



**CRC 7/07**

**11 July 2007**

## **Rural Watchdog welcomes affordable rural housing push**

The Commission for Rural Communities today welcomed the Prime Minister's announcement that he will put affordable housing at the heart of his parliamentary programme, and it wants to see this policy meeting rural needs as well as urban.

Stuart Burgess, Chair of the Commission and the Rural Advocate said:

"The lack of affordable housing is one of the most serious, if not *the* most serious, problem we face in rural England today. Our State of the Countryside report, to be published next week, will highlight that in many rural areas the gap between incomes and house prices far exceeds that in urban areas. There is much to be done and there are no simple solutions, but we believe there are six key actions needed now which would set this on the right track and demonstrate the Government's commitment to rural communities."

1. A significant increase in the level of rural affordable housing and, in particular, the Housing Corporation's rural programme. Doubling the size of this programme over the next couple of years would make a real contribution to the 11,000 new affordable houses needed in rural areas each year.
2. Greater encouragement to local authorities to invest in and facilitate rural housing, for example through the use of the reduced discount on second homes or allocating more sites for affordable housing. Therefore we welcome the Prime Minister's announcement to support and encourage initiatives by local authorities. But there must be stronger safeguards to ensure that any housing produced remains affordable in perpetuity and is not lost through the Right to Buy.
3. Further incentives to landowners to bring forward more land. The creation of a new homes agency will help to bring surplus public land into housing use. There are many opportunities to do this in rural areas. But at the same time we need to find ways of encouraging private landowners to release more land.
4. A commitment to invest in new ways of providing affordable housing, for example through Community Land Trusts or greater involvement of the private sector.
5. A strong steer from Government to regional bodies that they should address specifically rural housing needs when drawing up and implementing regional spatial strategies and regional housing strategies.
6. A joint action plan from CLG and Defra for the implementation of the Affordable Rural Housing Commission's recommendations nationally, regionally and locally.

Stuart Burgess said:

"There is no single answer to the rural housing crisis – it will require a package of measures at national, regional, local and community levels. If we get all these `ducks in a row` then we have a real chance of making a significant impact on the problem. It can be done – with more imaginative funding, better planning which takes account of rural circumstances and more support for community-based initiatives.

MORE...

“We are also pleased to hear today the Prime Minister’s plans for education, health, transport and climate change. These too present particular challenges and opportunities for those living and working in rural communities and we look forward to contributing to the debate on these proposals.”

ENDS

For further information contact Chris Wynne-Davies, Commission for Rural Communities, on 01242 534070 or 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](http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk)