

Rural Affordable Housing Guide

This guide has been developed to assist Parish Council's, Neighbourhood Plan Groups, Village Design Statements, Parish Plans and other community planning tools to assist in understanding and facilitating the process of the possibility of delivering affordable housing. This should be read in conjunction with the Guidance For Parish Councils document.

1. Consider the need for affordable housing in the parish

- Understand what affordable housing is, and the different affordable housing products available.
- Discuss the idea of affordable housing for local people at a Parish Council meeting. What level of need is there? Are the Parish Council aware of the affordable housing needs of local residents? The need can be identified more accurately through a parish based housing needs survey or a housing surgery. Please see point 3 'Assess the need'.
- Is the majority behind the idea? Are there one or two enthusiasts who have the time and energy to work with the stakeholders and Parish Council to help develop the ideas? Is there likely to be opposition to a housing scheme? What form is it likely to take? Think about wider issues in the parish at the same time.
- Apart from housing people, what benefits, or otherwise, would a scheme bring to the village? Examples might be additional support for a local shop or help towards sports facilities.
- Collect information about other affordable housing projects and research what method of housing delivery would work best for the community (see the list of options). Maybe visit a scheme in another village.
- Contact the Housing Development Team at Test Valley Borough Council to discuss options.

2. Involve your community throughout the project

Take time to educate as well as consult. Often hostility to projects develop because people are basing their views on rumour and misinformation and in many cases people don't truly understand what affordable housing is, and who it can benefit. People can only develop an informed view if they are properly advised about the project. Make sure the project reflects the views of people in the village. A housing needs survey or housing surgery can measure support for the project as well as the housing need. The greatest task is to listen to **all residents**, and not just those who have the most to say!

Do not overlook those people who are in housing need themselves. In order to retain and develop a mixed and diverse community the parish needs to consider a range of housing

types and prices. This may include accommodation for single, younger or older people and people with special housing needs as well as couples and families.

Take care to distinguish between objections that are ill-informed, and those which are on genuine environmental or aesthetic grounds, or based on material planning grounds such as access, drainage or utilities.

Keep consulting throughout the project, using the media available to you in your parish. The public can attend Parish Council meetings where the proposal is discussed and parish newsletters/web page and the local newspaper can be used. A public drop-in day may be needed to fully discuss the project once it has been agreed in principle. Above all, many objections can be met by face-to-face conversations with well-informed councillors.

3. Assess the need

Does the Parish Council have a general awareness that there are local people in need of affordable housing? Has an assessment of need already taken place – for example as part of a Parish Plan, Neighbourhood Development Plan or through a district wide survey?

Is this information up-to-date or of sufficient detail? Seek advice from the housing development team who will be able to assist you with this. In conjunction with Test Valley Borough Council, decide if a local parish-based survey needs to be carried out. Would it be helpful to look at wider issues within the village at the same time through a Parish Plan/Neighbourhood Development Plan?

The housing development team will assist the Parish Council to undertake a local/parish-wide Housing Needs Survey. A survey questionnaire will be sent or shared via Survey Monkey (online survey tool) to every household in the parish and to local people who have had to move away to find an affordable home, but are known to want to return.

The survey can be used as a prompt for those interested in new affordable housing to register with Hampshire Home Choice (for affordable/social rented housing) and/or with the Help to Buy Agent (for shared ownership housing).

The housing development team will present a report of the Housing Needs Survey to the parish council, which will consider the findings and agree how many homes should be provided to meet the need identified. A survey usually takes 2 or 3 months to complete.

4. Consider the options of delivery

Delivery through an Affordable Housing Provider

Once the Parish has established that they wish to investigate opportunities for delivering an affordable housing scheme, the housing development team can put your group in contact with an affordable housing provider (AHP). We work with a number of AHP's and some that specialise in rural housing delivery. The AHP will take the development process from as early as the site finding/analysis through to the planning application and scheme delivery. They can advise on all aspects of a scheme and will keep the parish council and/or delivery group involved at all times to ensure that the scheme meets the requirements and aspirations of the community.

Community led housing - There are a number of ways in which this can be delivered:-

Community land trusts are one form of community led housing, other types include cohousing and housing co-operatives. Projects that are genuinely community-led all share common principles:

1. The community is integrally involved throughout the process in key decisions like what is provided, where, and for who. They don't necessarily have to initiate the conversation, or build homes themselves.
 2. There is a presumption that the community group will take a long term formal role in the ownership, stewardship or management of the homes.
 3. The benefits of the scheme to the local area and/or specified community group are clearly defined and legally protected in perpetuity.
- **Community Land Trust (CLT)** - Community land trusts (CLTs) are set up and run by ordinary people to develop and manage homes as well as other assets important to that community, like community enterprises, food growing or workspaces. CLTs act as long-term stewards of housing, ensuring that it remains genuinely affordable, based on what people actually earn in their area, not just for now but for every future occupier. For more information, please visit the CLT Network at [National CLT Network](#)
 - **Co-housing** – housing and communities that are created and run by the people who live in them. Each household has a self-contained private home, as well as shared community space.
 - **Housing co-operative** – this is similar to CLT but the co-operative have equal share and responsibility for the homes and the communal spaces within the development.
 - **Self and custom build housing** – Self-build housing is housing designed and built by an individual for their own occupation. Custom build housing involves an individual or a group of individuals commissioning a developer to provide serviced plots and build homes on their behalf. The Council holds a register for those interested in registering for self-build for more information please visit <https://www.testvalley.gov.uk/planning-and-building/self-build-register>. **This option is included but is more likely to meet the needs of open market housing and for those that don't qualify for affordable housing.**

Community Led Housing opportunities can be discussed and developed through Hampshire Homes Hub (HHH - Details in the contacts section)

5. Identify potential sites

Find a site. This is probably the most critical stage of the affordable housing process. No site...no project.

Is the Parish Council aware of land in the parish that could be used as an Exception Site and might be available for a housing scheme? Consider all possibilities. Rural Exception Sites (RES) are small sites used for affordable housing in perpetuity where sites would not normally be used for housing. These sites seek to address the needs of the local community by accommodating households who are either current residents or have an existing family or employment connection. Further information can be found in the Affordable Housing SPD.

The housing development team will coordinate a site appraisal involving stakeholders (parish council, councillors, planning) and an AHP. (If the scheme is to be delivered through a CLT, Hampshire Homes Hub will coordinate the site appraisal process). There may be suitable land owned by Hampshire County Council or even the Parish Council, or it may be offered as a result of canvassing local landowners.

Land may be put forward by landowners or developers, or a site may have been offered to an AHP. The available sites will be assessed considering issues like: is the site suitable in terms of access, landscape setting, services etc and can it be purchased at a price appropriate for affordable housing on an exception site? A drop-in day may be appropriate to gain the views of the local community towards the site(s) if the landowner is happy for their site to be discussed in public.

6. Work with the housing provider

There are a number of Affordable Housing Providers (AHP's, also known as Housing Associations OR Registered Providers) that work in partnership with Test Valley Borough Council to deliver affordable housing in the Borough. However, rural housing delivery is often time intensive, costly and developments are often for a small number of homes. To this end some AHP's do not work on rural housing schemes. English Rural is a specialist rural housing provider and their development officers have considerable experience of developing affordable housing in rural villages.

The Parish Council and landowners may be approached by other AHP's and developers to provide affordable housing in the parish. The Parish Council should seek advice from the Borough Council officers.

It is important that the right type of housing is built in the parish. Certain factors need to be taken into account, such as household size, age, disposable income and special requirements of those people in housing need. Information from the Local Authority and Help to Buy Agent housing registers, local knowledge and survey information will inform the discussions with the AHP, architects and the planning and housing departments.

7. Obtain Planning Permission

The AHP will take the lead, but with the help of the housing development team to make sure you are consulted about the proposed houses and understand as fully as possible the planning and legal details of the scheme.

Be prepared to voice comments on the design of the scheme. If possible, involve the whole community at this stage, perhaps through a drop-in day. Invite comments on the design of the buildings. A legal agreement will be drawn up by the Council to ensure that the homes will remain affordable for local people 'in perpetuity'. This is called a Section 106 Agreement.

The Council officers should discuss the local connection criteria with the Parish Council, and consider the inclusion of neighbouring parishes in a cascade so that homes can be allocated to residents of neighbouring parishes if at any time there is no need from your own parish. These discussions will help inform the wording in the S106 agreement. A copy of the standard S106 terms and the local connection criteria is available from the council. Local connection is outlined as follows:

- Ordinarily resident in the village/parish
- Previously ordinarily resident in the village/parish prior to the date of allocation and has family who ordinarily reside there.
- Employment – current or to take up permanent employment in village/parish
- To support or be supported by member of family ordinarily resident in the village/parish.

Applicants who do not meet any of the above criteria will not have a local village/parish connection.

8. Secure funding

The AHP will apply for grant funding. This is normally obtained from Central Government through Homes England. The funding subsidises the housing costs to ensure they are affordable to the occupiers.

AHP's must compete with other AHPs across the South East Region for the funding allocations. There must be a suitable site and preferably planning permission for the site. Once the funding is allocated, the scheme must meet agreed deadlines. The Parish Council needs to be aware that funding is limited and to work with the AHP to meet the deadlines, or their scheme may be at risk of losing funding. However, there is still an element of flexibility.

9. Build the houses

Enjoy watching the homes being built. Parishes feel great pride when they see their vision become a reality. Keep an eye on construction. The local community can have a role to ensure that there is not undue nuisance or inconvenience to local residents.

10. Understand the nomination process

This is one of the major concerns of parishes – that the homes built are used to house local people. Yet for obvious reasons, it is the one area where the Parish Council is likely to be in

a sensitive position. It is important that the Parish Council understand the process to advise local people, but it is not appropriate for the Parish Council to be involved in the detail of the selection process as this would compromise both their position and the confidentiality of applicants' details. It is vital to disseminate information and advice to people in housing need.

Some people complain that although they were aware that the housing was about to become available (they could see it being built), they did not know what they had to do to be nominated for a home.

To be eligible to be nominated, a household must have their name on the Housing Register (Hampshire Home Choice) for an affordable property to rent and on the Help to Buy Agent register for intermediate housing (such as shared ownership).

The Parish Council has a role in making people aware that they must register and how to do so (by word of mouth, through a note in the parish magazine/website or on notice boards).

Do not forget those people who have had to leave the parish to find affordable accommodation elsewhere, but wish to return to their own parish. It is important to explain that, although people may not be high priority on the Housing Register, in the case of rural housing on exception sites, local connections will be the most important criterion, over-riding other factors.

Verification of an applicant's local connection will be undertaken by the AHP. A copy of the allocation policy for exception sites is available from the Council and is available on the TVBC website.

11. Celebrate!

The day the new tenants move into the newly-built homes is a day for celebration. All those involved in the long and complex process of developing a scheme deserve to be recognised and praised...especially the parish councillors.

An open day is often organised sometime after tenants move in, to celebrate the new scheme. This is a good opportunity to show other Parish Councils the benefits and advantages of a local affordable housing scheme.

Key Contacts:

Housing Development Team – Tel: 01264 368378 Email: housingdevelopmentteam@testvalley.gov.uk

Hampshire Homes Hub (HHH) – Tel: 01962 854971 Email: info@actionhampshire.org

Hampshire Home Choice – Tel: 01730 234 358 or 01730 234 277 Email: support.team@easthants.gov.uk Website: www.easthants.gov.uk

Help to Buy Agent3 – Tel: 0800 456 1188 Email: info@helptobuyagent3.org.uk