

HARAH

Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing

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



Introduction

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

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

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

The 10 steps

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

1 Consider the need for affordable housing in the parish

Contact the RHE at Community Action Hampshire who works with your District area

Discuss the idea of affordable housing for local people in the parish council meeting.

What level of need is there? The need can be identified more accurately through a parish based housing needs survey. See point 3 below.

Is the majority behind the idea?

Are there one or two enthusiasts who have the time and energy to work with the RHE to help develop the scheme?

Is there likely to be opposition to the scheme? What form is it likely to take?

Think about wider issues in the parish at the same time. Apart from housing people, what benefits, or otherwise, would a scheme bring to the village? Examples might be additional support for a local shop, an increased roll at the local school

Collect information about affordable housing projects. Maybe visit a scheme in another village.

2 Consult your community throughout the project

Take time to educate as well as consult. Often hostility to projects develops because people are basing their views on rumour and misinformation. People can only develop an informed view if they are properly advised about the project.

Make sure the project reflects the views of people in the village. A Housing Needs Survey can measure support for the

project as well as the housing need. The greatest task is to listen to those people who are the least vocal – often the silent majority not the vociferous minority.

Don't overlook those people who are in housing need themselves. In order to retain and develop a 'balanced community' the parish needs to consider a range of housing types and prices...this may include accommodation for single younger or older people as well as couples and families.

Take care to distinguish between objections that are ill-informed, and those which are on genuine environmental or aesthetic grounds, or based on material planning grounds such as access, drainage or utilities.

Keep consulting throughout the project, using the media available to you in your parish. The public can attend parish council meetings where the proposal is discussed and parish newsletters and the local newspaper can be used. A public drop-in day may be needed to fully discuss the project once it has been agreed in principle. Above all, many objections can be met by face-to-face conversations with well-informed councillors.

3 Assess the need

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

Has an assessment of need already taken place – for example as part of the parish plan or through a district wide survey? Is this information up-to-date or of sufficient detail? Seek advice from the RHE who will be able to assist you with this.

In conjunction with the RHE and District/Borough Council, decide if a local parish-based survey needs to be carried out. Would it be helpful to look at wider issues within the village at the same time through a parish plan?

The RHE will assist the Parish Council to undertake a local/parish- wide Housing Needs Survey. A questionnaire will be sent to every household in the parish and to local people who have had to move away to find an affordable home, but are known to want to return. The survey can be used as a register, encouraging people to give their names and contact details. They can then be sent an application for the District/Borough Housing Register to apply for affordable housing

The RHE will present a report of the Housing Needs Survey to the parish council. The parish council should consider the findings and decide whether to progress the development of an affordable housing scheme. A survey usually takes 2 or 3 months to complete.

4 Identify potential sites

Find a site. This is probably the most critical stage of the affordable housing process. No site...no project. Is the parish council aware of land in the parish that could be used as an Exception Site and might be available for a housing scheme?

Consider all possibilities. The RHE will coordinate a site appraisal involving Parish Councillors and District/Borough Councillors, officers from the District/Borough Council and the National Park Authority if appropriate, and the housing association. There may be suitable land owned by Hampshire County Council, the District/Borough

Council or even the Parish Council, or it may be offered as a result of canvassing local landowners. Land may be put forward by landowners or developers, or a site may have been offered to a housing association.

The available sites will be assessed. Are there planning problems? Is the site suitable in terms of access, landscape setting, services etc and can it be purchased at a price appropriate for affordable housing on an exception site?

A drop-in day may be appropriate to gain the views of the local community towards the site(s).

There is an agreed process for consulting on potential exception sites. This is set out in appendix 1.

5 Work with the housing provider

Hyde Housing Association have been selected by the Hampshire Alliance of Rural Affordable Housing (HARAH) to develop all affordable housing on exception sites in Hampshire settlements of less than 3000 people. A detailed selection process was undertaken to ensure the best affordable housing provider to meet the required criteria was chosen. The HARAH partners continue to regularly monitor the performance of Hyde on these criteria.

Hyde Housing Association is a Registered Social Landlord (RSL). They own and manage affordable housing across Hampshire and the South East and have offices in Lymington, Alton and Blackwater. Their development officers have considerable experience of developing affordable housing in rural villages.

The Parish Council and landowners may be approached by other Housing Associations and developers to provide affordable housing in the parish. The Parish Council should seek advice from the RHE or the District/Borough Council officers. If the land is an exception site and the settlement is under 3000, only Hyde Housing Association will be able to obtain funding from the Housing Corporation to provide affordable housing

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

6 Obtain Planning Permission

Allow the housing association to take the lead, but with the help of the RHE, make sure you are involved in working up the proposed houses and understand as fully as possible the planning and legal details of the scheme.

Be involved in the drawing up of the plans. Be prepared to voice comments on the design of the scheme. If possible, involve the whole community at this stage, perhaps through a drop-in day. Invite comments on the design of the buildings, particularly by those people who may live in them.

A legal agreement will be drawn up by the Council to ensure that the homes will remain affordable for local people 'in perpetuity'. This is called a Section 106

Agreement. The District/Borough Council officers will discuss the local connection criteria with the Parish Council.

Carefully consider the draft Section 106 Agreement. Make sure that neighbouring parishes are eligible for the local connection in future allocations in case local people to your own parish have all been housed.

The Local Connection criteria is set out in appendix 2.

7 Secure funding

The Housing Association must apply for funding. This is normally obtained from Central Government through the Housing Corporation. The funding subsidises the housing costs to ensure they are affordable to the occupiers.

To be successful in obtaining funding, a scheme must be 'deliverable'. Hyde Housing Association must compete with other RSLs across the South East Region for the funding allocations. There must be a suitable site and preferably planning permission for the site.

Once the funding is allocated, the scheme must meet agreed deadlines. The Parish Council need to be aware that funding is limited and to work with Hyde to meet the deadlines, or their scheme may be at risk of losing funding. However there is an element of flexibility within HARA. If a scheme with funding meets insurmountable obstacles in its development, another scheme without funding that is progressing well can be substituted.

8 Build the houses

Enjoy watching the homes being built. Parishes feel great pride when they see their vision become a reality.

Keep an eye on construction. The local community can have a role to ensure that there is not undue nuisance or inconvenience to local residents.

9 Understand the nomination process

This is one of the major concerns of parishes – that the homes built are used to house local people. Yet for obvious reasons, it is the one area where the parish council is likely to be in a sensitive position. It is important that the Parish Council understand the process to advise local people, but it is not appropriate for the Parish Council to be involved in the detail of the selection process as this would compromise both their position and the confidentiality of applicants details.

It is vital to disseminate information and advice to people in housing need. Some people complain that although they were aware that the housing was about to become available (they could see it being built), they didn't know what they had to do to be nominated for a home.

To be eligible to be nominated, a household must have their name on the District/Borough Housing Register. The Parish Council has a role in making people aware that they must register and how to do so (by word of mouth, or through a note in the parish magazine or on notice boards). Don't forget the people who have had to leave the parish to find affordable accommodation elsewhere, but wish to return to their own parish.

It is important to explain that, although people may not be high priority on the Housing Register, in the case of rural housing on exception sites, local connections will be the most important criterion, over-riding other factors.

Verification of an applicant's local connection will be undertaken by Hyde, which may include a home visit if necessary. The Parish Council will be sent a list of the local connections of the selected applicants, but not the applicants details due to data protection requirements.

A copy of the allocation policy is shown at appendix 2.

10 Celebrate

The day the new tenants move into the newly-built homes is a day for celebration. All those involved in the long and complex process of developing a scheme deserve to be recognised and praised...especially the parish councillors.

An open day is often organised some time after tenants move in to celebrate the new scheme.

This is a good opportunity to show other parish councils the benefits and advantages of a local affordable housing scheme.

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

Contact Michele Condon at AirS:
Telephone 01273 407325 or email
michele.condon@ruralsussex.org.uk

Appendices

Appendix 1 The HARA process for consulting on exception sites

Action	Input from
Agree the number of homes to be provided, following a Parish Housing Needs Survey	PC, RHE, LA, HA Local Member
Locate all potential sites <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possible sites may be indicated by local community through the Housing Needs Survey The Parish Council may advertise for sites to be suggested or brought forward by the owner The Parish Council may know of possible sites WCC Planning and Development Departments may indicate possible sites Sites may have been offered to RSLs 	Local community Parish Council Local Member Landowners LA Planning and Development Depts RHE HA
Identify all possible sites on a parish map	RHE
Undertake a brief desk top exercise to assess each site Apply the following sequential test to order the sites i.e. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brownfield sites just beyond the settlement boundary Greenfield sites just beyond the settlement boundary Sites in a National Park, AONB or other protective designation Subject to the following factors for each site:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to amenities and facilities in settlement Access to public transport (bus stops) Would the site form a natural rounding off of the settlement? Is there natural containment? Would the site intrude into the landscape or be harmful to the setting? Would the development conserve or enhance the village? Exclude any sites with obvious difficulties	RHE HA LA Development, Strategic Planning, Development Control
View sites <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tour the Parish to view identified sites Explore any obvious site constraints e.g. flooding, trees, access Note any local concerns e.g. previous flooding Shortlist up to 4 sites 	PC, RHE, HA Local Member LA Planning (DC) and Development Depts, Highways, Landscape and others as appropriate

Action	Input from
Contact Landowners of shortlisted sites to ask if they are willing to sell for affordable housing	RHE
Discuss results with Parish/Local Member (nominate parish lead if necessary)	RHE HA
Agree how to communicate with the parish	PC, Local Member
Consultation Exhibition held over a period of days, possibly un-staffed, asking for appropriate comments on the sites from the local community	LA, HA, RHE, PC, Local Member Local community
Further discussions with planners (further pre-planning meetings as necessary) and Parish/Local Member	LA, RHE, HA, PC, Local Member
Negotiate with Landowner to purchase the land	HA
Meet with Development Control and others to discuss the Design Statement	HA, RHE, DC, Other LA Depts as appropriate
Develop proposals for the preferred site and liaise with the Parish/Local Member	HA, LA, RHE, PC, Local Member

Glossary

PC – Parish Council
RHE- Rural Housing Enabler
LA – Local Authority
HA- Housing Association

Appendix 2 HARAH Local Connection Criteria and Allocation Policy

S106 Agreement Local Connection Criteria

Upon completion of the development and at all times thereafter each dwelling shall be allocated to a person who:

- a demonstrates a housing need and is unable to afford suitable accommodation on the open market within the Parish of X; and
- b has a strong local connection (as hereinafter defined) with the said Parish of X

A person shall be taken to have a strong local connection if he or she satisfies any one or more of the following criteria:

- he or she is ordinarily resident in the Parish at the date of allocation
- he or she was previously ordinarily resident in the Parish prior to the date of nomination and has family who ordinarily reside there
- he or she has a demonstrable need to live in the Parish by reason of:
- his/her current employment in the Parish
- his/her current employment which provides essential services (as hereinafter defined) to the Parish
- to take up permanent employment in the Parish
- he or she has a demonstrable need to reside in the Parish either to support or to be supported by another member of his/her family who ordinarily reside in the Parish at the date of allocation

A person shall be taken to be a member of another's family if he or she is the spouse mother father sister brother daughter son or grandparent of that other person or if he or she ordinarily resides with that other person as husband or wife without being legally married to that person.

Essential services shall be taken to be medical or social services, police, fire, teaching and agricultural services.

If within two weeks of any dwelling becoming available for occupation (whether upon practical completion of the Development or any time thereafter) any such vacancy arising cannot be filled in accordance with the foregoing provisions hereof (consultation having first taken place with the Council's Head of Housing) then any such vacant dwelling shall be allocated (but only with the prior written consent of the Head of Housing) to a person who:

- a demonstrates a housing need and is unable to afford suitable accommodation on the open market within the Parishes of Y, Z (to be agreed with X Parish Council & Ward Member) and
- b has a strong local connection (as hereinafter defined) with any of those Parishes

If within one month of any dwelling becoming available for occupation (whether upon practical completion of the Development or any time thereafter) any such vacancy arising cannot be filled in accordance with the foregoing provisions hereof (consultation having first taken place with the Council's Head of Housing) then any such vacant dwelling shall be allocated (but only with the prior written consent of the Head of

Housing) to a person who demonstrates a housing need and is unable to afford suitable accommodation on the open market within the administrative area of the Council and who is ordinarily resident within that area.

The Allocation Process

Applications to the Housing Register

All households who registered an interest in affordable housing on the village housing needs survey will be contacted to advise that they need to complete the relevant Local Authority housing application form and/or HomeBuy Agent application form for shared ownership if applicable. (Existing Housing Association tenants may need to register on a separate transfer register dependant upon the Local Authority's procedure).

The Rural Housing Enablers will advise the Parish Council of the need to encourage local people to register a Local Authority Housing and/or Zone Agent Application form and to put such notices in the Parish Magazine and notice boards.

Application forms requests the applicant(s) local connection details.

The Local Authority assesses the application – an applicant must meet the eligibility criteria of the Local Authority as set out in their published allocations policy. If a local connection is identified a further form is sent to the applicant asking for full details of their connection, family connection and employment connection.

Pre-Nomination

Four months prior to completion of a new scheme the Local Authority will advise the Parish Council and Ward Member that

nominations are soon to be sought and they should encourage households to register a housing application if they have not already done so.

Hyde will advise the Parish Council and Ward Member immediately of any subsequent vacancies advising that nominations are soon to be sought and they should encourage households to register a housing application if they have not already done so.

Points based allocations

Three months prior to completion of a new scheme the Local Authority will send a letter to all applicants who are requesting a property in the area asking them to supply all details of their local connection, if this has changed since their application.

Choice based lettings

Where a Local Authority operates a choice based lettings system, the properties will be advertised stipulating the details of the local connection criteria.

Shared ownership properties will be advertised advising interested eligible persons to apply through the HomeBuy Agents.

Nominations to Properties

When the nominations are requested by Hyde, the Local Authority will create a list of all applicants who have advised they have a local connection with the relevant area.

The Local Authority will then look at the applicant(s) local connection and if further information is required this will be obtained via a telephone call to the applicant or a home visit. Where the applicant is claiming a connection by way of existing or previous residency or employment, documentary evidence will be requested to support the application.

The nominations will then be made in accordance with the criteria in the s106 agreement (detailed above) within 10 working days.

Where applicants have met the local connection criteria, they will then be prioritised according to their housing need (based on the Local Authority points or banding system) and in the case of shared ownership, the ability to obtain the required mortgage.

Applications for shared ownership

Applications for shared ownership must be made through the Housing Corporation appointed HomeBuy Agent. For Hampshire this is Swaythling Housing Society - www.HomesinHants.co.uk.

The HomeBuy Agent assesses the application – an applicant must meet the eligibility criteria of the Zone Agent as set out in their published policy.

If a local connection is identified a further form is sent to the applicant asking for full details of their connection, family connection and employment connection.

Hyde will advise the HomeBuy Agent and the Local Authority that nominations are sought for a rural exceptions scheme.

The HomeBuy Agent will provide a list of eligible applicants to the Local Authority within 2 working days to verify their local connection criteria as detailed in the nomination process above.

The Local Authority will then provide a list of verified eligible applicants to Hyde Housing Association within 8 working days.

In the event of there being no suitable nominee with a local connection with the Parish or specified surrounding Parishes for any shared ownership properties, prior to seeking nominees from the wider

administrative area, Hyde will consider converting the tenure to be for rent with the approval of the Local Authority and Housing Corporation subject to housing needs and funding. When the tenancy comes to an end, Hyde will consider reverting the property to shared ownership sale subject to housing needs and Local Authority and Housing Corporation approval.

Post Nomination

Hyde Housing Association will advise the Local Authority and the HomeBuy Agent (if applicable) of the successful applicants and their local connection information.

Should the ward member or Parish Council request it anonymous information will be provided setting out the local connection of the successful applicants.

Declarations

All applicants for properties will need to provide a signed declaration that the information they have provided is correct. If this information is subsequently found to be false the applicant will be liable to have legal action taken against them.

Subsequent lettings and sales

The above process applies to both first and all subsequent lettings and sales on HARAH schemes.

HARAH schemes will be identified by a flagging system by Hyde Housing Association when asking for nominations, and this information will be given to the Local Authority and the HomeBuy Agent (if applicable).

The Local Authority will hold a file of all the s106 agreements relating to each exception site scheme in order to confirm the specific local connection criteria and Parishes that are applicable. This will be checked for every rural vacancy.

Who do we contact?

The main points of contact for Parish Councils are the Rural Housing Enablers:

John Lancaster - Test Valley & Basingstoke and Deane
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