



CRC 01/09

8 January 2009

Top executives focus on rural housing crisis

The Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) is bringing together top executives from across the housing, economic and finance sectors in an attempt to tackle the rural housing crisis sparked by the recession. The 'Rural Experience' event is being led by Sir Bob Kerslake, Chief Executive of the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and is taking place on Thursday 8 January 2009 in Essex.

Delegates lined up for the event include David Orr, Chief Executive, National Housing Federation; Gideon Amos, Chief Executive, Town and Country Planning Association; Adam Sampson, Chief Executive, Shelter; Shaun Spiers, Chief Executive, Campaign to Protect Rural England; Jackie Bennett, Head of Policy, Council of Mortgage Lenders; and Adrian Coles, Director General, Building Societies Association.

Delegates will have the opportunity to visit villages and a market town to hear directly about the issues affecting people living there. The visit is being held in co-operation with Hastoe Housing Association which manages 3,500 affordable homes in southern England, over half of which are in rural areas. In rural areas households need at least eight times their income to purchase a house, and even in a recession house prices would have to fall by as much as 63% to be affordable.

Dr. Stuart Burgess Chairman of the CRC and the Government's Rural Advocate said: "I am delighted Sir Bob Kerslake is leading this first event; the lack of affordable housing is the single most pressing issue facing rural communities. Key decision-makers will now have the opportunity to see and hear about some of the issues facing rural communities at first hand."

Sir Bob Kerslake said: "I am honoured to lead the first Rural Experience event and to be joined by senior executives from such a wide range of influential organisations. The event will provide a unique opportunity for us all to experience what life is like for people living in rural areas and the impact of the market downturn."

From the Rural Experience event all of the participants are asked to consider how their organisation can best 'rural proof' their activities to improve the delivery of affordable rural housing, both individually and also through working collectively. In this way an action plan is developed including generating some new, innovative solutions.

ENDS

For further information contact Chris Wynne-Davies on 01242 534070

Notes for editors:

1 Delegates taking part in the event on 8 January are:

Sir Bob Kerslake, Chief Executive, Homes and Communities Agency
Gideon Amos, Chief Executive, Town and Country Planning Association
David Bryant, Group Commercial Director, Persimmon Homes
Jackie Bennett, Head of Policy, Council of Mortgage Lenders
Deborah Cadman, Chief Executive, East of England Development Agency
Sue Chalkley, Chief Executive, Hastoe Housing Association
Adrian Coles, Director General, Building Societies Association
Terry Fuller, Director of the East of England, Homes and Communities Agency
Elinor Goodman, Commissioner, Commission for Rural Communities
Adrian Maunders, Chief Executive, English Rural Housing Association
Michelle Milne, mortgage broker, Saffron Building Society
The Rt Revd Christopher Morgan, Bishop of Colchester
David Orr, Chief Executive, National Housing Federation
Adam Sampson, Chief Executive, Shelter
Nick Shuttleworth, Director, Rural Community Council of Essex
Shaun Spiers, Chief Executive, Campaign to Protect Rural England
Mark Webster, Head of Housing Finance, Nationwide

2 Delegates will visit a rural housing scheme that has met with local opposition; a local Citizens Advice Bureau to hear about people in housing need; a building society to learn about the state of the local housing market; and a further housing scheme that is successfully delivering rental and shared ownership housing.

3 The Homes and Communities Agency is the national housing and regeneration delivery agency for England, whose role is to create thriving communities and affordable homes. Further information can be found at: www.homesandcommunities.co.uk

4 Hastoe Housing Association Limited is a not-for-profit organisation that owns and manages over 3,500 homes in southern England for affordable housing through letting and shared ownership. Half of these homes are in rural areas. Hastoe works closely with its residents to ensure its homes are a good place to come home to. Further information can be found at: www.hastoe.com

5 The CRC was established in April 2005 and became an independent body on 1 October 2006, following the enactment of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, 2006. The role of the CRC is to provide well-informed, independent advice to Government and ensure that policies reflect the real needs and circumstances of people living and working in rural England. We give particular focus to tackling disadvantage and economic under-performance.

We have three key functions:

- advocate: the voice for rural people, business and communities;
- expert adviser: providing evidence-based, objective advice to Government and others; and
- independent watchdog: monitoring and reporting on the delivery of policies nationally, regionally and locally.

Further information about the CRC and its work can be found at: www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk