



Rural Housing Service

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Overview

BRCC acts as an independent 'honest broker' working with Parish Councils, Housing Associations, local authorities and land owners to progress opportunities for affordable housing for local people in rural areas. Similar services are offered by Rural Community Councils across the country.

BRCC's principal role is to identify local housing need within rural parishes through carrying out Housing Needs Surveys. This work is usually funded by Housing Associations who are interested in developing Rural Exception Site housing.

What are Housing Needs Surveys?

Housing Needs Surveys have been used for a number of years to ascertain the specific needs of local people for affordable housing, as well as the general views of the community on housing. If sufficient local need for affordable housing is identified, this provides the necessary evidence for a planning application for a Rural Exception Site.

Housing Needs Surveys are also increasingly being used to provide data on open market housing needs within a parish, in order to provide evidence for a Neighbourhood Plan (see Q5). BRCC has developed a new form for this purpose.

What is Affordable Housing?

Affordable housing is for people who cannot afford to buy or rent a home on the open market. It aims to meet not only current need but also future need, with government guidelines that regulate its price, eligibility criteria and resale.

Affordable housing is usually provided by Registered Social Landlords such as Housing Associations. It is offered for either 'affordable rent' or 'shared ownership' (in which people can purchase a share in the property and pay rent on the rest).

Why might we want affordable housing in our village?

House prices have outgrown incomes in recent years. People on low incomes – often undertaking key roles in their community such as teaching assistants, farm workers or shop and pub staff - cannot afford to set up home in their village. This means that young people in particular are moving away with negative impacts on both themselves and their community. Social and family networks are breaking down whilst local services such as schools, public transport, shops and pubs become less viable.

Affordable housing helps to sustain communities by offering local people the chance to stay living in the place where they have strong connections.

Is it really affordable?

The government has introduced a new 'affordable rent', set at up to 80% of the local market rent (inclusive of all service charges). Some rented properties may still be available on a 'social rent' basis, usually equating to 50%-60% of market rents.

Housing benefit may be available to those unable to afford either an 'affordable' or 'social' rent.

What is shared ownership?

Shared ownership offers the opportunity to part purchase a property whilst paying a subsidised rent on the outstanding share. There is no subsidy on the purchased element, but extra shares of the property can be purchased when this can be afforded. The share that can be purchased is capped at 80%, so that the affordable housing is secured for future generations.

What is a Rural Exception Site?

Most affordable housing nowadays is built by private developers required by planning requirements for to allocate a set percentage of new housing development sites (usually around 30%) to affordable housing. Sites go through the usual planning processes, and the housing is allocated on a point-based system to housing applicants from across a local authority area.

However, in rural areas it is possible to gain planning permission for small 100% affordable housing developments to meet local needs (see Q3), through a Rural Exception Site. This site would be an 'exception' to the local planning authority's usual site allocations process, and would usually provide 8-10 units maximum.

Because the land would not gain planning permission for housing under any other circumstances, it can be bought for considerably less than land upon which ordinary development would be permitted, helping to keep the housing affordable. At the same time, landowners are able to get a higher price for their land than its agricultural value alone.

Who is Exception Site Housing for?

Unlike most conventional affordable housing, priority for exception site housing must be given to people with a strong local connection to the parish, including at least one of the following:

- Current residence
- Previous residence for a number of years
- Having an immediate family member in the parish
- Working in the parish

Exception site developments have conditions placed upon them to ensure that the housing remains available for local people in perpetuity. The housing is offered either for affordable rent or shared ownership; under the latter, it is usually stipulated that nobody can ever buy their house outright, but instead is required to sell the house back to the housing association for reallocation.

How are rural exception site properties allocated?

Properties are allocated according to an allocations scheme agreed between the local authority and the Parish Council. Anyone seeking affordable housing in their parish must first register with the relevant housing association or local authority. When a rental property becomes available, the housing association can offer the house to those who qualify from the allocations policy. If there is ever a situation whereby

there are no longer people with a local connection to the parish requiring the houses, the properties are first allocated to people in need from neighbouring parishes.

Do rural exception sites open the floodgates for other development?

No! They are an exception to planning policy and do not set a precedent for other amendments to village boundaries. Planners prefer sites to abut the village boundary to ensure they don't create an in-fill opportunity between the site and the boundary.

How long does it take to build a rural exception site?

It can take several years to develop a rural exception site. Finding an appropriate site is often the biggest stumbling block. With a suitable site lined up and a positive approach from all partners it is possible to be on site within 18 months of initial contact with the Parish Council.

What is a Neighbourhood Plan?

The Localism Act 2011 introduced a statutory right for local communities to draw up a Neighbourhood Plan, intended to give communities more of a say in the development of their local area (within certain limits and parameters). The Neighbourhood Plan must broadly conform with the overall Local Plan for the local authority area, and must be approved both by an independent inspector and a local referendum to be adopted.

For more information on this service please contact:

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