

## Ten steps to delivering affordable homes on a Rural Exception Site

The following diagram and text set out the principal steps for delivering a rural exception site (RES). It is presented as a linear process though in practice some of the steps may happen in a different order. However, all these elements will occur during the development of a rural exception site scheme.

It describes the steps taken where a scheme is developed and owned by a housing association (HA). These will also be the steps taken for a community led housing (CLH) scheme developed on a RES, but there will be additional stages such as formal group formation and registration as a legal entity. Where it is a Community Land Trust (CLT)/ housing association partnership there will also be a partnership agreement stage as well as agreeing and signing the lease agreement.



### Step 1

#### **Community/parish council raises the need for affordable housing in the community**

This may be through the parish council or by a small group formed from members of the community. At this stage they will usually seek and be supported by a Rural Housing Enabler (RHE), the local authority (LA) housing enabler or sometimes a housing association.

### Step 2

#### **Community identifies the level and nature of housing need**

This is often done through a Rural Housing Enabler and/or the LA housing enabler and usually takes the form of a housing needs survey, with additional secondary information to provide wider housing market context. The results are shared with the parish council and will be publicised through a local website or newsletter. Options for meeting the need can be discussed at a parish council meeting or a specific public meeting.

### Step 3

#### **A suitable site is identified**

Site identification may include a local call for sites, a desktop exercise, and a 'village walkabout' with members of the community/parish council and the RHE, and possibly a housing association Officer. In some areas local Planning Authority Officers may advise which sites would be considered appropriate.

An approach is made to the landowner/s either through the community or the RHE, setting out a proposal in principle. Detailed site negotiations are conducted by the HA.

#### **Step 4**

##### **Selection of a housing association**

If a housing association has not already been involved the community can seek advice from the RHE or LA of a suitable housing association to work with. In practice there are few housing associations willing to develop small rural schemes so there is often no choice.

#### **Step 5**

##### **Capital finance is raised for the scheme**

This is the responsibility of the HA and/or developer. This will include ensuring there is loan finance in place and negotiating and securing any grant funding. Often small rural HAs will work with a larger HA, with the rural HA taking ownership of the units at completion.

#### **Step 6**

##### **Scheme design**

The HA will work with the landowner and community to agree a site layout and design that will comply with local policies. There will be a public exhibition event/s and any previous work undertaken by the community, such as a Village Design Statement, will also inform the design. The RHE will work with the community to ensure events are well publicised and that there are opportunities for all sectors of the community to be involved.

In some cases at this stage there may be a verification of the level or nature of need, with allocation staff on hand to advise potential residents and encourage them to register with the HA, LA or HomeBuy agents.

#### **Step 7**

##### **Planning permission is given**

The HA will submit the planning application, and they will be the principle agent involved in any pre-application discussions. The community will be kept informed of progress by the RHE and/or HA and the community can comment along the way. The RHE may be called upon to act as a broker between the community and the HA where there are differences of view and the RHE can, when needed, also act as a broker between the HA and LPA.

**The S106 Agreement** will include requirements that the homes are retained as affordable housing in perpetuity and will include criteria that ensure the homes are occupied by people with a local connection to the community, usually defined either by residency, family connection or employment. In some cases it will have a local lettings policy as an addendum. The community will not be a signatory to the S106, but they will be involved in discussions on the Heads of Terms and in the design of any Local Lettings Policy.

#### **Step 8**

##### **The scheme is built**

The development stage is completely managed by the housing association. In an ideal world the HA will keep the community informed of progress and give reasons for any delay but in practice this does not always happen as well as it should.

#### **Step 9**

##### **The homes are allocated**

Potential residents will have registered on the LA's Choice Based Lettings or through the relevant HomeBuy agent. For the former the LA will advertise the properties, noting that these are subject to a S106 Agreement and that local occupancy criteria apply. The LA will nominate potential residents to the HA who will then handle the actual nominations.

The local parish newsletter/website may be used to advertise and make people aware that the properties are being let and encourage potential residents to register.

#### **Step 10**

**The residents move in - time to celebrate!**