



CRC 18/07

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Rural watchdog points way forward for affordable rural housing

Research launched today by the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) shows that proposed levels of investment in affordable rural housing by Regional Assemblies will result in 5% fewer homes being provided in each of the next three years than annually during 2006-08. And it reveals that only a minority of regions have specifically examined the need for housing in their rural areas.

Commenting on the findings Trevor Cherrett, Head of Planning, Housing and Transport at the CRC said: "This is alarming, particularly as the crisis of affordability is greatest in rural communities. Regional bodies are failing to live up to the challenge of providing affordable homes to families and communities living in rural areas.

"We welcome the attention that government has given to improving the supply of rural affordable housing □ including the promise of a national target for rural affordable housing. Over the next few weeks the government is expected to make some key decisions on the availability of funding and land for rural affordable housing. We are now calling on Ministers to support their commitment by setting challenging targets for rural affordable housing delivery, ensuring that Regional Assemblies use the additional funds that have now been made available to them to meet these targets."

For its part, CRC today is announcing its affordable rural housing work programme for the coming year. This has been developed using its research findings and feedback from stakeholders, including a major conference 'The Affordable Rural Housing Commission: One Year On' held in June, which concluded that whilst the ARHC's recommendations could result in an improvement, there were still significant barriers to progress.

Introducing the new work programme Trevor Cherrett said: "Our work will build on the foundations laid by government through revised planning guidance and proposals set out in the Housing Green Paper. To make the most of these opportunities further action is needed:

- the partial review of Regional Spatial Strategies announced by government needs to result in a much more positive approach to delivering affordable rural housing;
- local authorities, through their planning strategies and by exploring new ventures, need to seize the opportunities now available to address the shortage of affordable housing in their rural communities, which many have already identified as a corporate priority; and
- rural communities need to engage positively in moves to provide the homes that will help assure their long-term future.

Trevor Cherrett added: "Providing affordable housing in our rural communities is a joint responsibility and venture. Consequently, we look forward to working with government, regional bodies including the Rural Affairs Forums, local and community partners to provide affordable housing as a central pillar of sustainable rural communities."

ENDS

For further information contact Chris Wynne-Davies on 01242 534070

Notes for Editors:

1. 'Taking Forward the Recommendations of the Affordable Rural Housing Commission: Final Report', CRC WEB 22, November 2007 and 'Assessing the rural content of regional spatial and housing strategies' by Three Dragons can be found at:

www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/publications

Table - Housing Corporation rural housing programme

| Region | Allocation of units in 2006-08 per annum | Target units in 2008-11 per annum | Target units per annum for 2008-11 target compared to allocated units per annum for 2006-08 |
|--------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|---|
| East Midlands | 452 | 333 | - 119 |
| East of England | 467 | 337 | - 130 |
| North East | 48 | 60 | 12 |
| North West | 154 | 113 | - 41 |
| South East | 750 | 1,000 | 250 |
| South West | 612 | 450 | - 162 |
| West Midlands | 195 | 250 | 55 |
| Yorkshire and the Humber | 210 | 180 | - 30 |
| Total | 2,888 | 2,723 | - 165 |

Source: Three Dragons and associates, November 2007

2. CRC's affordable rural housing work plan will comprise:

- Building an evidence base: establishing the rural content of regional strategies, levels of rural housing need and the use of council tax on second homes.
- Training and support: working with government offices and local authorities to support the implementation of revised planning guidance.
- Understanding and overcoming local opposition to proposed affordable housing development.
- Developing and testing new ideas: tax incentives, Community Land Trusts, bringing forward church land, improved housing delivery in National Parks and AONBs and securing funding for Rural Housing Enablers.
- Responding to government consultations: Housing Green Paper, Shared Ownership and Leasehold Enfranchisement, recent housing statement and Capital Gains Tax changes and future input into the development of proposed legislation on housing and planning.
- Representation on the Housing Corporation's Rural Housing Advisory Group.
- Specialist advice to Matthew Taylor, MP who has been appointed by the Prime Minister to investigate the policy and delivery blockages to meeting rural housing and employment needs.

3. The government's Housing Green Paper 'Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable' can be found at: www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/439986

4. Information about the Commission for Rural Communities and its work can be found in its current Annual Review at:

www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/publications/annualreview20062007