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Rural Watchdog welcomes Housing Green Paper

The Commission for Rural Communities has welcomed the Government's Housing Green Paper – '**Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable**' published late yesterday (Monday 23 July, 2007).

Dr. Stuart Burgess Chair of the Commission for Rural Communities and the Government's Rural Advocate said: "The lack of affordable housing is one of the most pressing problems faced in rural England. Our recently published *State of the Countryside 2007* report highlights that in many rural areas the gap between incomes and house prices far exceeds that in urban areas.

"I am therefore especially pleased with the demonstrable level of commitment in the Green Paper to tackling the affordable housing problem, and the recognition that this problem affects rural areas as well as urban. I particularly welcome the proposal for a specific rural target set for 2008-11, and for the new homes agency to work with rural councils so that they can meet the particular pressures faced by rural communities."

In order to make the step change envisaged by the Green Paper, the Commission for Rural Communities has set out a number of 'must do' actions that will be crucial for success. These include:

- Regional Spatial and Housing Strategies must properly address rural needs.
- Local Authority strategies and plans must incorporate rural affordable housing targets and sites.
- Local rural communities must be actively engaged in ways to meet affordable housing needs – including addressing the concerns of local people about new development.
- Design, quality and sustainability of new homes must continue to be improved.
- Scarce rented homes in villages must not be lost through the 'Right to Buy'.

Dr. Burgess continued: "We know a great deal about not only the housing problems facing rural communities but also many of the solutions. The Commission for Rural Communities is strongly committed to help develop and implement an action plan for meeting rural housing needs, building on the results of our earlier Housing Inquiry and research, the recommendations of the Affordable Rural Housing Commission, and the work of the recently-formed Rural Housing Advisory Group.

"I am optimistic that the Government's Housing Green Paper can be the launch pad for real and lasting action in addressing the affordable rural housing problem and to signal a strong Government commitment to rural communities".

ENDS

For further information contact Chris Wynne-Davies on 07900 608030

Notes to editors:

The Commission for Rural Communities is an independent government body established in October 2006. Our role is to provide well-informed, independent advice to government and ensure that policies reflect the real needs of people living and working in rural England, with a particular focus on tackling disadvantage and economic under-performance.

We have three key functions:

Rural advocate: the voice for rural people, businesses and communities;

Expert adviser: giving evidence-based, objective advice to government and others;

Independent watchdog: monitoring and reporting on the delivery of policies nationally, regionally and locally.

Further information about the Commission for Rural Communities and its work can be found at www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk