



Anthony Ball – Housing Manager - – Penwith District Council

I work for Penwith District Council, a rural authority with some urban issues, in Cornwall.

More affordable homes in Cornwall

- Over the last 3 years, 1,000 extra affordable homes have been added in Cornwall;
- Right to Buy has dropped off. 0 in Penwith and only 31 in Cornwall last year;
- For the first time in many years, we are increasing the supply of affordable homes in Penwith and Cornwall.

How have we achieved this ?

- Making full use of our existing powers. We have implemented policies in the Local Plan to bring forward the following :
 - In town – seek 30% affordable housing;
 - edge of town – 100% affordable housing;
 - in village – seek 50% affordable housing;
 - edge of village – 100% affordable housing.
- Set up an Affordable Housing Task Force, to bring together in one team, Housing, Planning and Legal expertise and to offer a better, more joined up service to potential customers and landowners.
- We have also questioned the accepted norm. When I arrived at Penwith, we set a target of 70 affordable homes a year. At that time we were producing 20 a year. I was told that we would never achieve 70. Since then in March 2006 we delivered 81 new homes and last year moved further with 104 new homes provided. We are on course to deliver another 100 homes this year.
- A further example of questioning the norm was in relation to exception sites on the edge of a village. There appeared to be an unwritten rule that planning permission could be granted for a maximum of 10 homes. This was madness as we had evidence of housing needs in villages for 20 - 40 homes. This “norm” was overruled and since then we have delivered affordable housing in villages with 21 homes (Goldsithney), on the edge of Penzance) and a scheme in Connor Downs (between Hayle and Camborne) of 40 homes.
- Funding – The South West Regional Housing Board, lobbied for a big increase in funding for affordable housing in 2005/06 and was successful. Furthermore, greater government investment was complimented by Second Homes Council Tax, which in Cornwall by 2009 will have added another £15m to affordable housing funding.
- Second Homes Council Tax – in Cornwall was a 5 year agreement, and has allowed the development of many affordable homes across the County.
- Many of the new homes are built adjacent to school, children centres, shops, medical facilities and make best use of sustainable locations for now and the future.

What have we learnt today ?

- We can and have increased the delivery of affordable housing in rural areas
- the need to make full use of all our existing powers
- new powers, take a while to filter through
- many of us have made a “step change” through better working with partners, housing, planning, legal parish councils, developers, registered social landlords, housing corporation – all working together for a common goal.
- Second Homes Council Tax has been a great success in Cornwall, especially as the agreement was for 5 years and long term
- Community Land Trusts are beginning to deliver new homes in Cornwall, with one site benefitting from planning permission.
- Rural Housing Enablers – Cornwall did run this for 3 years and it proved a great training opportunity for housing enablers, who are now employed by the District Council's. Should funding for RHE's be made available, in Cornwall if Community Land Trust's could be eligible that would be equally helpful.
- Planning Inspector's appear to be approving affordable housing planning applications, and they are doing this quickly (often within weeks of the inquiry).
- Planners can be your friend. They are innovative but work with them, as they can be constrained.

What do we need the Government to do ?

- Revamp **Housing Benefit**, to stop the waste of millions been poured into maintaining poor quality homes;
- **Increase investment** in affordable housing for rented and shared ownership homes. As we have shown, we can spend the extra investment on more new homes;
- **Stamp Duty** – there is a need to exempt shared ownership schemes in rural areas, as it is in conflict with the aim of providing new affordable homes. The customer, often faces a bill of £5,000, which they generally haven't got, after paying mortgage fees and legal fees and it can act as disincentive.
- Please clearly restrict **staircasing** on shared ownership schemes and ensure this is clearly laid out, as there is a conflict between the Commonhold Leasehold Reform Act and the exemption of rural areas from the Right to Buy. The loophole at present could enable Right to Buy/Right to Acquire and consequently landowners are reluctant to sell their land as they fear someone else could make a large profit at their expense.
- **Financial institutions** – still appear reluctant to fully engage with a new market of many people able to afford, affordable homes, but not able to buy on the open market. They are viewed as a risk and as such have to pay arrangement fees and higher interest rates, thereby penalising them further.

Conclusion

- For many years, we have seen a greater investment both nationally and locally in affordable housing. With existing powers, we have shown that more new homes can be delivered. The advent of new powers, provides another opportunity to ensure more new homes are delivered for local communities.

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