



"My son is 28 and still living at home. Will he never leave home?"

"I work in the local school but will have to leave because I can't afford to stay in this village"

"The council houses in this village all seem to go to people from outside"

"How will you make sure that the homes are for local people?"

"This is all about landowners making a quick buck"

A guide for

Parish Councils

who wish to develop an affordable housing scheme for local people

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Introduction

As a Parish Council you may have heard local people raising the types of concern shown on the front page and wondered if there is any way that you could help solve this problem locally. This is a big project to undertake and can be daunting. This guide is designed to help you begin to address some of these questions. Experience has shown that there is no one single factor that will guarantee the success of a project. However there are some essential ingredients that have been found to be crucial in providing affordable housing in rural areas. These are covered in this booklet.

What is affordable housing?

Affordable housing is low cost housing for sale or rent, usually delivered through a housing association, to meet the needs of local people who cannot afford accommodation through the open market. The Glossary in **Sheet 2** at the back of this booklet gives information about the different types of affordable housing.

Why is it needed?

The lack of affordable housing for rural communities has been a problem for decades, but recently it has reached crisis point. People in rural England are becoming homeless because of affordable housing shortages, according to the Commission for Rural Communities' State of the Countryside 2007 report. Among the problems are:

- Holiday houses and second homes pricing locals out of the market.
- Lack of social housing in villages.
- "Right to Buy" has significantly reduced the stock of social housing in rural areas
- High house prices preventing first-time buyers from getting a foothold in the housing market.
- Incomes of those who work in rural areas tend to be lower than the regional average which makes it difficult for people working locally for instance in agriculture, tourism and village services (such as shops, schools, GP-practices etc) to live in the village in which they work.

These factors are contributing to demographic change. The population in rural areas is ageing more rapidly than elsewhere as young people often cannot afford to stay in the area. There is significant inward migration of older people and pensioners. These changes are altering the social fabric of rural communities putting strains on the formal and informal support mechanisms within those communities. Homelessness in rural areas has increased significantly over the past years.

More affordable homes in small villages would allow local people of all ages to live and work in rural areas and would support the creation of sustainable rural communities.

What should you do if affordable housing is an issue for your community?

The development of affordable housing is complex and time-consuming. A resourceful parish council with the right mix of skills and experience might be able to find their way through the labyrinth - however you don't have to.

Many communities choose to work in a group consisting of local people and specialists who undertake to work together through every stage of the process. A successful team will be the result of close partnership working between the Parish Council, the Rural Housing Enabler, the District Council, a Housing Association or other developer and the wider community. If you live on Exmoor or Dartmoor, the National Park Authority will need to be included in this group. Good partnership working will be an essential factor in the success of a project and must operate openly and transparently with good communication and shared responsibility for outcomes. This team will need to:

- Engage and consult with the local community
- Help with the initial housing needs surveys.
- Identify land or property for development.
- Access loans and grants to fund the development.
- Liaise and negotiate with the planning authorities, architects and builders.
- Provide expertise to ensure that developments are well-designed
- Provide professional services and business advice, such as surveying.
- Manage the property or land.

The Team

- The **Parish Council** is an important partner, bringing local knowledge and ensuring the community remains informed throughout.
- **Rural Housing Enablers (RHEs)** assist rural communities with the development of affordable housing and will be your first point of contact. There are three RHEs in Devon working for the Devon Rural Housing Project and the Exmoor Rural Housing Project.
- Each **District Council** will have a housing enabler who will assist with the development of housing.
- Each **District Council** will also have a Planning Department that advises and makes decisions about the location and type of development permitted. If you live in a National Park the National Park Authority is responsible for planning.
- A **Housing Association/Registered Social Landlord (RSL)** is a not for profit organisation that develops and manages affordable housing and is regulated by a government agency. A Development Manager will act on their behalf to drive the development process.
- There are other **developers** that develop affordable housing. Your RHE can give you contact details.

*(See **Sheet 1** for contact details)*

Leadership

Strong leadership that drives the process forward is a crucial element in the delivery of rural housing. Firstly, strong leadership within the community either from the Parish Council or a housing group is needed to take responsibility for finding a way to meet local housing needs. Whilst you can benefit from professional help from the team detailed above, the only organisation that will be solely focused on

your parish will be this group. Sustained commitment and a tenacious approach to problem solving will be required throughout the long process. This helps to maintain community support and cope with and mitigate nimbyism.

Political leadership at District Council and Parish Council level is also very important in order to support the staff at the District Council and Housing Associations who are working to deliver the outcomes.

Why it might be difficult?

Some problems you might come across;

- **Nimbyism:** means “not in my back yard” and is a common blockage to affordable housing in rural areas. It can be combated by making sure that myths are dispelled and that information is given about how affordable housing can benefit and enhance a community. Nimbyism needs to be challenged for the benefit of the wider community.
- **Planning:** The planning system plays a key role in the delivery of affordable rural housing. There are particular constraints on development in rural areas that can prevent the development of affordable housing. These include environmental concerns and issues about highways.
- **Site availability:** It is sometimes difficult to find a suitable site. If a suitable site without a willing landowner cannot be found the process cannot proceed.
- **Funding:** There are a number of ways funding can be accessed. The Homes and Communities Agency invests public money in Housing Associations, which in turn are a major source of affordable housing for rural communities. The scheme has to meet a value for money test.



How can you make it happen?

Housing Needs Survey

The first stage of a scheme is to get accurate information. Each community has unique housing needs that should be assessed by a housing needs survey. This will ascertain the level and nature of the need. The results will inform what kind of action is required. For example, a survey might show that a shortage of houses to rent is forcing young people out of the area. Your RHE will conduct a survey with the help of the Parish Council and District Council. The Parish Council needs to take a lead in supporting the survey as a community exercise.

It is vital to get information on all types of housing need, including:

1. People who have left the village but wish to return.
2. Older people who wish to move to smaller, more manageable accommodation.
3. Single people and couples living with family.

Identifying land and sites

A significant challenge will be to find an appropriate site or property for development. Parish Councils are key players in helping identify land. Site assessments can be carried out by different partners, together with the Parish Council, including the RHE, the District Planner, and the District Housing Enabler.



The RHEs can help identify all possible sites within a village that show some potential for affordable housing. They will then contact landowners to ascertain willingness to either sell or give a small piece of land. Landowners will require confidentiality during this process.

Most sites will probably be exception sites which are plots of land which are not earmarked for development. However, they can be given 'exceptional' planning permission to meet affordable housing needs. They normally exist at the edge of villages. Permission can only be granted if there is a proven need for such housing and if the local community agrees.

Other options are:

- The Parish Council may own land they could release.
- Developers could provide surplus or underused land.
- Unused properties or empty homes could be released for development.
- Local Authorities or housing associations may hold land or property.
- Your District Council may allocate land in rural communities specifically for affordable housing. Your local planning authority will be able to tell you if land has been allocated in this way in your village

Your RHE will provide you with further guidance on identifying sites when you are ready to start this process.

Community Engagement

Usually communities will be the first to identify the need for affordable housing locally and will then engage specialist help to develop this further. It will be necessary to involve as many from the community as possible from a very early stage in order to identify and deal with negative opinions and objections and to make sure that any new development meets the needs of the whole community and is seen as an asset. For instance at Frogmore and Sherford the Parish Council worked closely with the community to -

- Involve them as fully as possible in understanding the issues facing the Parish and Parish Council in terms of affordability and choices,
- promote the survey,
- encourage take-up.

They held a number of public meetings and publicised the issues widely in the local press to ensure the community were aware of the issues and therefore had the opportunity to get involved. People who had left the villages because of the price of housing were also encouraged to complete a housing needs questionnaire. This resulted in an impressive survey return rate of just under 50%.

Selecting your Developer

Your District Council will have preferred Housing Association partners. These are Housing Associations who are already committed to working in the local area. Housing associations are the main providers of new affordable housing. However, there are other providers you can consider and your RHE will be able to give you more information on these. There are a number of ways in which a housing association can become involved in a scheme. A landowner might approach one directly and offer to work with them. In other cases the Parish Council might already have a housing association with properties in the village. There are a number of housing associations working in Devon currently. They all offer slightly different products but will all build to Homes and Communities Agency standards and the houses will all be affordable. Details on **Sheet 1**.

The Development Process

The housing association (or other developer) will now drive the process but should still keep the community involved and informed as much as possible. The process will include:

- Community consultation once an outline of the scheme has been worked up.
- Investigations into the environmental impact of development, the archaeology of the site etc.
- Negotiation with planners including pre-application negotiations, the planning application and approval.
- Site purchase.
- Application for funding from the Homes and Communities Agency.
- Negotiation of the Section 106 agreement.
- Undertake the development.
- Letting of properties.
- On going management and maintenance.



In Summary

If the lack of affordable housing is an issue in your community it is possible to act to alleviate this problem. There are no easy or quick solutions but development is possible given persistence, patience and hard work. The results can be of huge benefit to your local community and will continue to be so for many years to come. The checklist that follows will help you to get started and to remain focused on the issue.

Checklist

There are eleven checklists below that can be used to help you through each stage of the process.

1. Making a start	Tick
Do you think that the majority of residents could support a scheme if well informed about the issues?	
Are there one or two enthusiastic activists who have the time and energy to push the project forward?	
What spin off benefits would additional affordable housing have for the school, for local shops and businesses?	
How have other parishes succeeded in delivering affordable housing?	
Should we visit completed schemes in other parishes?	
Contact your local District Council to find details of your Rural Housing Enabler (RHE) and staff who can help you start your project.	

2. Engage your community – who should be involved?	Tick
The Parish Council. As the democratically elected body, the Parish Council should be central to the process. It should be involved from the beginning and in many cases should drive the project through the various stages.	
The local District and County Councillors. It is important that councillors are involved at an early stage. They will be the natural link and champion with the services you will need to engage with including Housing, Planning and Highways.	
Residents. It is essential that all (even those who may not appear to be interested!) have the opportunity to be involved. Communication should reach everyone, including “hard to reach” groups such as young people, who may not even have thought about their future housing needs and whether they will want to stay in the parish.	
Landowners. Many local landowners have been keen to provide something for the parish in perpetuity and have therefore been a key stakeholder in successful projects.	
People forced away from the village (but would like to return). These people can be difficult to find but might be reached by word of mouth and using posters.	
Schools, businesses. Essential services will only remain as long as they are able to maintain ratios of families with children or working age people. In addition key workers (say teachers and nurses) are essential to keep local service provision open.	
Independent Rural Housing Enablers from the Community Council of Devon and Housing Enablers from your local council can play a key role in helping you involve local people and advise on the best methods for effective public participation.	

3. Assess the Needs	Tick
What kind of affordable housing provision is needed? Is there local anecdotal information about people in need of affordable housing?	
Does your village have a parish plan? What does it say about affordable housing need? If not it may be appropriate to look at wider issues in your parish by developing a Parish Plan.	
Is there a current housing needs survey with up to date information?	
If not carry out a local parish housing needs survey. Use your Rural Housing Enabler (RHE) and the District Council, who will ensure that the survey asks the right questions and that don't just end up with a wish list.	
Advertise that you are about to undertake a survey to ensure good response.	
Use the survey as a register for those who wish to put their names forward to the District Housing Register.	
What is the District Council's statistical data on housing need in your parish?	
Have an open meeting of the Parish Council for the Housing Needs Survey report to be presented back to the village. A survey normally takes two to three months to complete.	

4. Identify potential sites	Tick
Appoint a small working group to make it happen.	
Analyse the results of the survey; how many homes are required, were potential sites identified?	
Print off several large scale maps of the village, showing settlement boundary and surrounding land.	
Undertake a local site search with your Rural Housing Enabler, looking carefully for any land owned by public bodies such as the Parish, District, County or Church.	
Be open to all possibilities	
Advertise for sites using parish newsletters, boards, shop windows etc	
Use the site checklist on next page to work through potential sites.	
Work with housing and planning authorities, developers and housing associations to establish which sites would or would not be likely to be allowed.	
Develop a short list of sites	
Discuss results with Parish/District Councillor	
Are landowners of short listed sites willing to sell for affordable housing?	
Select an appropriate site and an appropriate mechanism	
Hold an open meeting or exhibition to share information, gather support and feedback on site and allay perceptions or fears around affordable housing	

5. What sites in the village may be suitable	Tick
Identify all possible sites on a map	
View all potential sites (rule nothing out at this stage) with local members, the District Council housing / planning staff and Rural Housing Enablers	
Is there a brownfield or greenfield site adjacent to the settlement boundary?	
Access to amenities and facilities in village or nearby?	
Access to public transport?	
Does the site naturally 'round off' the boundary? Is there a natural containment?	
Would the site intrude into the landscape or be harmful to the setting?	
Would the development conserve or enhance the village?	
Any previous problem with flooding?	
Any access problems? Is there enough room for highway splays? Good visibility?	
Any likely problems with trees?	
Any anecdotal problems with services such as sewerage, drainage etc.?	
Is the land fairly flat?	
Usually need about half an acre per 8 houses	
What are neighbours views likely to be?	
Is the landowner positive about affordable housing?	

6. Working up the plans

Tick

The next stage is to select the options available to you. Your District Council and the RHE can advise what would be best suited to your village.

Meet with representatives of housing associations and others who may be able to help.

Think about whether a Community Land Trust may be the answer. Visit a CLT in another area to establish whether it could work for you (or not).

Seek advice from the Rural Housing Enabler and the District Council officers.

Develop proposals for the preferred site and liaise with the Parish/District Councillor.

If the land is an exception site, the District and Registered Social Landlord will pursue funding from the Homes and Communities Agency for the scheme. To do this, the site must be suitable and preferably have planning permission.

Think about what housing is needed, bearing in mind household size, age, disposable income and any special requirement of those who have housing need.

7. Obtaining planning permission

Tick

The actions in this phase will depend on what option you have chosen. If you have chosen a housing association they will take the lead in obtaining planning permission. However, if you have chosen a Community Land Trust, then you will probably need to be more involved.

Keep in close contact with your planning team

Make sure you are involved in the working up of the proposal and understand as fully as possible the planning and legal details of the scheme.

Be prepared to voice your comments on the design of the scheme.

Involve the wider community at this stage, perhaps through a public meeting.

Invite comments on the design of the buildings, particularly by those who may be housed in them.

Pay close attention to the drawing up of the Section 106 Agreement the agreement that ensures the homes continue to meet local needs 'in perpetuity'. Seek advice from partners.

Make sure you are kept aware of the stages of progress.

8. Secure funding

Tick

The actions depend on the option chosen.

Exception sites managed by a Housing Association should obtain Homes and Communities Agency funding subject to application criteria. The Housing Association will apply for this.

Community Land Trusts need a more innovative approach. The CLT will become the owner of the land or it could lease a site from a landowner. The Trust will be a charity and will apply for funding from bodies such as local Councils, and will rely heavily on volunteer support for publicity, admin, fund-raising and negotiating.

9. Build the houses	Tick
Keep an eye on the construction and enjoy seeing the village's affordable homes being built.	
Continue communication with the community via newsletters and posters etc, especially to ensure that people know how to put themselves on the housing register. Don't forget the people who have been forced to leave your village.	
Ensure that the construction is not causing undue inconvenience to local residents.	

10. Understand the nomination process	Tick
This differs according to the option chosen. With an exception site the Parish will need to understand the process but will not be involved in the detail. A Parish may be more involved with a Community Land Trust.	
Disseminate information and advice to people in housing need so that everyone is aware on how they can be nominated for a home.	
Understand the process of nomination on an exception site and keep abreast of progress.	

11. Celebrate	Tick
The day the tenants move into the newly-built houses is a day for celebration.	
All of those involved in the long and complex process of developing a scheme deserve to be recognised and praised...especially the Parish Council, who should feel justly proud.	
Consider holding an Open Day to show the village and others what you have achieved.	
Share your knowledge and achievement with other parishes that are just starting their schemes.	



Contacts

Rural Housing Enablers

- **Sue Hitchcock** – South Hams, Teignbridge, West Devon
Email. susan@devonrcc.org.uk
Tel. 01392 383419
- **Sue Southwell** – East Devon, Torridge and Mid Devon
Email. sue@devonrcc.org.uk
Tel. (01392) 383419
- **Colin Savage** – Exmoor, North Devon and West Somerset
Email. CBSavage@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk
Tel. (01398) 322249

District Councils

- **East Devon District Council** – The Knowle, Sidmouth, Devon, EX10 8HL. Tel. (01395) 516551
- **Mid Devon District Council** – Phoenix House, Phoenix Lane, Tiverton, EX16 6PP. Tel. (01884) 255255
- **North Devon District Council** – North Walk, Barnstaple, Devon, EX31 1EA. Tel. (01271) 327711
- **South Hams District Council** – Follaton House, Plymouth Road, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 5NE. Tel. (01803) 861234
- **Teignbridge District Council** – Forde House, Brunel Road, Newton Abbot, Devon, TQ12 4XX.
- **Torridge District Council** – Riverbank House, Bideford, Devon, EX39 2QG. Tel. (01237) 428700
- **West Devon Borough Council** – Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon, PL19 0BZ. Tel. (01822 813600)

Registered Social Landlords in the Devon Rural Housing Partnership

- **Devon and Cornwall Housing Association** –
The Mount, Paris Street, Exeter, EX1 2JZ.
Tel. (01392) 252566
www.dcha.co.uk
- **Hastoe Housing Association** – Fleur de Lis, Middlemarsh Street,
Poundbury, Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 3GX.
Tel. (01305) 250103
www.hastoe.com
- **Westcountry Housing Association** –
Hatfield House, Hatfield road, Torquay, TQ1 3HF.
Tel. (01803) 200300
www.westcountryha.org.uk
- **Magna Housing Group** –
Hollands House, Poundbury Road, Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 1SW.
Tel. (01305) 216000
www.magna.org.uk
- **Guinness Trust** – Guinness Trust, 3rd Floor,
Balliol House, Southernhay Gardens, Exeter, EX1 1NP.
Tel. (01392) 456600
www.guinnesstrust.org.uk
- **Spectrum Housing Group** – Hawthorne House, Emperor Way,
Exeter Business Park, Exeter, EX1 3QS.
Tel. (01392) 361122
www.sha.co.uk
- **South West Housing Society** – 504 Worle Parkway,
Weston-Super-Mare, North Somerset, BS22 6WA.
Tel. 0845 290 3366
www.swhs.org.uk
- **Teign Housing** –
Templar House, Collett Way, Newton Abbot TQ12 4PH.
Tel. (01626) 322722
www.teignhousing.co.uk

- **Tor Homes** –
Tor House, St Peters Quay, Totnes, TQ9 5SH.
Tel. (01803) 869600
www.torhomes.com
- **South Devon Rural Housing Association** –
Forder Lane House, Dartington, Totnes, TQ9 6HT.
Tel. (01803 863550)
www.southdevonrural.com
- **Falcon Rural Housing Limited** –
Falcon House, 3a South Street, Wellington, Somerset, TA21 8NR.
Tel. (01823) 667343
www.falconhousing.co.uk
- **Cornerstone** –
18 Southernhay East, Exeter, EX1 1QD.
Tel. (01392) 273462
www.cornerstonehousing.net



Glossary of types of housing

- **Affordable Housing** – “Affordable Housing” is the accepted national terminology for housing which provides for the needs of local people within a district who cannot afford to buy or rent on the unrestricted open market. It is defined as housing that is provided with subsidy, both for rent and intermediate housing, for people who are unable to resolve their housing requirement in the local private sector housing market because of the relationship between housing costs and incomes. Most councils definition of affordable housing align with the PPS3 (Planning Policy Statement 3) definition as follows

“Affordable Housing should:

- meet the needs of eligible households including availability at a cost low enough for them to afford, determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices; and
- include provisions for:
 - i. the home to be retained for future eligible households; or
 - ii. if these restrictions are lifted, for any subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision.”
- **Housing Associations (HAs)** – Also known as Registered Social Landlords. Not for profit organisations regulated by Government that supply affordable housing.
- **Intermediate Housing** – A range of products available to people who have income above those requiring social rented housing but below those that can access full ownership. Products include shared ownership and sub market rent etc.

- **Low Cost Home Ownership** – A form of intermediate housing which provides low cost access to home ownership. Includes schemes such as shared ownership.
- **New Build Homebuy** – Low cost home ownership scheme funded by the Housing Corporation to assist people in housing need (including key workers).
- **Shard ownership** – A form of affordable housing where the householder buys a share of the property and rents the remaining share, traditionally from a Registered Social Landlord (RSL). See also ‘Low cost home ownership’.
- **Social rented housing** – Housing provided at below market cost for households in housing need with regulated standards of good practice in relation to physical conditions, management, allocation, equal opportunities and accountability. Provided on assured tenancies.
- **Sub market rent** – Rented housing whose rents are less than open market rents (often 80% of open market) but more than social rented housing.
- **Private rented accommodation** – Open market rented accommodation assured short hold tenancies.
- **Community Land Trusts (CLTs)** – These are local trusts set up to own and develop housing, some for rent, some for shared ownership or shared equity, with the Trust usually keeping the ownership of the land or part of the house. Houses can be sold but only part of the increase in value will be realised by the owners as the increase will be shared with the Trust, and the sale value will be restricted to ensure it is affordable to the incoming owner. The principle is to provide homes, not financial assets. Sometimes done as self build schemes. These are subject to each individual Local Authority Planning Policy.

- **Individual private developments** – They are usually one or two houses for families – sometimes self-build – and are often difficult in planning terms in rural areas.
- **Low cost housing** – Usually sold by private developers as part of the deal when they get planning permission to develop some Open Market housing. They have to build some low cost housing that is sold at a discount (60 - 80%) as part of the planning agreement. The agreement is usually covered by a Section 106 agreement. It is not regarded as truly affordable as it does not fully comply with the legal definition of Affordable Housing (see PPS3).
- **Open market housing with local occupancy restrictions** – This can be affordable in some places depending on the local housing market. Local occupancy restrictions can be open to challenge. Must comply with Local Planning requirement but is subject to no occupancy restrictions and can be bought by anyone.
- **Open market housing** – This housing is subject to no restrictions and can be bought by anyone.

Other terms

- **Social Housing** – Generally used to cover rented accommodation, usually through Registered Social Landlords / Housing Associations.
- **Eco-Homes** – This is a high environmental standard of new housing imposed on new houses by the Homes and Community Agency if the scheme is getting Homes and Community Agency funding.
- **Homes and Communities Agency** – A government organisation that directs funding and support for social housing and produces housing strategies working with the Regional Housing Boards.

- **Self-build** – Housing constructed by the future owner/resident. Sometimes the future owner/resident gets the contractor in to build the house (as opposed to a developer building several houses).
- **Section 106 (S106)** – Legal agreement under Section 106 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990. Used as a means of securing the provision of affordable housing and other contributions from private housing developments.
- **Local Development Framework (LDF)** – A suite of documents forming a local plan to decide what will go where for housing and other development, while the overall amount of housing in a county/district is decided by the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS).
- **Local Occupancy** – A restriction that limits who can live in the house – dependent on local authority’s policy.
- **Second Home** – A home that is not used as a main residence. No formal definition exists, and second homes are subject to the same planning rules as a permanent residence.
- **Holiday let** – A residence let out for holidays, usually registered as a business, and under separate planning rules.
- **District Wide Survey** – A survey to assess the strategic housing need within a district used to inform discussions about how much housing is to be allocated to which area. It is usually not statistically valid at a local level.
- **Housing Needs Survey** – A survey done at a local (usually parish) level to ascertain the need for affordable housing, what tenure and size. Usually carried out by Rural Housing Enablers.
- **Rural Exception Site** – Land that would not normally be considered for development, but that would be accepted as land for affordable housing, as a result of proven local housing need and usually on the edge of a village boundary.
- **Affordability Potential** – The amount people can afford when they are trying to a house (usually 3.5 x income + savings)
- **Affordability Ratio** – The ratio between what people can earn and the house prices in an area.

