

A Briefing and Policy on the Provision of Affordable Housing in Rural Hampshire

"Affordable housing" is social rented, affordable rented, shared ownership housing and starter homes, provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market.

CPRE Hampshire has a vision of a beautiful and thriving countryside. This means rural communities which are stronger and more diverse, and where more people live and work in the countryside. Yet this will only be achieved if people in lower paid jobs are able to find a decent, affordable home close to work, and in a town or village where they have a clear connection.

Unfortunately, housing in many rural areas of Hampshire has become increasingly unaffordable to people on low and average incomes, and the failure to create affordable homes is fuelling some of the main issues facing rural communities. The closure of rural services (such as post offices, pubs and public transport) and the skewed population structure, due to falling numbers of young people, is linked strongly to the inability of people to be able to afford a home.

National government policy is tending to make the situation worse. Extension of Right to Buy to allow housing association tenants to buy their properties at a discounted rate, and so take those properties out of the affordable housing stock, is likely to reduce the current stock of affordable housing unless replacement sites can be found. Yet in rural areas, where plots tend to be small, replacement will be harder to achieve where (outside areas of designated landscape) the requirement to provide affordable housing has been removed on sites of 10 units or less. Also, allowing an element of low cost market housing within "rural exception" sites, designed to cross subsidise affordable housing provision, runs the risk of landowners seeing a "hope value" for market housing on land which would otherwise have been released for affordable housing in perpetuity. It is the view of CPRE and CPRE Hampshire that rural communities should be exempted from the extension to Right to Buy, and rural local authorities should have the freedom to set their own levels of affordable housing contribution on small development sites.

So it is all the more important, if we are to enhance the vitality and sustainability of the Hampshire countryside, that as many as possible of the new homes built in our market towns and villages in Hampshire are "affordable", and in perpetuity wherever possible. Accordingly we will:

- support national CPRE in its work with government to increase the provision of affordable housing in rural areas,
- meet Hampshire Members of Parliament to express our views and concerns as to the provision of affordable housing in rural areas
- review and comment on housing policies in emerging Local Plans, in order to ensure the maximum provision of affordable housing within nationally permitted limits, and that affordable housing provision is focussed on meeting need of people having a strong local connection

By "having a strong local connection" we mean a person who currently lives in that community, or who has previously lived in that community, or who is employed in local area, or who has close family relations in the local area.

Affordable housing within settlements

In applications for housing on sites allocated for housing and within settlement policy boundaries, we will seek the maximum provision of affordable housing within nationally permitted limits and that it will be available first to those having a strong local connection

Rural Exception Sites

Rural Exception Sites give rise to particular issues for CPRE as, by definition, they are in an area which is not allocated for housing development and to which countryside policies apply. Countryside policies provide for general restraint in order to protect landscape character, views, dark night skies, and to protect the countryside for its own sake. Protection of all of these attributes of the countryside is fundamental to the aims and objectives of CPRE Hampshire. This gives rise to potential conflict with our strong support for rural affordable housing where Rural Exception Sites are concerned. Another factor that CPRE Hampshire needs to take account of is that proposals for Rural Exception Sites can give rise to mixed views within the local community.

Yet, Rural Exception Sites are differentiated from other housing sites in that they consist wholly of affordable housing, held in perpetuity, and are usually allocated to households with the strongest local connection to the area, who have the most urgent housing need and who have been waiting the longest.

Having regard to these factors, CPRE Hampshire will support development of Rural Exception Sites where:

- the housing will consist wholly of affordable housing, held in perpetuity
- there is robust evidence of a need for affordable housing within the community, and a requirement for occupants to show a strong local connection
- the scheme is of a scale appropriate to the community, and the site is adjacent to existing development,
- development of the site would be acceptable in the context of landscape character and views, having regard to the extent to which the design of the proposed housing is integrated into the landscape and built environment,
- the proposal is for a scheme of a high standard of design (such as described by the HARAH *Rural Design Guide*) which will integrate with its setting, and will have minimal impact on dark night skies,
- the community is broadly in favour of the site being allocated for affordable housing; or there has been a robust process, with effective community involvement, of considering alternative sites and none have been found acceptable for justified reasons, and
- the scheme is designed and will be developed and managed by a Registered Provider

CPRE Hampshire

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