Parish Councillors' Guide to Rural Affordable Housing

Rural Housing Alliance

Enabling rural communities to thrive

Foreword

As Patron of the English Rural Housing Association, I am aware that rural communities will only really thrive when there are good quality affordable homes available to those who live and work in rural areas.

Yet in many rural communities affordable housing is lacking, or in some cases absent. This is not a new problem, but one that has grown worse. High property values, increased aspirations to live in the countryside and limited development of new homes have all had an impact. Many local households are now unable to find a home they can afford in order to remain within the rural community where they have grown up or where they work.

It need not be this way. Across the country parish councils have supported and been a key partner in delivering small scale rural affordable housing developments. These have provided high quality homes that are affordable to run and not for sale on the open market. Their design balances being in keeping with local surroundings and reducing use of carbon fuels and resources. They have kept families together, boosted custom for local services, kept the community and local economy running with homes for essential workers, such as those employed in local businesses, teachers, care workers and those providing local services.

You too could make this difference, so please take time to read this practical Guide and think how this could be achieved in your own community.

Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal

Introduction

Ursula Bennion, RHA

Rural affordable housing is part of the lifeblood of rural communities, but it is in short supply.

Recognising this, members of the Rural Housing Alliance have pledged to ensure there are high quality, low carbon, affordable homes with great services in rural areas. We have committed to working closely with communities and parish councils to provide homes that allow young people to stay and work in villages. Homes that mean older people don't have to leave behind the support of family and friends when they cannot manage in their current home. Homes that avoid residents suffering ill health or fuel poverty.

As long-standing bedrocks of their local communities, the active involvement of parish or town councils is integral to a successful scheme. It is their strong community support and leadership that will ensure these homes are delivered.

We also know that embarking on this route can be daunting. To help you, the Rural Housing Alliance has produced this practical Guide. It will help your Council explore your options, guide you through the process of providing affordable homes and how you can actively support the development of affordable homes for people in your own community.

I would like to thank Jo Lavis for her sterling work in updating the document and ensuring it is as comprehensive and informative as it is. The Guide is correct as of June 2021 and reflects national policy at that date.

Ursula Bennion
Chair
Rural Housing Alliance

Rural Housing Alliance

The Rural Housing Alliance is a group of over 40 housing associations that develop and manage rural housing in England.

Richard Qualington, ACRE

ACRE believes that no one should be disadvantaged just because of where they live. This extends to being able to find a good quality affordable home. For too many people on low incomes in rural areas this is not possible and they are forced to move away. With their departure, the local shop loses custom, local businesses struggle to find workers, delivering services becomes more difficult and the informal social networks that support vulnerable members of the community fall away.

But, as the Covid pandemic has shown, rural communities are resilient, resourceful and supportive. It is this commitment to their community that has driven many parish and town councils to address the rural affordable housing challenges locally. Throughout this Guide you will find examples of where local councils have shown leadership, often with the support of a Rural Housing Enabler.

Their energy and commitment is inspirational. I hope their experiences and the advice in this Guide will encourage you to act locally to provide affordable homes in your community.

Richard Qualington
Executive Director
Action with Communities in Rural England

acre ACTION WITH COMMUNITIES IN RURAL ENGLAND

ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) is a national charity speaking up for and supporting rural communities. It is the national body of the ACRE Network, England's largest rural grouping of county-based local development charities.

Why this Guide will be helpful to you as a Parish Councillor

When you stood to become a Parish Councillor you probably wanted to make a difference to your community. To speak on its behalf and help local people. As you have listened to people in your parish, whether it is a single village or several small communities, you may have been told about, or maybe experienced yourself, the lack of suitable housing that can be afforded by people in your local area. A young person still living with their parents, a family in cramped or temporary accommodation, or an older person facing the prospect of moving away because they can no longer manage in their home.

Helping them can seem a tall order, but as a Parish Councillor you can play a vital role in meeting their needs. This Guide shows you how. Based on questions asked by Parish Councillors and experience of delivering rural affordable housing, it takes you through the options available to you, the stages in the development process, introduces you to the key players and arms you with an understanding of some of the technical matters that will help you make decisions. Most importantly of all it will help you deliver new homes that you can be proud of and make yours a thriving community.

But do not just take our word for it. Click here and listen to a Parish Councillor talk about what being involved in a rural community housing scheme meant to them and their community.

How to use this Guide

This Guide is an interactive document and you can choose which parts you want to read by clicking the **bold text section headings** in the box below. In each section you will also find links that take you to related parts of the Guide or to external documents or websites.

We are also delighted to be able to include links to case studies and short videos which we hope you will find inspirational.

The Guide is in two parts. Part One provides you with information that applies to all affordable housing schemes and sets out the different ways in which rural affordable housing can be provided.

Part Two focuses on Rural Exception Sites. This is a route tailored specifically to provide rural affordable housing and the one which provides the greatest opportunities for you and your community to be involved and shape the scheme to meet your parish's housing needs.

Part One: The Basics

What is affordable housing and who will live in it?	Definition of affordable housing and tenures
Why do we need affordable housing?	
What factors make for a successful scheme?	The rural affordable housing jigsaw
Which planning routes are available?	Market Led Developments First Home Exception Sites Rural Exception Sites
Who builds, owns and manages affordable housing?	
How can the parish council be involved in making sure the scheme meets the needs of our community?	

Part Two: Rural Exception Sites

What is a Rural Exception Site?	Definition and the 10 steps to developing a Rural Exception Site
Why would a parish council be involved in a Rural Exception Site?	Why would the parish council want to be involved? How long will it take and who will help us?
What are our options for delivering a Rural Exception Site?	Scheme developed, owned and managed by a housing association Partnership scheme between housing association and community housing association Scheme developed, owned and managed by a community housing organisation What factors should we take into account?
Building and maintaining community support	How do we test and build support for a Rural Exception Site scheme?
How do we know if there is an affordable housing need in the village?	What is a Housing Needs Survey? Why is a Housing Needs Survey needed and who uses the information? Do those who say they have a housing need automatically get a home on the scheme? Who carries out the Local Housing Needs Survey, how much does it cost and how is it paid for? What happens once the Housing Needs Survey has been completed?
Finding a suitable Rural Exception Site	What makes a suitable site for a rural exception scheme? How can we help find a suitable site? Who decides whether a site is suitable? Who negotiates with the landowner?
Bringing a housing association on board	How does a housing association become involved and what questions should we ask to check if they are the right one for us?
Designing a Rural Exception Site scheme	Who designs the scheme and how will the community have a say in the design? How will infrastructure needs be met? Who decides that the design is appropriate?

Part Two: Rural Exception Sites (Continued)

Gaining planning permission	At what stage will planners be involved in the scheme? Is it difficult to get planning permission on exception sites? Who will submit the planning application? What is the role of the parish council?
Building and funding the homes on a Rural Exception Site	Who will build the homes? Will the contractor be mindful of residents? How will we be kept informed of progress during the build phase? How can we be involved at the build stage? How are the affordable homes paid for? Will it cost the parish council anything?
Allocating and managing the homes and keeping them affordable in the long term	Who will qualify to live in the properties? How do those in housing need register for the properties? Who will decide who lives in the homes? How is the decision made? Who checks the community connection? What happens if no one with a community connection comes forward for the homes? What happens if the homes are not occupied by people with a connection to the community? What happens if there is a re-let or re-sale? How can the parish council help? Who will ensure the homes are kept in a good state of repair? Who will manage any resident problems?
How can we be sure the homes remain affordable in the long term?	What legal protections are available? Which affordable homes might be bought be the tenants?
Celebrate	
Glossary	

Part One: The Basics

What is affordable housing and who will live in it?

These are likely to be the first questions you will ask or be asked by others. You and they will want to be assured that the homes will be affordable to people in your community.

The most common definition of what is affordable is that the household pays no more than 33% of their income on rent or spends no more than 3.5 times their annual income on mortgage payments.

Whilst there is no legal definition of affordable housing, one is set out in the glossary of the National Planning Policy Framework. 'Housing for sale or rent, for those whose needs are not met by the market (including housing that provides a subsidised route to home ownership and/or is for essential local workers)'. Falling under this definition are several different tenures that range from homes to rent to those sold at prices below market value.

Social Rent	These homes are provided at the lowest rents. The level of rent is set using a government formula and local values set by the District Valuer, property size and average regional incomes.
Affordable Rent	The rents on these homes are higher than social rent. Rent is set at up to 80% of that charged for homes in the private rental market for an area. In practice the rent is usually a little bit lower so the resident can claim Housing Benefit if they need it.
Right to Shared Ownership	This is a Right for homes funded by Government grant after April 2021. It is only available in rural parishes with populations of more than 3,000 people. In these communities, Government will only provide grant if this right is offered to all social and affordable rented homes. The right entitles the resident to buy a 10% to 75% share of the home. The price of the share is based on a % of full market value with rent payable on the unsold share. Over time the resident can buy more shares up to 100% ownership.
Shared Ownership Housing	The resident owns part of the home, paid for with a mortgage, and they pay rent on the remaining part, plus service charges. On first sale the purchaser can buy between 10% and 75% of the open market value (using a RICS valuation), depending on the individual scheme. Over time they can buy further portions of their home, as they can afford – this is called staircasing. At a minimum a 1% share can be bought. In parishes with less than 3,000 population, the maximum amount that can be owned is limited to 80%. This means the home will always be part of the affordable housing supply. When the shared ownership resident wishes to move, they will sell the same % share as they own. In many rural areas this must be to someone that has a connection with the community.
Discounted Market Sale Housing	The initial sale price is set at a % of open market value with the level of discount being set by the local authority. In rural areas it is common for the local authority to require the % discount to be applied to future sales.
First Homes	This is a new affordable housing tenure. The homes are sold at a minimum discount of 30% of market value which applies to future sales, there is a price cap of £250,000 and it is restricted to households with a combined income of £80,000 per annum. Further details can be found in National Planning Practice Guidance.
Starter Homes	These are defined in legislation as homes sold at 20% of market value with a price cap of £250,000 outside London. There is no requirement that the discount is applied to future sales.

Why do we need affordable housing?

Across the country there is a lack of affordable housing to rent or buy in many villages, in some there is none at all. This causes hardship for people across the generations, young people just starting out on an independent life, families trying to provide for their children and older people who have lived in the village for most of their lives but whose growing frailty means they can no longer manage in their current home.

For these people a new affordable home puts more than a roof over their heads, it also gives them a safe and secure place from which they can build their lives and be part of the community.

But the benefits of affordable housing go much wider. It is the lynchpin of a thriving rural community. These homes are lived in by people who work in local businesses or provide local services, maybe a care worker or the person who works in the local shop.

They are the people who use local services, helping to keep them trading viably and available for everyone to use. They are a vital thread in the social fabric of the community, providing support for family and friends, perhaps an older relative or providing childcare so parents can work.

If you click here, you can hear from a resident on what having affordable housing has meant to him. Here you can read about the scheme he lives in.

What factors make for a successful scheme?

Five factors deliver a successful rural affordable housing scheme. These are best understood as a jigsaw: they are all interdependent and all need to be in place. Each of these are explained in more detail in the different sections of this Guide.

Which planning routes are available?

Affordable housing can be provided through one of three planning routes. On each of these types of site five types of providers can be involved, either working alone or in partnership. Their relevance to your parish will depend on the Local Plan policy for your area and whether sites have been allocated for development in your community.

It will also depend on how much involvement you want to have in the development and management of the homes. The table below describes the three principal planning routes and their pros and cons.

The next section describes the different providers.

Planning route	Pros and Cons
Allocated sites built for market housing but with a % of the dwellings provided as affordable homes. These sites will be either allocated in the Local Plan or be 'windfall' sites. In some cases, they may come forward because the local authority does not have enough land supply to provide the calculated number of houses, of all types, that are required. Here is an example of a market led scheme that includes some affordable housing.	**Pros** Relatively quick to deliver. Site supply is assured. Will provide some and a range of affordable housing if it is a requirement in the local plan, but national policy requires that 25% of the affordable homes are First Homes, sold at a discount of market price. **Cons** They may be of a scale that is larger than appropriate for your community. The affordable housing provided will not be tailored to the housing needs of your community. There may not be the same requirements for the affordable homes to be occupied by people who have a connection or support the sustainability and inclusivity of the community. The community has limited opportunities to shape the size of the scheme, the type and tenure of housing provided or the design of the development. However, some ways in which you could do this are set out here.

Planning route	Pros and Cons
First Homes Exception Sites This is a new type of site introduced in 2021. It will only be an option in some rural areas. Details can be found here. The scheme will provide wholly or mainly First Homes, which are sold at a minimum discount of 30% of open market value at first and subsequent sales. The scheme may include a small amount of market housing if needed to make it financially viable. It may also include a small amount of other forms of affordable housing. The site will not be allocated. It could be an infill site or one on the edge of the village that would not normally be considered appropriate for housing development. The site should be proportionate in size to the village.	**Pros** They provide affordable sale housing where the discounted price is locked into future sales. They are likely to be smaller scale than a market led scheme. The homes will be offered first to people who have a local connection. They could offer a mix of housing tenures and types. **Cons** The affordable housing will not be of a type tailored to the needs of your community. The discounted price may still be unaffordable to those seeking affordable sale housing in your community. The system for ensuring these homes go to people with a local connection and are affordable may mean the homes are offered more widely. They are likely to need a higher level of market housing than a Rural Exception Site, depending on whether First Homes are eligible for public grant funding. The community is likely to have less opportunity to shape the size of the scheme, the type and tenure of housing provided or the design of the development. However, some ways in which you could do this are set out here.

Planning route	Pros and Cons
Rural Exception Sites solely allowed to provide affordable housing to meet local housing needs in perpetuity. These are defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as small sites either within or on the edge of rural communities that would not normally be used for housing. They provide housing to address the needs of the local community. In some cases, there will be some market housing on the site where this is necessary to make it financially viable to build the scheme. Here is an example of a Rural Exception Site development.	**Pros** The type and tenure of the housing is determined by the evidence of local housing need. They are small developments, usually ranging from 3 to 20 dwellings depending on the level of housing need. There are established legal agreements that the homes are occupied by people who have a local connection or contribute to the sustainability and inclusivity of the village. There are established legal agreements to ensure the homes provided remain affordable in perpetuity. The community is involved at the stages of assessing need, identifying sites, design and allocation criteria. The detail of how this is achieved is set out in Part Two of the Guide. **Cons** They are usually slower to deliver than market led schemes.

Who builds, owns and manages affordable homes?

The table below sets out the different organisations that can provide affordable housing, the type of site they will be involved with and features that you will want to be aware of as you consider your choices of how to provide affordable housing in your parish.

Organisation	Type of sites they work on	Features to be aware of
Housing Association Not for profit organisations. they are often registered as Community Benefit Societies and may have charitable purposes or be a registered charity.	Allocated and windfall market led sites where a % of the homes are affordable. The housing association buys the properties and then allocates, manages and maintains the affordable homes. Rural Exception Sites. They may be involved in First Homes Exception Site developments. 100% affordable housing sites, which they may own themselves.	The community will be involved to different degrees depending on the type of site. It will be greatest on a Rural Exception Site. The nature and points at which the community can be involved in development on these different sites is explained here. Housing associations have access to a range of finances that can readily be used to fund new homes. This includes agreed loans, internal subsidy and public grant. In most villages with populations of 3,000 or fewer, housing association properties built: • for rent cannot be bought by the resident; • residents of Shared Ownership housing can only buy up to 80% of their home This is explained in more detail here. Here you can read about a housing association development.

Organisation	Type of sites they work on	Features to be aware of
Local Authority Some local authorities build new affordable housing themselves. This may be as the Council or through a company they have set up and run.	Allocated and windfall market led sites where a % of the homes are affordable. The local authority buys the properties and then allocates, manages and maintains the affordable homes. Rural Exception Sites. They may be involved in First Homes Exception Site developments. 100% affordable housing sites, which they may own themselves.	Residents of homes built for rent by local authorities will be able to buy their homes under the Right to Buy. This is explained in more detail here. Here you can read about a council built scheme.
Stand-alone Community Land Trust or other community housing organisation These are legally constituted groups, usually Community Benefit Societies, often with charitable purposes or independent charities. Included in this category are CLTs, Co-operatives, Cohousing groups, and some forms of Self and Custom Build.	Allocated and windfall market led sites where a % of the homes are affordable. The housing association buys the properties and then allocates, manages and maintains the affordable homes. Rural Exception Sites. They may be involved in First Homes Exception Site developments. 100% affordable housing sites.	Under this option the community group are responsible for all aspects of the development and long-term management of the properties, whatever type of site is involved. Residents of rented properties owned by a formal community housing organisation that are built without public grant cannot buy their home and the CLT/housing group can restrict the percentage of an affordable sale home the resident can buy or use a covenant to control resale price. You can find out more about Community Land Trusts here and here about other forms of community led housing. Here you can read about a community led housing scheme.

Organisation	Type of sites they work on	Features to be aware of
A partnership between a housing association and Community Land Trust The legal form of the organisations is as set out for housing associations and community housing organisations. Here you can read about a partnership CLT and housing association scheme. Here you can hear from a Chair of a CLT group and Parish Councillor on how they worked together and with a housing association to provide and manage affordable housing.	Allocated and windfall market led sites where a % of the homes are affordable. The housing association buys the properties and then allocates, manages and maintains the affordable homes. Rural Exception Sites. They may be involved in First Homes Exception Site developments. 100% affordable housing sites.	The community will be involved to different degrees depending on the type of site. It will be greatest on a rural exception site. The nature and points at which the community is involved are explained in full here. In most villages with populations of 3,000 or fewer, Community Land Trust properties built: • for rent cannot be bought by the resident; • residents of Shared Ownership housing can only buy up to 80% of their home. This is explained in more detail here. You can find out more about Community Land Trusts here and here about other forms of community led housing.

Organisation	Type of sites they work on	Features to be aware of
Private developer with housing association buying and then managing the affordable homes These are private for-profit organisations. They range from local small enterprises to large national organisations. The developer will build the homes and usually a housing association or community housing association will usually buy and then let or manage the affordable homes.	Allocated led sites where a % of the homes are affordable. The housing association buys the properties and then allocates, manages and maintains the affordable homes. They may be involved in First Homes Exception Site developments. A developer's involvement on a rural exception site will be solely as a contracted builder.	Opportunities for community engagement are significantly less than for schemes developed by other organisations. Some ideas of how a parish council might seek to shape these schemes is provided here. In most villages with populations of 3,000 or fewer where the affordable housing is owned by a housing association or Community Land Trust properties: • homes for rent cannot be bought by the resident; • residents of Shared Ownership housing can only buy up to 80% of their home. Residents of properties owned by a formal community housing organisation that are built without public grant cannot buy their home and the CLT/housing group can restrict the amount of a sale home the resident can buy or use a covenant to control resale price.
Private landowner This may be small schemes of one or two dwellings, or a larger scheme provided, by a landowner. They will retain ownership and manage the affordable housing.	Allocated and windfall sites where a % of the homes are affordable, but the landowner retains ownership of the affordable housing. Rural Exception Sites. They may be involved in First Homes Exception Site developments.	The degree of community involvement will be at the discretion of the landowner. It is likely that it will be greatest where the scheme is being built on a Rural Exception Site. There are no resident rights to buy rented homes and the landowner can decide how much of an affordable sale home a resident can buy and what restrictions they put on resale prices. Here you can read about a scheme built by a private landowner.

How can the parish council be involved in making sure the scheme meets the needs of our community?

The extent to which you can be involved is very much dependent on the planning route that is used to deliver the affordable homes. The opportunities are limited on a market led scheme, but you can have a significant input into a Rural Exception Site.

Allocated market led site developments

Even on allocated market led sites there are some ways in which you can become involved. This is more about influencing the decisions of others and as a Parish Councillor you have a formal voice in the process at the planning application stage. You could also use your unique position as community leader to facilitate a constructive conversation between the developer and the community. The watch words are engage early and engage constructively. You could take the following steps.

Checklist

- [ ] Comment on the Local Plan to: call for and support a % of dwellings on allocated sites to be affordable housing; and specific policies for rural affordable housing including a Rural Exception Site policy.
- [ ] Develop a Neighbourhood Plan or local design code with policies and requirements for what type and tenure of homes should be provided on market led sites.
- [ ] Contact the landowner and or developer to:
  - Ask to be involved in discussions on design, housing type and tenure mix.
  - Offer to organise community consultation events to inform decisions on design, housing type and tenure mix.
- [ ] Seek a meeting with the planning officer who is the case worker for this scheme so your views can be fed into pre-application discussions with the developer.
- [ ] Provide comments on the formal planning application when you are notified that it has been submitted by the Local Planning Authority.

First Homes Exception Sites

Opportunities to shape these schemes will be limited because the tenure mix is largely decided by national policy, with First Homes making up most of the development. However, you could:

Checklist

- [ ] Carry out a Housing Needs Survey to try and influence the tenure mix.
- [ ] Contact the landowner and or developer to:
  - Ask to be involved in discussions on design, housing type and tenure mix.
  - Offer to organise community consultation events to inform decisions on design, housing type and tenure mix.
- [ ] Seek a meeting with the planning officer who is the case worker for this scheme so your views can be fed into pre-application discussions with the developer.
- [ ] Provide comments on the formal planning application when you are notified that it has been submitted by the Local Planning Authority.

Rural Exception Sites

This is where you can really take the lead. At the heart of these schemes is the full and meaningful engagement of the community from first considering this option, all the way through including: assessing how many and what type of homes are needed, identifying a site, deciding what the homes will look like, to the homes being built and residents moving in.

For this reason, all of Part Two of this Guide provides you with information on what happens at each stage and how you can become involved in a Rural Exception Site development.

Part Two: Rural Exception Sites

What is a Rural Exception Site?

These are small sites within or adjoining villages that would not usually be considered for residential development. They are an exception to this because they provide affordable homes to meet the housing needs of the community in perpetuity. They are in fact tailor-made for rural communities.

There are generally 10 steps to developing these sites.

The steps may not follow the exact sequence in the diagram; some steps will run in parallel and others may occur in a slightly different order. At all the stages you as a Parish Councillor have a role to play, sometimes very active, sometimes giving your support to the scheme, sometimes explaining and encouraging parishioners to become involved in a constructive way.

The next sections of the Guide take you through each of the steps, explaining what will happen, how you can be involved and some of the technical detail that will help you make decisions and make the most of your role as a Parish Councillor.

The 10 steps to delivering a Rural Exception Site

Why would a parish council be involved in a Rural Exception Site?

Why would the parish council want to become engaged in a Rural Exception Site scheme?

You or your fellow councillors may already be aware from conversations in the community that there is a lack of affordable homes to buy or rent. A group in the community may have contacted you, seeking your help to provide affordable homes. Or perhaps a landowner has spoken to you about offering a site for affordable housing.

You may also be aware that some of your local services are vulnerable or that local businesses are finding it difficult to attract and keep workers. Providing affordable housing will not only meet housing needs, but through the people it houses it will also contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of the community. The residents are likely to work locally, and use local services such as the shop, pub or local school. They will already be part of the community, maybe providing support for other members of their family or friends.

It can also bring environmental benefits by the way it is designed to reduce the use of carbon, contribute to tackling climate change and perhaps provide other environmental benefits for the whole community.

Whatever the starting point you have a responsibility to respond. Your community is special, it will have its own characteristics, history, look and feel. As a Parish Councillor you will know what these are and want to make sure that the best qualities are retained, and improvements made where possible. Becoming actively and positively involved in a Rural Exception Site scheme means that you can achieve these goals.

You hold a unique and vital position. You will be the bridge that brings people together. Because you know personally many of your parishioners you will be able to explain why the scheme is needed and will benefit the community. As a Parish Councillor you can make sure their voices are heard and taken into account; and where this is not possible be able to explain to them why a different approach has been taken.

There is nothing as rewarding as being there when the residents move into their homes, knowing that you have played a role in providing a lasting benefit to the community that they and you can be proud of. Here you can read about a Parish Councillor who has been so inspired that their council has come back for another scheme.

How long will it take?

There is no pretending this will happen overnight. It will always depend on the individual scheme and how long each step of the process takes. As a rule of thumb, it can take over three years from the first discussions of a project to residents moving into their new homes. The length of time will vary depending on the approach that you take and the level of commitment that you can offer to support the process. A good deal of patience and determination are required, but the reward is new affordable homes that will support your village community for years to come. This Guide will help you keep your scheme on track.

Who will help us?

Rest assured, there is a wealth of experience on hand to help and talk things through with you face-to-face. The table below sets out where you can find this support, what they can provide and how you can work with them. There are also some short videos where they describe their jobs and how they work with parish councils.

Rural Housing Enablers

How they can help you.....

Provide information so you decide if and how you want to proceed.

Build community interest and support.

Assess local housing needs.

Identify a site.

Choose/work with a housing association.

Run events so the community can have a say in design of the scheme.

Input into the local lettings policy and/or Section 106 Agreement and provide explanations and technical advice so you have the information you need.

They can act as an independent, honest broker between the different parties involved.

Here you can hear from a Rural Housing Enabler (RHE).

How you can work with them?

Invite them to an informal conversation about what is involved.

Invite them to a parish council meeting or a community event so they can explain what affordable housing is, who it is for and how it will be developed.

Publicise and help deliver the local Housing Needs Survey.

Be a supportive voice in the community.

Take part in any consultation events they organise.

Encourage people to participate in community design events.

Be ready to listen to advice and sometimes work to find compromises, if necessary, to ensure the scheme is deliverable.

How much does it cost and how do we contact them?

The RHE service is free of charge, except they may ask you to contribute to the cost of the Housing Needs Survey, this will be around £2,000.

Their costs are funded by a mixture of grant from local authorities and housing associations and some also charge a fee that is paid for through the scheme's capital funding.

You can find the contact details for the RHE working in your area here.

If you cannot find an RHE, seek out your local authority Strategic Housing Enabler/ Affordable Housing Development Officer.

Local Authority Strategic Housing Enablers/Affordable Housing Development Officers

They are a helpful person to ask for help wherever you live, but particularly if you are in an area where there is no Rural Housing Enabler.

How they can help you.....

Provide evidence of local housing need or help commission a Housing Needs Survey - sometimes they will pay the RHE to do these.

Find a housing association to work with you.

Some may have funds or expertise to help you pay for support setting up a community led housing organisation.

Act as a bridge and negotiate with the planners or housing associations if the scheme hits a sticking point.

Help secure grant funding to build the homes, including from the local authority.

Work with the local authority's housing allocation team on local lettings policy/Section 106 Agreement.

They will provide formal comments on a planning application.

Help to keep your Ward Councillors and portfolio holders in the loop on your scheme, helping to build in their support.

Where the local authority owns housing stock, the housing enabler will also be involved in promoting new council housing schemes.

Here you can hear from a local authority housing enabler.

How you can work with them?

Invite them to an informal conversation about what is involved.

Invite them to a parish council meeting or a community event so they can explain what affordable housing is, who it is for and how it will be developed.

Publicise and help deliver the local Housing Needs Survey.

Be a supportive voice in the community.

Take part in any consultation events they organise.

Encourage people to participate in community design events.

Be ready to listen to advice and sometimes work to find compromises, if necessary, to ensure the scheme is deliverable.

How much does it cost and how do we contact them?

The local authority housing enabler service is provided free of charge.

To contact them call or e-mail your local district/borough or unitary council and ask to speak to the Housing Enabling Officer or Strategic Housing Officer.

Housing Associations

How they can help you.....

Identify a site.

Help run events so the community can have a say in design of the scheme.

Input into the local lettings policy and/or Section 106 Agreement.

Help you build community interest and support.

Provide explanations and technical advice so you have the information you need to make decisions and explain the scheme and what is happening to the community.

Provide regular updates on how the scheme is progressing so you can relay this to the community and are aware at an early stage of any complications.

Where there is no RHE or the local authority is unable to offer staff from their own enabling team, the housing association will be able to offer more support in order to fill their role.

Here you can hear from a housing association development manager.

How you can work with them?

Invite them at an early stage to discuss the possibility of a scheme.

Invite them to a parish council meeting or a community event so they can explain what affordable housing is, who it is for and how it will be developed.

Take part in any consultation events they organise.
Encourage people to participate in community design events.

Keep them updated on any concerns being raised by the community as the scheme proceeds.

Be a supportive voice in the community.

Be ready to listen to advice and be willing to find compromises, if necessary, to ensure the scheme is deliverable.

How much does it cost and how do we contact them?

The housing association provide their support free of charge as they are employees of their organisation.

You can find a list of housing associations that deliver rural affordable housing from the Rural Housing Alliance website.

You could also ask your RHE or local authority Strategic Housing Enabler/Affordable Housing Officer, which housing associations develop rural schemes in your area.

Community Led Housing Hubs/Advisers

How they can help you.....

Provide information to help you decide if and how you want to proceed.
.
Help you choose and register as a legal entity.

Help you build community interest and support, including membership of your CLH organisation.

Assess local housing needs & identify a site.

Choose/work with a housing association.

Help run events so the community can have a say in the design of the scheme.

Input into the local lettings policy and/or Section 106 Agreement, provide explanations and technical advice so you have the information you need.

If you are doing a community owned scheme in partnership with a housing association, they can help you with project management of the community inputs.

How you can work with them?

Invite them to an informal conversation of what is involved.

Invite them to a parish council meeting or a community event so they can explain what affordable housing and a community owned scheme is, who it is for and how it will be developed.

Be a member of the steering group and then the formal governance body for the community owned housing organisation.

Publicise and help deliver the local Housing Needs Survey.

Be a supportive voice in the community.

Take part in any consultation events they organise.

How much does it cost and how do we contact them?

Community Led Housing Advisers will usually provide support free of charge as you consider your options. Thereafter they may charge for their service on a contract basis. Alternatively, it will be absorbed into the development costs. This will be a decision for the community if it is building the scheme themselves or the developer who builds the homes if this is a scheme done in partnership.

They will be able to help you apply for any funding available to cover their costs if this is needed.

Community Led Housing Hubs/Advisers (Continued)

How they can help you.....

If you choose to do a stand-alone community owned scheme, they will also help you:

- Put together a Business Plan for the project
- Carry out financial appraisals of the scheme
- Secure the finance
- Gain planning permission
- Find specific expertise you may need, such as architects and surveyors, project managers
- Tender for and manage the build contract
- Set up an allocations policy and process

Here you can hear from a Community Led Housing Adviser.

How you can work with them?

Encourage people to participate in community design events.

Be ready to listen to advice and sometimes work to find compromises, if necessary, to ensure the scheme is deliverable.

How much does it cost and how do we contact them?

Sometimes the CLH Adviser is also an RHE – so worth checking if this is the case.

These advisers will have completed accredited training. There are also independent CLH advisers, but it would be worth checking that they have completed the CCH training and are accredited.

You can find the contact details for the CLH Hub Adviser working in your area here.

What are our options for developing a Rural Exception Site?

There are three principle options that you could consider if you want to provide new affordable homes on a Rural Exception Site. For all these the community will be involved in the assessment of housing need, identifying a site and design of the scheme. The difference is that the two involving a community owned housing organisation require significantly more time and resource input from the community during the pre-development and construction phases and because the community will own the homes, a long term, possibly inter-generational, commitment to managing and maintaining homes is required.

It is also worth considering at the outset what levels of support are locally available to you through each approach, what funding you can access and whether there are housing association partners with the capacity and willingness to work with the joint model, if that is the preferred option.

Scheme developed, owned and managed by a housing association

Under this option the housing association bears all the responsibility for the scheme and will own the finished homes. They will secure the site, design, finance, gain planning permission and build the scheme. Once completed they will own and manage the properties, including allocating the homes to residents, and carry out maintenance and repairs. Housing associations that are members of the Rural Housing Alliance have made a pledge that throughout the process they will work closely with the community.

Rural Housing Alliance

Our pledge is to ensure there are high quality, low carbon, affordable homes with great services in rural areas.

We will:

- **Work closely with local communities and parish councils to find the best solution to meet identified housing needs.**
- **Ensure that homes are occupied by people who have a local connection or contribute to the sustainability and inclusivity of the village and rural area.**
- **Ensure that affordable homes always remain affordable.**
- **Build sensitively designed, high quality homes which contribute to the beauty of an area.**
- **Build to high environmental standards which help residents and communities reduce their carbon impact and be more sustainable and resilient.**
- **Provide locally sensitive, high quality services to our residents and their communities.**
- **Always listen and respond positively to our customers and the local community.**

Delivering our Pledge will create and maintain positive local rural communities as real places to live and thrive in.

Partnership scheme between housing association and community housing association

This includes Community Land Trusts, Cohousing, some forms of Self and Custom Build, and Co-operative housing.

Under this option the community has ownership of the homes by setting up a formal legally constituted organisation, that owns the freehold of the properties. The group choose and work closely with the housing association in the same way as they would for a housing association owned development. The housing association still secures the finance and builds the scheme. They would hold the homes on a long-term lease, commonly 125 years, but it can be much longer, and would manage the allocations, repair and maintenance during this period. You can find out more about how community housing groups work with housing associations here. Before embarking on this approach, parish councillors are recommended to check what support is available locally to support a community housing group and whether there are housing associations in the area that are willing to work with this approach. It may vary from area-to-area.

Scheme developed, owned and managed by a community housing organisation

This form of development includes Community Land Trusts, Cohousing, some forms of Self and Custom Build, and Co-operative housing.

Under this option the community form a legal organisation, put together a viable business plan, take responsibility for finding and securing the site, gaining planning permission, raising the finance, commissioning professional advisers and contractors and managing the build contract.

The completed homes are owned and managed by the community housing organisation, including the allocation of the properties and long-term maintenance and repair. They are responsible for legal compliance and regulation associated with being a landlord. They receive income from the scheme from rents and any sales with the monies financing the organisation and funding future housing or other community owning asset activities, such as community buildings, pubs, allotments and even workshops.

Before embarking on this approach, parish councillors are recommended to check what support is available locally to support a group to take on all the responsibilities as it may vary from area-to-area.

What factors should we take into account in making our choice?

The first thing to know is that there is lots of support you can draw on to help you work out which choice is right for your parish council and community. One of your first ports of call could be a Rural Housing Enabler. They will invite you to describe what you want to achieve, explain what the different options involve and answer the questions that you are bound to have at this early stage.

In advance of speaking to them, or maybe as part of a meeting, your parish council may like to consider the questions below.

It is not expected that the parish council or community has the skills, knowledge and expertise necessary to make a development happen. The Rural Housing Enabler will support you, providing information and expertise that you can draw on to make sure your community is involved. They will also help you find other professionals who can help you, including finding a housing association to work with.

Here is a table that tells you who these people are, how they can help you and how you can work with them.

- [ ] How much time and expertise do we have in the different elements that make for a successful Rural Exception Site scheme?
- [ ] Do we want to be responsible for appointing and managing a building contract?
- [ ] Do we want long-term responsibility for allocating the properties, managing the scheme, maintenance and repairs?
- [ ] Are there other existing groups or individuals that could take the lead or work with us, such as a Neighbourhood Planning Group?

Building and maintaining community support for the scheme

How do we test and build support for a Rural Exception Site scheme?

Experience shows that given the opportunity to be involved constructively, local residents can be a scheme's greatest champions. As Parish Councillors you play a leading role in creating these opportunities and can do so effectively by following three golden rules:

• Start early to dispel myths and assure residents that the scheme will be developed with, not imposed on, them.

• Keep the community involved and informed all the way through to completion. It is a thread that needs to run through every stage.

• Communicate, communicate, communicate!

How you do this requires openness and sensitivity, being willing to listen to concerns and where possible seek to accommodate them. But it also is where you can show leadership; advocating, explaining and sometimes holding firm.

At each step on the way you and your community will have the opportunity to engage and some ideas on how to do this are set out in the relevant sections of this Guide. As a first step you will need to build community support.

Floating the idea and building community support

Be prepared. First you need to have a good idea of what it is you want to achieve and some basic information of what an affordable housing scheme will offer. This Guide provides you with some of this information, but you could also start by having an informal conversation with the Rural Housing Enabler or local authority housing enabler or local housing association in your area. You may like to check how many affordable homes there are in the parish, how many have had to be sold under the Right to Buy in the past and an idea of local house prices. It may be that some people have already approached you describing their housing difficulties. If you make these anonymous you could use their stories to show others how the lack of affordable housing is affecting people in your community.

The temptation is to jump straight into calling a public meeting, but there is a risk that these events will be dominated by a few individuals whose views will not be informed by what affordable housing is, who will live in it, or how it will be developed and managed. The ill-feeling that such events cause can make it an uphill struggle to bring the community on board. Instead, you could first set some seeds and garner support in a more low-key approach. It takes a little longer at first, but it is worth the effort and in the long-term speeds up the process. Here are some ideas you may like to try.

Checklist

- ☐ One to one conversation with some of the movers and shakers within your community. It may be the vicar, someone that is involved in running community activities, your District Councillor if they are not also a Parish Councillor. Explain why you think an affordable housing scheme is needed, seek their insights and ask for their support.
- ☐ Have a stall at a community event or in a public place where you can explain to the community in an informal social setting why you think an affordable housing scheme is needed. This will also be an opportunity to take soundings on who will support a scheme and where there may be challenges.
- ☐ Does your parish have a Facebook Page? You could use this to float the idea, maybe include some photos of completed schemes in other parishes to show the quality of the homes and what can be achieved. You could do the same through an article in your village newsletter.
- ☐ Go and speak to some of the social groups in your community, perhaps the WI, a group for older residents and somewhere young people gather. If you have a school, you could talk to parents as they collect their children. Explain what you want to achieve and ask for their views.
- ☐ Ask some of the people who run local businesses whether they are aware of the difficulties arising from a lack of affordable housing.

Whichever of these routes you use, remember pictures are often more powerful than words. People will be reassured if you can show them the quality and the small-scale nature of what you are proposing. The Rural Housing Alliance website has some wonderful images and case studies you could use.

Having taken these soundings and built interest, and hopefully support, for a scheme you could put on a public meeting. But try to avoid the top-table and audience approach. The checklist opposite suggests some ways in which you can bring people together that gives everyone an opportunity to air their views, avoids confrontation and helps build support for your scheme.

- [ ] Have people sit in small groups.
- [ ] Make sure to invite some of those people who were supportive when you spoke to them earlier.
- [ ] Ask some of the supportive 'movers and shakers' to speak and give their support during the meeting.
- [ ] Ask some of those who are experiencing difficulties finding a home if they would be willing to describe their experiences.
- [ ] Invite a local employer who has experienced difficulties finding staff to talk about the challenges they face.
- [ ] Invite speakers who can outline what affordable housing is, who it will house, how the community will be engaged. Ask them to be brief, allowing time for parishioners to ask them questions. This could be the Rural Housing Enabler for your area, the local authority housing enabler or someone from a housing association who has developed a scheme nearby.
- [ ] Have some pictures and case studies available to show people what can be achieved.

What can we do about objectors who continue to oppose the scheme?

Keep the channels of communication open and be consistent in the message you deliver, which means it is important to understand how a project will develop, right from the beginning. This leaves less room for miscommunication and means you are entering the process with all the information and can turn to fellow councillors for support.

If some members of the community cannot be persuaded of the benefits to the community, try and understand that they do not want new homes on land which, according to the current plans, probably was not intended for development. Listen to what their concerns are and show you have heard what they have said. Give answers where you can and if you are not sure say you will get back to them – and do.

The partners in the project will be able to give you continued support and help you answer questions that you do not feel able to answer in full.

Sometimes for all your efforts there may still be people who oppose the scheme. That is not unusual. Your role is to stand firm for the benefit of the wider community.

How do we know if there is an affordable housing need in the village?

You may already have heard of people who are struggling to find a home to rent or buy that they can afford. This is a good start, but you will need to have much broader evidence if you are going to take a scheme forward. For this reason, a local Housing Needs Survey will usually be required.

What is a Housing Needs Survey?

A Housing Needs Survey takes the form of an anonymous questionnaire sent to every household in the parish. Where the parish is made up of more than one village the survey will need to include people living in all the villages. The purpose of a Housing Needs Survey is to identify the amount of affordable housing that is needed and the type and tenure of housing being sought. As part of this the analysis will seek to establish what is affordable to the household looking for somewhere to live. Additional publicly available information is also incorporated into the report to describe the housing market conditions in the parish.

Why is a Housing Needs Survey needed and who uses the information?

The results of the Housing Needs Survey are the founding block for the scheme. They will:

- Inform your Council's decision on whether to proceed with a scheme.
- Can be used to encourage a landowner to make a site available.
- Provide the housing association or community owned housing organisation with the information it needs to design the scheme that meets the needs of the community and is financially viable.
- Provide the evidence that triggers the input of the local authority housing enabling staff and informs early pre-application discussions with local authority planners.
- Provide supporting evidence required in planning applications and will be taken into account in the decision on whether to grant planning permission.
- Inform the process for allocating the homes to residents.

Do those who say they have a housing need automatically get a home on the scheme?

No, but those expressing a need are often encouraged through the survey to formally register on the local authority's housing list. The process for allocating the properties is explained here.

Who carries out the local Housing Needs Survey?

Rural Housing Enablers can help you carry out the survey, or in some cases this may be the local authority housing enabling officer. They will design the questionnaire, advise on its distribution, collate and analyse the results into a report and present the findings to the parish council. Here you will find guidance produced by the RHE Network that sets out what you can expect from a Housing Needs Survey.

You, as Parish Councillors, will have an important role to play; telling people the survey is coming, why it is being carried out, encouraging people to complete it and explaining what will happen next. You could send the survey out with a parish newsletter or hand deliver them.

Who much does it cost and how is it paid for?

In some areas the Rural Housing Enabler will carry out the survey free of charge but in others there is a small fee, usually £2,000.

What happens once the Housing Needs Survey has been completed?

The responses to the survey will be analysed by the Rural Housing Enabler and written up into a report that is presented to the parish council. You have time to consider the report and the Rural Housing Enabler or local authority housing enabling officer will attend a meeting with you to explain and discuss the results. Armed with this evidence you can decide whether to proceed with a scheme.

Who else has access to the Housing Needs Survey Report and information?

The Housing Needs Survey Report will be made available to the parish council. Who else has access to the report is dependent on who has paid for the survey and who holds the Intellectual Property Rights. Where the survey is undertaken and owned by a non-public body, they can choose how they share the report. However, if your parish council or the local authority has paid for it, the report will become publicly available information, and someone can ask to see the report under the Freedom of Information Act. There are exemptions that could apply to release of the data and the licence agreement that commissions the report can guard against the misuse of this data for commercial uses. Your Rural Housing Enabler will be able to explain this in more detail.

Finding a suitable site for a Rural Exception Site scheme

What makes a suitable site for a rural exception scheme?

By definition for a site to be considered a Rural Exception Site it is not allocated in the local plan for residential development.

Beyond that there are a number of factors that will be taken into consideration to decide whether or not it is suitable.

Here is a checklist of what the planners and housing associations will be looking for.

Location

Is it within or adjoining the village?
Are there any existing or failed planning applications for the site?

The Site

How big is it? It is unlikely to be accepted if it is bigger than 2 acres.
What is its current use? It could be farmland, or a piece of undeveloped land that is lying vacant or unused. It could also be a site that has been used for some other purpose, perhaps a farmyard, garage or workspace. Sometimes local authorities might have small pockets of land that they no longer use.
What is its topology?
Is it flat or on a slope? Does it flood?
Are the boundaries clear?
Are they clearly marked on the ground?
Is it registered with the Land Registry?
Will the ground conditions affect building work or costs?
Is there any contamination from previous uses?
What underlies the soil and how far down?
Are there any overhead cables?
What trees are on or forming the boundary of the site?
It will be necessary to know if any of the trees are subject to Tree Preservation Orders.

The Site (Continued)

How easy will it be to connect the development to services?
Is it on main sewers and water?
How near is it to electricity supply?
How near is it to broadband supply?
Are there any special /protected flora or fauna on the site?
Is it near to a statutorily protected habitat? - For example: Newts/badgers/bats to name a few, Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
Are there likely to be any bones or archaeological remains?

Access

How easy and safe will it be for people and cars to exit and access the site?
How near is it to a road?
Will it be possible to gain access on to the road?
Will it need /is there room to put in splay lines so there is safe car access onto the road?
Will any traffic calming measures be needed?

Landowner

Is the landowner known?
Are they willing to sell the site?
Are there, or will they seek, any covenants on the site?

This may seem like a daunting list of requirements, but at this stage it is about producing a shortlist of potential sites and it is certainly worth putting all possible sites forward. Through design or drawing in additional funding it might be possible for an improbable site to become the one chosen to best meet the identified need.

How can we help find a suitable site?

As Parish Councillors you have a vital role to play in identifying sites. In the checklist are some ideas of how you can be involved.

Checklist

- [ ] The Rural Housing Enabler, housing association (or community owned housing group if that approach has been selected as the preferred approach) will invite Parish Councillors to a village 'walkabout'. Your local knowledge will help answer some of the questions in the site suitability checklist. It is also your chance to ask further questions of them. Sometimes someone from the local planning department may attend to give an initial view of whether a site is suitable.
- [ ] It is likely too that you will know the local landowners. A personal approach from you may unlock a site. You will be able to explain why the scheme is needed and what will be involved. But this will be to establish the principle. The detailed negotiations on price will be handled by the housing association.
- [ ] It may be that the parish council owns some land that could be used. This too should be included for consideration. A conversation with the local authority housing enabler may also identify some sites in the council's ownership that could be sold to a housing association.
- [ ] If your village has a Neighbourhood Plan, or is in the process of preparing one, check if they have identified any sites that could be considered as a Rural Exception Site.
- [ ] Occasionally, a site may already have been proposed. However, even with a willing landowner it is important that other sites are considered. This demonstrates that the 'due process' has been followed and there is transparency in the site selection process.

Who decides whether a site is suitable?

The decision on whether a site is suitable rests with the local authority planners and the organisation building the scheme.

The planners will have the ultimate say and will check that the location and position of the site is compliant with policies in the Local Plan and its development does not infringe any statutory habitat protections. They will also carry out further checks with the Highways Authority and, if there is any risk of flooding, they will seek the views of the Environment Agency. From 2021 the site will also be assessed to establish its current biodiversity value. This sets the baseline from which the scheme will be expected to provide a 10% net biodiversity gain.

Housing associations, or the community owned housing organisation where they are going to develop the scheme, will also carry out further investigations. These will establish whether there are any physical factors that would prevent the scheme being built or would add to its cost. From these surveys and using the data from the Housing Needs Survey they will do an economic viability appraisal of the scheme to check that it is financially feasible to build the homes.

Who negotiates with the landowner?

The housing association, or the community owned housing organisation where they are going to develop the scheme, will negotiate the sale price with the landowner. The price they pay will be informed by calculating the costs of building the homes, the cost of finance and availability of grant and the income from rents and sales.

As Rural Exception Sites are not allocated for development, they do not have any value other than their existing use. Instead the sale price reflects that their sole purpose is to provide affordable homes to meet local housing needs. As a broad rule of thumb this results in a price of £10,000 to £12,000 per dwelling, which equates to £100,000 to £120,000 per acre.

In some instances, the landowner may choose to lease the site, usually for 125 years, rather than sell the site. Occasionally the landowner maybe offered the right to nominate residents to one or two of the dwellings in the scheme, but these residents would still have to need affordable housing and meet any occupancy conditions.

Who will advise us?

The Rural Housing Enabler or the local authority housing enabler will be able to offer advice and help you organise and go with you on the 'walkabout'. They may also link in the relevant planning officer for your area. Here you will find how to contact the RHE or, if there is not one for your area, the local authority's housing enabling officer.

By this stage it is likely that a housing association has been identified to work on the scheme. It will be helpful to draw on their experience and advice as you do the walkabout. This gives you an opportunity to build a relationship with them and explain what it is you want to achieve. It will also mean you will know why some sites have been rejected and others put forward, so you are able to explain these decisions to parishioners.

Bringing a housing association on board

In some cases, a specific housing association may be involved from the outset. They may own a site, already have been approached by the landowner, or be the housing association selected by the local authority to work in your area.

In some cases, you may have a choice and the Rural Housing Enabler can guide you through the process of choosing the right housing association for your scheme. Even if there is already a housing association involved you may want to reassure yourselves that they are the one for you.

This checklist gives you some questions you could ask and requests you could make.

Checklist

- ☐ What experience do they have of delivering small rural schemes on Rural Exception Sites?
- ☐ When and where was their last scheme?
- ☐ Is there a scheme nearby that you can visit?

- ☐ What is their approach to working with the community?
- ☐ Can they give you the contact details for a person from a parish council they have worked with recently that you can talk to?

- ☐ What measures do they take to make sure that the schemes are designed to sit happily in the village setting?

- ☐ What measures do they take to make sure the running costs of the homes helps to make them affordable to the resident?

- ☐ How do they manage allocation of properties in rural schemes?
- ☐ What steps do they take to make sure that as far as possible the homes are initially and on re-letting occupied by people with a community connection?

- ☐ Do they manage other properties in the area? Where are they located?
- ☐ How do they involve their rural residents in development and management of their services?
- ☐ What policies and mechanisms do they have for involving tenants?
- ☐ Do they work with local builders, suppliers and trades people?

Designing a Rural Exception Site scheme

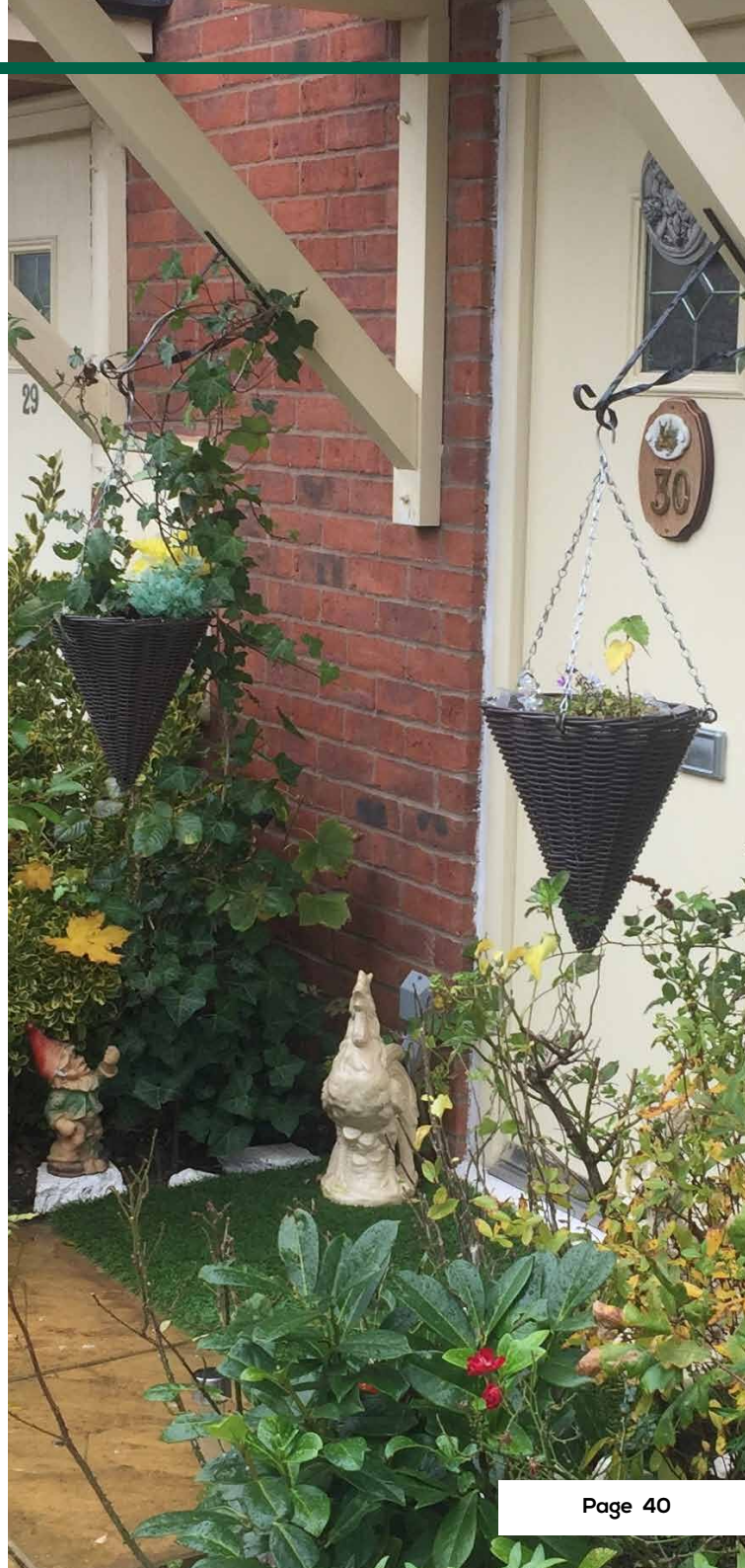
Who designs the scheme – what will they take into account?

You will want the scheme to be designed so it is in keeping with your community and the homes are of a high quality. To see just how good this can be take a look at the case studies on the Rural Housing Alliance website. You could also ask the housing association involved with your scheme for details of developments nearby that you could visit.

Once a site has been identified and the landowner has agreed to make the land available, the housing association or community owned housing organisation where they are developing the scheme, will commission an architect to design the development. Often it will be an architect with whom they have worked before and who appreciates the sensitivities around rural development.

The architect will have to take into consideration any physical constraints of the site and any planning requirements, including policies on design, set out by the Local Planning Authority, and national standards, including requirements to respond to climate change. As this is a Rural Exception Site you will have the opportunity to be involved too, through active engagement in the process.

The final design will need to provide the number, type and tenure of housing required, informed by the Housing Needs Survey, and be financially viable to build. This may mean that some compromises on design may be needed, but this should not be at the expense of quality or local sensitivity. A good architect working with the local planning department and the community, will be able to produce creative solutions.



How will the community have a say in the design?

The design stage is a real opportunity for the whole community to engage in the scheme. There are several ways in which this can be done, and the parish council can play a pivotal role in ensuring these are positive and constructive. In the checklist you will find some ideas of how you can become involved in the design of your scheme.

- At a minimum you will certainly want the housing association, or community owned housing organisation, to put on an open community consultation event. It should provide images and examples of what is being proposed, with opportunities for members of the community to comment. Remember to hold these at times when different members of the community can come along and give it lots of advanced publicity. You could even piggyback on another village social event. It is helpful to have the RHE or the housing association present at these events so they can answer questions about what the scheme will provide and who will live in it. Make sure all the comments are recorded and there is a report that explains how they have been accommodated and if not, why this has not been possible.
- In advance you may like to carry out, or support a local group to carry out a Village Design Statement. They describe the distinctive character of the village and the countryside around it. Drawing on these they record the design principles for future development.
- Take the consultation to the people. You could involve the local school as a way of bringing other members of the community into the conversation. Here you can read about how a primary school was involved.
- Use the legal requirement that a scheme must provide a 10% net biodiversity gain to encourage members of the community to share ideas of how this might be met, either on the site or elsewhere in the village.

How will infrastructure needs be met?

Integral to the design will be the provision of infrastructure, such as roads, drainage, sewers, water and electrical connection. There may also be other infrastructure requirements that will be set out in a Section 106 Agreement. This is the legal planning agreement that goes with the planning permission. It is worth remembering that the residents of these homes will be people already living in the community, so there will not be an increase in demand on wider infrastructure such as schools and medical facilities.

Who decides that the design is appropriate?

The ultimate decision on the design of the scheme will be taken at the planning application stage. The planning officer will make a recommendation to the planning committee and they will decide whether to approve. As Parish Councillors you will be notified when a planning application is submitted which gives you a direct voice through the comments you submit on the planning application.

In advance of this the housing association, or the community owned housing organisation, will have to agree the design. Their decision will be informed by how much the scheme costs and how much funding they can draw in. You can find out more about how the scheme is financed here.

By supporting the process of community engagement and becoming involved at the design stage it is more likely that your views are taken on board. It is in the interests of everyone that this happens at an early stage, not left to the point at which the planning application is considered. There may be times when not everything you are looking for can be accommodated, but it is reasonable that the housing association, or community owned organisation, explain why this has not been possible.

Gaining Planning Permission for a Rural Exception Site scheme

Preparing for the planning application is one of the most time-consuming elements of the process. There are numerous, and often lengthy, consultations between all partners to make sure the evidence, design, cost and location of the development deliver the right homes in the right place.

At what stage will planners be involved in the scheme?

Ideally from the outset. Once a Rural Exception Site is mooted the planners should be engaged. These will be primarily those who are responsible for Development Management. They will be involved in identifying and agreeing a suitable site, pre-application discussions with the architect and housing association or community owned organisation, planning application stage and agreeing any planning conditions or Section 106 Planning Agreements that are part of the planning permission.

The Rural Housing Enabler and/or the local authority housing enabler are there to help and will have frequent contact with the planners, promoting the scheme and helping to resolve any problems that arise.

Is it difficult to get planning permission on exception sites?

It should not be considered easy, but if there is a Local Plan policy for rural exception sites and the proposed scheme meets the strict criteria, then planning permission may be granted. Briefly:

- There must be a proven need for affordable housing for local people.
- The proposed homes must meet this identified need.
- There must be a mechanism to keep the homes at below open market prices and permanently available to local people.
- The housing association, or community owned organisation, must be prepared to enter into a Section 106 Agreement.
- The site and designs comply with all other planning policies.
- The site is well related to the village or adjoining the village boundary.

Once submitted for planning permission, a decision should be made in 8 to 13 weeks, depending on the size of the application. Given that these schemes are 'exceptional' the decision will normally be made by the planning committee. Occasionally, this may be delegated to an officer.

If the planning application is refused, an appeal can be made to the Planning Inspectorate and would be lodged by the housing association or community owned housing organisation. The Inspector will look at whether the correct policies and processes have been followed and the facts and evidence of the application. If you have done all the preparation and all the planning criteria have been understood and met, there should be a strong case for the appeal to be successful.

Who will submit the planning application?

Commonly this is the architect, on behalf of the housing association, or the community owned housing organisation. However, it could also be the developer or planning agent.

What is the role of the parish council?

The parish council has a key role to play. When your parish council is consulted on a new or revised Local Plan it is important to check that a Rural Exception Site policy is included and that it can be used in your parish. In your formal response support the policy where it exists. If it is absent ask for it to be included, citing the requirement in the Rural Housing section of the National Planning Policy Framework.

When it comes to the scheme in your parish your role is more direct and vital.

Checklist

- [ ] You could write a letter in support of the scheme and ask others to do so.
- [ ] Speak to your Ward Councillor and explain why the scheme is needed and ask them to speak in support at the committee meeting.
- [ ] You will be formally notified of the application and you can respond in support.
- [ ] Ask to speak at the Committee meeting demonstrating additional support for the scheme.

Building and funding the homes on a Rural Exception Site

Who will build the homes?

The housing association, or community owned housing organisation where they are developing the homes themselves, will manage the build. The level of technical knowledge and expertise should not be underestimated, housing associations generally have dedicated development staff. They will contract with a builder, often one local to the area and be responsible for managing the development through the construction phase.

Will the contractor be mindful of local residents?

Yes. Contractors are usually required to be signed up to the Considerate Constructors Scheme. This means that these companies make assurances to be clean, safe, responsible and establish full and regular communication with site neighbours. In some cases, the firm may run a health and safety campaign with the local school(s).

How will we be kept informed of progress during the build phase?

The housing association, or community owned housing organisation, should give you regular updates on progress and explain any delays. If you are not receiving them, ask them to send you an update at least every month.

How can we be involved at the build stage?

It is in everyone's best interests to establish a good working relationship with the community during the construction period. As a parish council you play a key role in ensuring this happens.

Checklist

- ☐ You should report to the housing association, or community owned housing organisation, any concerns that local residents might have about the building works.
- ☐ Ask them to let you know about any roadworks or local disruptions so you can alert local residents in advance.
- ☐ Ask them for updates on progress and if there are any delays, why these are occurring. It will be important to keep the community informed, maybe through a newsletter/website or Facebook page.
- ☐ As the homes near completion, the housing association, or community owned housing organisation, will begin the process of allocating the properties. You could help by advertising that the application process for the homes is open when the homes are nearing completion – if local people do not apply, they cannot be allocated the houses.

How are the affordable homes paid for?

In most cases some public money is needed to subsidise the cost of building affordable housing schemes on Rural Exception Sites. Housing associations, or community owned housing organisations, make the formal application to Homes England for this grant funding. If the scheme is being built by a Community Owned Organisation, they will first have to gain Investment Partner registration and after this become subject to formal regulation from the Regulator of Social Housing. Housing associations, who are also regulated under the same framework, tend to have resources dedicated to making sure that the burden of regulation is complied with as a matter of course.

These applications are considered in the context of the area in which the homes are being provided, so that a balanced view is taken on value for money. There are limits on the funds available and the total scheme costs of any project put forward must not be too high. This is why acquiring land through the exception site policy for a lower than market price is essential to make sure a development is viable.

In some cases, the local authority may contribute funding. This may come from money they have received from selling council homes, known as Right to Buy receipts. In other cases, it may be money that has been paid by a developer in place of providing affordable housing as part of an open market development. This is known as S106 funding or commuted sums.

Government grant funding covers only a small part of the overall cost (currently in the region of 30%) so housing associations, and community owned housing organisations, invest in new schemes by using their own reserves or securing private loans. Depending on the needs of individual developments, the local authority could also contribute. Housing associations will generally have loans agreed upfront and detailed financial plans that make some internal subsidy readily available to support their work.

Grant funding is not always available or there may be insufficient finance to cover costs. However, the National Planning Policy Framework allows for a small number of open market sale homes on an exception site. The profits from these sales fill the funding gap by putting them back into the scheme to subsidise the affordable homes. This is known as cross-subsidy.

Will it cost the parish council anything?

No, your time and input are a valuable investment in the project. Sometimes parish councils have contributed by making land available for development. In some cases, they have also contributed loan funding through their access to the Public Works Loan Board.

Allocating and managing the homes

Who will qualify to live in the properties?

The purpose of a Rural Exception Site scheme is that it provides affordable homes in perpetuity to people who will support the sustainability of the community.

A S106 Agreement, or more rarely a planning condition, will set out the qualifying criteria for who will occupy the homes. Commonly these will be people who are:

- Already living in the community or have a long-term connection with it;
- Supporting or require support from someone in the village;
- Employed locally; and
- Those who would contribute to the sustainability of the village.

In some authorities it may be possible to arrange a Local Lettings policy. These apply to lettings for a specific development and could include that the homes are let to people with a defined community connection. Commonly they become an appendix to the Section 106 Agreement for the site, which gives them legal weight.

How do those in housing need register for the properties?

To be considered for one of the homes the person seeking an affordable home must register their need.

Those needing rented housing will do this through the local authority's Choice Based Lettings process. The Rural Housing Enabler, housing association or local authority housing enabler will be able to tell you the name and contact points for your local system. According to the applicant's level of housing need they will be put into a priority banding. They will also register their connection to the community. As and when the properties are available to let, they will be notified, and they can 'bid' to be considered for that home. The local authority will then nominate people for the scheme.

Those interested in Shared Ownership register with the local Help to Buy Agent, usually a housing association, who advertise all the affordable home ownership opportunities available within a particular area. They may also be able to register directly with the developing association.

Where the scheme is providing Discounted Market Sale properties, those interested in buying will need to register their interest with the housing association or community owned organisation if they are going to manage and allocate the homes. Their applications will be assessed to check they have a housing need and connection to the community.

The allocations process may vary slightly depending on the housing association and local authority partners so it is important to ask how the process works early on to make sure you fully understand what is involved. The Rural Housing Enabler, housing association or local authority housing enabler will be able to explain and provide more information.

Who will decide who lives in the homes?

Ultimately the responsibility for deciding who lives in the houses lies with the housing association, or community owned housing organisation if they are managing the properties, but the local authority also plays a key role by providing nominations for the homes through the Choice Based Lettings system.

By law the homes must be allocated in a fair and transparent way. Having a degree of separation offers protection from local challenges that might emerge, securing the degree of separation is not as easy for community owned housing associations who live amongst those applying and may know them personally.

Legislative changes have led to some local authorities reducing the numbers who qualify to access their Choice Based Lettings. This has had a bigger impact in rural areas than most, as there are fewer smaller units available and households who typically apply for local needs homes are not always considered to have the highest housing need. It is important to be clear on the approach that your own local authority takes from the outset so that each party can set clear expectations about who qualifies and how they can apply.

Given the level of need and small size of Rural Exception Site schemes it is likely that not all those who need a new home will get one. You will be shown, or can ask for, the housing association's, or community owned organisation, allocation criteria and procedures.

How is the decision made?

The allocation is made using a points-based system which will be used to assess the housing needs of the local people who apply. For Shared Ownership properties applicants will also need to have sufficient finances to meet the commitment of owning their own home and be able to secure a mortgage for the percentage share of the property they are going to buy.

Who checks the community connection?

The local authority and/or housing association and community owned housing organisation, where the latter is going to manage the homes, will check whether an applicant meets the occupancy criteria. They will always ask for written evidence to support an applicant's claim. If they claim to work in the local area, they will need a supporting letter from their employer, or if they live in the village, examples of utility and council tax bills.

What happens if no one with a community connection comes forward for the homes?

This is unlikely to happen because the scheme has been designed specifically to meet identified needs in your parish. However, people's circumstances change and sometimes it is not possible to find anyone who would meet the community connection criteria. The housing association, or community owned housing organisation, cannot afford to leave the homes empty because they will still need to pay off the loan that has helped finance the scheme.

To avoid this, the Section 106 Agreement sets out that if within a defined period of time no qualifying person from the parish, which will include all villages in the parish, comes forward to be housed, the homes are offered to people in an ever-widening geographic area. Usually, this is to the adjoining parishes in the first instance, extending to the local authority area at the final stage of the cascade. The next time the home is let, the cascade reverts to first seeking residents from the parish.

What happens if the homes are not occupied by people with a connection to the community?

If you believe that the terms of the Section 106 Agreement have not been adhered to, the first thing to do is contact the housing association, or community owned organisation, and request more information. It can be that a misunderstanding or a lack of communication can cause innocent mistakes. There are confidential reasons why one applicant's housing need will be prioritised over another and these cannot be revealed, but the housing association, or community owned organisation, is responsible for ensuring that the local connection of applicants is checked and that they meet the requirements of the S106 Agreement.

If you do not receive a satisfactory first response, you can use the housing associations, or community owned organisation, complaints procedure to request that the matter is investigated again. As a last resort you can contact the planning authority and register your concern.

What happens if there is a re-let or re-sale?

When a Shared Ownership property comes up for re-sale the local authority or Help to Buy Agent will pass a list of the nominated households to the housing association or community owned housing organisation where they are managing the properties. They will then allocate the homes on the strength of community connection (using the criteria in the S106 Agreement) and the applicant's housing need (as detailed in the policy and procedure).

If you hear of a vacancy first you do not have to wait, get in touch and find out how you can help get the word out to local people.

People from the parish wanting to live in one of the affordable rented homes must make sure they are registered with the local authority. Available rental properties will be advertised via the Choice Based Lettings system and low-cost ownership homes usually via the Help to Buy Agent for the area.

The local authority or Help to Buy Agent will pass a list of the nominated households to the association. The housing association, or community owned housing organisation where they are managing the properties, will then allocate the homes on the strength of community connection (using the criteria in the S106 Agreement) and the applicant's housing need (as detailed in the policy and procedure). Additionally, in the case of Shared Ownership properties, the applicant's financial situation will be taken into consideration. The process will be the same as the first time the homes were allocated.

How can the parish council help?

Allocating the properties and making nominations is a sensitive process and sometimes involves making tough decisions deciding between people competing for the properties. By law this must be a fair and transparent process. For these reasons parish councils do not become involved in the deciding which individuals live in the properties. However, you do have a vital role in encouraging people to register for the homes.

Checklist

- [ ] Familiarise yourselves with the allocation process at an early stage. The housing association, community owned organisation, and/or Rural Housing Enabler will be able to provide the information you need.
- [ ] Encourage people to register on the local authority housing list. If they would like a Shared Ownership home, be ready to give them details of the local Help to Buy Agent. You could run an annual feature in your parish newsletter or magazine.
- [ ] As the building work starts ask the housing association, or community owned housing organisation, to run a 'surgery'. Once people see the homes happening it is likely more people will come forward with a need. The 'surgery' means they can register their need and receive advice on how the process will work.
- [ ] Keep reminding people to register throughout the process, from when the idea of a scheme is first proposed to the point of completion. Perhaps using your local newsletter, Facebook page, social media, and posters in prominent places in the village.
- [ ] In years to come, run annual features in your local newsletter or Facebook page.to remind people.
- [ ] Remember, new Parish Councillors are elected and staff at housing associations, or community owned organisation, will change so it is important to keep a channel of communication open and keep records of important documents.

Who will ensure the homes are kept in a good state of repair?

The housing association, or the community owned housing organisation where they have long-term management of the properties, are responsible for the ongoing upkeep and maintenance of the rented units and work with shared owners to also ensure that their homes are maintained to a high standard. In particular, building safety compliance is critical and the housing association, or community owned organisation will be legally liable for this.

Some developments may have areas of communal planting and the housing association, or community owned housing organisation, will put a contract in place to maintain this. Make sure you know who the development's dedicated Housing Officer is so that you can make them aware of any local issues.

Who will manage the homes?

This is the responsibility of the housing association or community owned housing organisation.

Housing association residents will have a Housing Officer to contact about any financial or domestic issues. Residents have peace of mind that their accommodation is secure, and the rents will continue to be affordable. Housing associations have a range of policies and procedures that will help people should they experience, for example, financial difficulty or a disagreement with their neighbour.

Community owned housing organisations should have a nominated member of staff or Trustee who performs this role. This can be challenging given that they are likely to live within the community. Because of this the community housing organisation will sometimes contract a housing association to do this on their behalf.

Residents, whether they rent or have purchased part of their property, are encouraged to become involved in how their homes are managed and the services the housing association, or community owned organisation, offers. Most housing associations have staff in place to encourage and support this involvement.

How can we be sure the homes remain affordable in the long term?

A central characteristic of Rural Exception Sites is that the homes remain affordable in perpetuity. This is secured through legislation, Section 106 planning agreements and covenants. These are set out in the table below.

Protection	What it does
Exemption from the Right to Acquire (1996 Housing Act)	• In designated settlements with populations with 3,000 people or fewer, residents of housing association owned homes built since April 1996 do not have the Right to Acquire (this is not the Right to Buy) their home. • These are listed and mapped, and the documents are held by the local authority and Homes England.
Exemption from leasehold enfranchisement (2008 Housing and Regeneration Act)	• In parishes with populations of 3,000 or fewer, residents of Shared Ownership homes are not able to buy 100% of their home and sell into the open market. These parishes are legally defined as Designated Protected Areas (DPAs) • This legislation also provides that a housing association can either limit how much a resident owns to 80% of the equity, or require that they have the first opportunity to buy the home when it comes up for sale, before it is offered on to the open market.
Section 106 Planning Agreements	• These are legal obligations that run with the land and are part of the planning permission. • They will set out a requirement that the housing association or community owned housing organisation provide and retain the homes as affordable housing in perpetuity. • They will also set out that the homes should be occupied by people with a connection to the community. It will include the criteria that define that connection.
Covenants in the property deeds	• These are usually included in the deeds of sale and are commonly used where the home is being offered at a price below market value. • The covenant sets out the % discount and that this will apply to the first and any future sales. • This arrangement applies to First Homes, which are a specific tenure defined in the NPPF.
Community Land Trust properties built without public grant (Housing and Regeneration Act 2008)	• If the Community Owned Housing Group is a Community Land Trust and has built their homes without Government grant, the rented homes cannot be bought by the residents. The organisation can also decide whether and how much those buying part of their home can purchase and determine arrangements for selling on the homes. The perpetuity lock for Community Land Trusts comes from the definition of CLTs set out in the 2008 Housing and Regeneration Act.

Which affordable rented homes might be bought by the tenants?

Right to Buy – this is a legal right only open to tenants of homes owned by local authorities and some tenants of housing associations where homes have been transferred from a local authority. There is no rural exemption from this right, so these homes can be bought by the resident and sold onto the open market. Some rural local authorities can require that the home is sold to someone with a local connection, or offered to them first, before it is sold onto the open market.

Voluntary Right to Buy - in recent years the Government has mooted the idea of extending the Right to Buy to tenants of housing associations, or community owned organisations where the homes were built with Government grant, under the Voluntary Right to Buy. However, this has not been enacted. Critically, the Voluntary Right to Buy included some rural safeguards which meant that housing associations, and Community Land Trusts working in partnership with housing associations, could decide not to sell their rural properties.

Right to Acquire – in settlements with populations of more than 3,000 tenants have a legal Right to Acquire their rented home if it is owned by a housing association and was built after 1996. This right is not available to residents of these properties in parishes with populations of 3,000 or fewer.

Celebrate!

Rural affordable housing schemes provided on Rural Exception Sites are very special. They happen because everyone works together to provide new homes that help the parish to thrive. As Parish Councillors you will have played a pivotal role and without your time, support and willingness to get stuck in, those beautifully designed homes would not be there. As the residents move in its time to be proud of what you have achieved. So, whether it is popping a champagne bottle, planting a tree, or having a party – CELEBRATE!

Glossary

Term	Definition
Affordable housing	Homes offered for rent or sale at below open market prices and rents.
Affordable Homes Programme (AHP)	Capital grant programme run by Homes England available to Registered Providers to develop affordable housing.
Affordable Rent	Homes offered at no more than 80% of open market rents.
Affordable Home Ownership	Homes offered for sale at prices below open market value. Can include discounted market sale and shared ownership homes.
Cascade	Sets out the ever-widening geography over which homes on a Rural Exception Site will be allocated if there is no one in the parish with a housing need. It usually starts with the parish, then neighbouring parishes and eventually out to the council area. It will be defined in the Section 106 Agreement.
Choice Based Lettings	A system used by most local authorities for residents to register a need for affordable housing. When a home comes up for letting or re-let those registered can 'bid' for the property. They will then be assessed against the eligibility criteria of housing need and any community connection requirements.
Community Led Housing Hub	County or regional organisation that provides local face-to-face support for groups considering or involved in a Community Led Housing scheme.
Community Owned Housing Organisation	Legally constituted local organisation who own and can develop and manage homes for the benefit of the local community with an asset lock to keep the homes affordable. Includes Community Land Trusts, Co-operative housing, Co-housing, some forms of Self and Custom Build and Self-help housing.
Cohousing	Housing that is created and run by its residents. Each household has a self-contained home. Includes private and affordable homes.
Co-operative housing	Affordable housing that is owned and or managed by their residents who are members of the co-operative.

Term	Definition
Community Land Trust	Local legally constituted group who develop and manage homes for the benefit of people in their community. They may also own and manage other assets such as allotments and workspace.
Community Led Housing Adviser/Facilitator	Individual with expertise who supports community groups to form, develop and manage affordable housing that will be owned by the community.
Commuted sum	Also known as S106 financial contributions. These are a financial sum taken in place of on-site provision of affordable housing. Its future use will be to support affordable housing delivery, but this need not be in the community where it has been levied.
Covenant	A formal and binding legal agreement between two or more people. Can be used to secure long-term affordability of homes developed as affordable housing.
Cross-subsidy	The use of sale profit from market housing to help pay for the development of affordable homes.
Designated Protected Areas	Defined in the 2008 Housing and Regeneration Act as settlements of less than 3,000 population where occupiers of Shared Ownership properties can only buy up to 80% of the equity or the housing association has a pre-emptive right to buy back the property when it comes up for sale.
Discounted Market Sales Housing	Homes sold at below market value with the percentage reduction secured for future sales by covenant and/or a Section 106 Agreement.
Economic Viability Assessment/ Financial Development Appraisal	Assessment of the costs of building and the income of a proposed scheme. Used to determine if or how a scheme could be financially viable.
First Homes	Affordable tenure that provides homes for first time buyers at a minimum discount of 30% of market value which applies on first and future sales. There is a price cap of £250,000 and it is restricted to households with a combined income of £80,000 per annum.

Term	Definition
First Homes Exception Sites	These are small sites where most of the development will be for First Homes. There may be a smaller amount of other forms of affordable housing and some market housing if needed to make the scheme financially viable. This form of development is not allowed in some rural areas – please check with your local authority.
Help to Buy Agent	Organisation appointed by government to guide and support people seeking affordable home ownership properties in a region of the country.
Homes England	Government agency responsible for the distribution and management of funding for the delivery of a range of housing, including affordable housing.
Housing association	Usually a not-for-profit organisation with charitable purposes that develops, owns and manages affordable housing. They are often referred to as Registered Partners or RPs. If they have this status, they are subject to regulation through Homes England.
Housing Register	Register held by local authority, housing association or community owned housing organisation by which people with a housing need can apply for affordable housing owned by that organisation.
Local authorities	Organisation responsible for the delivery of public services for a defined geographical area. They may be district/borough/county or unitary bodies. Their responsibilities include housing and planning, except in National Parks where planning is the responsibility of the National Park.
Local Lettings Policy	Document that sets out letting policies for a specific development. This could include a requirement that the homes are let to people with a local connection.
Local Planning Authority (LPA)	The organisation statutorily responsible for preparing and implementing planning policy for development in its area and making decisions on planning applications. It may be a district/borough/unitary council or a National Park Authority.
Local Plan	Sets out local planning policies and identifies how land is to be used, what and where it will be built. These provide the framework for development and planning decisions in the area they cover.

Term	Definition
Local Plan	Sets out local planning policies and identifies how land is to be used, what and where it will be built. These provide the framework for development and planning decisions in the area they cover.
National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)	Sets out the government's planning policies for the use of land in England. It is the framework that guides the policies within Local Plans.
National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)	Sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied – it is arranged and accessed by topic.
Neighbourhood Plan (NP)	A development plan for a formally defined Neighbourhood Area by a Neighbourhood Planning Group. Once it has been approved through a formal Inspection and passed by a local referendum it becomes part of the Local Plan for the area.
Nomination Agreement	A contract under which councils place those in housing need into housing association homes as they become available.
Planning Conditions	Conditions imposed on a grant of planning permission. They may require additional approvals for specific aspects of the development or restrict the use of the site, such as that the housing should be occupied by people with a defined housing need and local connection
Planning Obligations (also known as S106 Agreements)	Private agreements between local authorities and developers that are attached to a planning permission to make acceptable a development that would otherwise be unacceptable. This runs with the land, not the developer, so providing perpetuity to the requirements, such as occupancy and local connection criteria.
Registered Provider	Organisations who develop affordable housing and have achieved registration with Homes England by virtue of meeting financial and governance criteria.
Right to Acquire	Statutory right for tenants who rent their home from a housing association to buy their home. There is a rural exemption from the Right to Acquire in settlements of less than 3,000 population.

Term	Definition
Right to Buy	Statutory right for tenants renting their home from a local authority to buy their home. There are rural safeguards that ensure the homes are in future available to local people, but these are unlikely to be as rented homes.
Right to Shared Ownership	Right for the tenant of a rented home to buy shares in their home. This right does not apply in parishes with populations of 3,000 or fewer people.
Rural Exception Site	Small site within or adjoining a rural settlement that would not normally be considered suitable for residential development but may be granted planning permission where the development meets a local need for affordable housing in perpetuity.
Rural Housing Enabler (RHE)	Independent adviser and broker employed to support communities gain affordable housing to meet their needs by helping them: assess housing needs; identify a suitable site; engage in the design of the scheme; input into the criteria and Heads of Terms of S106 Agreements.
Section 106 Agreement	These are private legal agreements, known as Planning Obligations between local authorities and developers that are attached to a planning permission to make acceptable a development that would otherwise be unacceptable. This runs with the land, not the developer, so providing perpetuity to the requirements, such as occupancy and local connection criteria.
Section 106 Financial Contributions	Also known as commuted sums. These are a financial sum taken in place of on-site provision of affordable housing. Its future use will be to support affordable housing delivery, but this need not be in the community where it has been levied.
Self and Custom Build housing	Defined in the Self Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015, individuals or persons working with or for individuals or associations of individuals, build or complete houses to be occupied as homes by those individuals. It can include affordable housing and may be part of a Community Led Housing scheme.

Term	Definition
Shared Ownership	Properties where the resident part buys and part rents their home and over time can increase their equity share. In rural Designated Protected Areas statutory arrangements are in place to prevent the eventual sale of the homes onto the open market.
Social rented housing	Homes made available at a rent determined by a national formula. This is usually less than an Affordable Rent. Social rented housing can be built by: councils, housing associations and community owned housing organisations. It may also be offered by a private landowner who is building and managing affordable homes.
Starter Homes	Homes available to first time buyers under the age of 40 who have an annual income of less than £80,000 a year (outside London). The resident can sell their home into the open market but during the first 15 years they will have to pay back any discount. The Housing and Planning Act gives planning authorities the discretion to exclude Starter Homes from rural exception sites.
Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)	Formally adopted document produced by the local planning authority that provides detailed guidance for the implementation of policies in the Local Plan. These are often subject specific, for example, affordable housing or design.
Threshold/affordable housing threshold	The size of development or site that will trigger an affordable housing contribution. This, along with the size of the affordable housing contribution, will be set out in the Local Plan.
Village Design Statement	Formal document produced by the community that sets out the design requirements for new development, so it reflects the local character of the community.
Vision Statement	Document produced by a community that sets out in an informal way what they would like to see as part of a development, including its design.
Voluntary Right to Buy	This is currently being piloted and it is not certain it will be rolled out. It allows Registered Providers to offer, on a voluntary basis, the opportunity for residents of their rented properties to buy their home. However, housing associations with rural stock have discretion not to sell, particularly where there was a S106 Agreement requiring the homes to be retained as affordable housing in perpetuity. Where such Agreements were in place the local authority would in any case have to agree to the S106 being lifted, which given their Rural Exception Site policies would be unlikely.

Further Resources

Video Playlist https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJTg5m-dELN0&list=PLd5h0HFFmaBUywFEfCoVm-R3t-LcT00zQA&index=9	Here you will find a library of inspirational short videos of Parish Councillors and others talk about their involvement in rural affordable housing schemes. There are also some clips so you can hear from some of the residents about what being able to live in one of the homes has meant to them.
Rural Housing Alliance https://ruralhousingalliance.net/	Here you will find more case studies that showcase rural affordable housing schemes across England. It also includes a list of the housing associations who are members of the Rural Housing Alliance and have signed up to their pledge to work with local communities and parish councils to ensure there are high quality, low carbon affordable homes with great services in rural areas.
National Community Land Trust Network http://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/	This website explains what is a Community Land Trust (CLT), offers advice and guidance on how to set one up, showcases examples of rural CLTs and brings the latest news on policy and practice that affects CLTs.
Community Led Homes https://www.communityledhomes.org.uk/	This website explains the different forms that Community Led Housing (CLH) can take. It provides guidance on the different stages in developing a CLH scheme, a list of accredited CLH advisers and showcases some rural success stories.

For more information, please contact:

The Rural Housing Alliance
c/o The Rural Services Network
Kilworthy Park
Tavistock
Devon
PL19 0BZ

e. andy.dean@sparse.gov.uk
e. jo.lavis64@googlemail.com

Rural Housing Alliance

acre ACTION WITH COMMUNITIES IN RURAL ENGLAND

Rural Housing Solutions