

5-star plan for rural housing - annual review 2018

The 5-star plan for rural housing was formally launched during Rural Housing Week 2017. This five-year plan presented a clear ambition from housing associations to increase the supply of well-designed affordable rural homes. So far, the plan has attracted support from 95 organisations. This includes 55 housing associations and all leading rural organisations.

To have value, the 5-star plan needs to prove what impact it has as a stand-alone ambition and through associated activity. This review one year after the launch is designed to highlight some of this value. Although at the time of drafting this update figures are unavailable, indications are that over the past 12 months the level of affordable rural housing completions has increased as has the level of investment into rural housing from Homes England.

During the early stages of developing the 5-star plan, housing association and rural organisations were consulted on what the main challenges would be to delivery. Together the Rural Housing Alliance and National Housing Federation have sought to tackle these and details of this work are summarised below.

Overcoming local objection to new homes – Through networks and partnerships, key messages about how to avoid local objection have been promoted. This has included publishing a Rural Life Monitor in November 2017, which used case studies to show how new affordable rural homes have supported local services and economy. Collectively all supporters have advocated a community partnership approach and restated their shared commitment to delivering well-designed quality homes, that help local people.

Rural Housing Week 2018 saw tackling *Nimbyism* as a key theme. With a focus on promoting positive messages and examples, showing what new affordable homes can secure for local communities.

Building capacity to deliver more homes – The 5-star plan itself is aimed at encouraging housing associations to examine and push their own resource capacity. Inspiring interest from more housing associations is also important and the level of those supporting the collective ambition shows that this is happening.

The Federation's 2018 Influencing Academy had a generous rural cohort, and these individuals have been working together since to develop a regional approach to driving forward the 5-star plan, by acting as local rural champions from the housing association sector.

Working with Action with Communities in Rural England, a successful training event was held for Rural Housing Enablers (RHEs), more events like this are being planned. The outcome of these is to develop further the close partnership between housing associations and RHEs, to grow skills that have been highlighted as important.

A clear case has been made to Homes England for housing associations to have access to the Community Housing Fund. Housing associations are the most successful model of community led housing providers to date and this is especially true of those working in rural areas. Housing associations have a lot to offer the wider community led sector and government in this area.

Tackling land, planning and infrastructure barriers – Collectively housing associations have been increasing their engagement with the landowning and farming community. Most notable this is through improved partnerships with landowner organisations and through

hosting well-organised events. The national landowner conference arranged during October 2017 was a good example of this.

Influencing planning policy has also been a focus, with a strong response to the government consultation Right Homes Right Places in November 2017 and more recently in May 2018 the draft National Planning Policy Framework. The shared aspirations for the 5-star plan has increased collaborative working with wider rural organisations, making key messaging more prominent. For example, there has been widespread support to ensure the integrity of rural exception sites is protected, that the viability loophole is closed, calls for affordable rural homes to be proactively planned and importantly for the affordable housing threshold on small market sites to be lowered in rural areas.

Another example of work to influence policy includes the involvement from the Rural Housing Alliance in the Federations devolution work. Making a clear case for rural homes and infrastructure to be considered as devolution deals emerge.

A recent research project undertaken by the policy think tank IPPR into key rural housing issues has also been funded by supporters of the 5-star plan. This work refreshes key concerns around the impact of too few affordable rural homes and develops some clear asks. The IPPR research aligns well with the Rural Manifesto for Affordable Homes, which was launched during Rural Housing Week 2018 and evolves the 5-star plan into a cross-party manifesto supported by rural MPs.

What's next? More work is planned with the Influencing Academy rural cohort to drive forward the 5-star plan ambition at a local level. Continued partnership working will be essential, both between housing associations and with other leading rural organisations. From a policy perspective, work will include protecting the good things that we have, whilst trying to secure a better deal for rural communities who want to support housing associations work. The three themes of Rural Housing Week 2018 are also likely to feature, these are innovation, tackling rural loneliness and building homes to meet the needs of a changing demographic.

You can be sure that the good work will continue and the important role played by you, the supporter of the 5-star plan, will be invaluable.

Martin Collett, Rural Housing Alliance & Monica Burns, National Housing Federation

