local people and remain so in perpetuity. The site itself must meet the criteria set out by the local planning authority. Usually all potential sites around the settlement will be considered in order to find the best site.

Sites within the settlement boundary (i.e. non-exception sites) may also provide affordable housing as part of a market housing development. However these sites are usually too expensive to provide only affordable housing and local people will not necessarily be given priority for the housing.

Who are the Rural Housing Enablers?

The Rural Housing Enablers (RHEs) are mentioned frequently throughout the pamphlet. The RHEs are employed by Community Action Hampshire. They are funded from three separate sources and are therefore able to provide independent help and advice. Their role is to bring together and liaise with all the parties who need to be involved. In particular this means working closely with parish councils and local communities to identify housing need and make sure they are part of the process of developing affordable housing in their parish.

Which other parties are involved in the process?

As well as the parish council and parish community, the other key organisations are:

- The local planning and housing authorities – both councillors and officers (New Forest District Council, New Forest National Park Authority)
- The local highways authority (Hampshire County Council)
- Hyde Housing Association (The Registered Social Landlord)
- The owners of land with potential for affordable housing

What is HARAH (The Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing)?

Funding for affordable housing on exception sites comes from the Housing Corporation, a central government body which allocates money each year on a regional basis. Housing Associations, supported by the Local Authority, have to bid for money on a competitive basis.

The Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing (HARAH) has been set up to make sure the rural areas in Hampshire are not overlooked in this funding system. HARAH comprises the local authorities of Basingstoke and Deane, East Hampshire, Hart, New Forest, Test Valley and Winchester, together with the Rural Housing Enablers and the Housing Corporation.

In order to create a more strategic and effective approach to the delivery of rural affordable housing on exception sites in Hampshire and to attract more Housing Corporation funding to rural schemes in Hampshire, HARAHA invited submissions from local Housing Associations and consortia of Associations to undertake all development of rural affordable housing on exception sites in settlements less than 3000 people. Hyde Housing Association was chosen.

Who is Hyde Housing Association?

Hyde Housing Association is a Registered Social Landlord that owns affordable homes across Hampshire and beyond. Hyde HA has considerable experience of developing rural affordable housing and in Hampshire has a dedicated development officer for rural housing. Its main office base is in Southampton, with sub-offices in Alton, Lymington and Blackwater. Since July 2005 Hyde HA has been undertaking all rural housing development on exception sites in Hampshire.

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