



## **'Priorities for Action' notes**

### **The Affordable Rural Housing Commission Report 'One Year On'**

Commission for Rural Communities

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### **A quick tour of issues affecting rural affordable housing delivery under the headings: Funding; Scheme Costs; Enabling**

#### **1. Funding:**

Whilst the national Social Housing Grant budget is not large in terms of national priority or other national budgets I strongly endorse the presentation by Housing Corporation Chair, Peter Dixon on the need to move to 'low grant or no grant' delivery. Why? Grant is not helping enough people. What are the figures?

- Rural Housing Enablers employed in the SW pooled their survey results to show that, just in those parishes under 3,000 surveyed to date, **3,800** households meet LA needs criterion.
- For Dorset County the 06 / 08 grant bid round met only **9%** of measured urban need, and **4%** of surveyed rural need.
- Dorset parishes have an average housing need for **12** affordable homes per parish.

Two observations follow on:

1. Urban affordable housing undersupply affects rural communities: Many rural communities have stocks of general needs social rented housing which would be more likely to meet local need if larger settlements had adequate affordable housing to meet their own need.
2. To achieve real improvement new ideas will be essential: Planning support for radical build methods; open market cross subsidy on exception sites; affordable housing bonds being developed by Andrew Williamson; community land trusts; land assembly as by the Highland Housing Alliance offering 33% open market homes / 33% housing association and 33% serviced self build; South Shropshire support for self provided affordable housing etc.

## 2. Scheme Costs:

Does anyone have an overview of the cost increases faced by housing associations who, at the same time, are expected to reduce the amount of grant per unit?

Examples:

Land	Wild variation in exception site land values - £5,000 to £8,000 plot current schemes in Dorset; £15,000 in some areas; £28,000 suggested by one District Valuer.
Materials	Stone finish required by planners £1,600m <sup>2</sup>
Procurement	Builders quote £800m <sup>2</sup> to build a house. Housing associations around £1,200m <sup>2</sup>
Code For Sustainable Homes	Estimated at perhaps 2% additional scheme cost. Risk could be much higher – especially where loading individual homes with requirement to generate power, rather than promoting small local power plants. Will there be bureaucratic costs? Will it stifle low tech approaches or self build?
Planning contributions	Recent move to apply a highways contributions to all new housing, market or otherwise, even exception sites. Based on 'journeys made' amounting to £5,000 to £10,000 per unit. RHE established need to re-assess extent of additional journeys associated with exception sites / compare to urban / assess impact on deliverability.

- Who is providing an overview?
- Are the expectations realistic?
- Is the total cost package deliverable?
- Will the net result be reduction where increase was intended?

## 3. Planning Enabling

Conflicts must be resolved between community needs, Local Authority policies, Strategic Partnership aims and Regional decisions

### Sustainability

In Dorset 52% of people live in communities under 3,000 population.

Are we still imposing judgements based on old assumptions?  
Some LA's are removing communities from exception site policy. Which is most sustainable? A rural dweller travelling to work in the nearest market town? Or the urban dweller commuting out of town? (50% of some urban communities commute out to work – how do volume of trips and distances compare) What do communities themselves want? ARHC finding: Planning should assist all communities to *become* sustainable.

PPS3 seems fair – 'places where people want to live...'

Where are the Rural Action Plans within local and regional strategies?

### **Policies**

Exception sites	Re-name 'local housing needs sites' to make clear this is not a favour or an optional extra?
Affordability	Any old version of? Or specifically related to targeted housing costs? Very important for rural shared ownership.
Priorities?	Rural affordable housing fitted in by overworked Development Control Officers after home extensions and garage applications?
Protocols	West Dorset single point of contact with Development Control has improved effectiveness.
Manpower	Planning officers are overwhelmed. Find budget for one specialist affordable housing DC Officer per LA?

Lastly - slipping in an 'extra' heading

## **4. Quality of Life**

93% of our time is spent in buildings.  
Average size of UK homes 76m<sup>2</sup>  
Average size of French homes 113m<sup>2</sup>  
Average UK room size 16m<sup>2</sup>  
Average Dutch room size 28m<sup>2</sup>

Yes change is happening - the good work being done by the Commission for Rural Communities here today. But we must continue to communicate the issues and to apply pressure.