



**RURAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING – DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES
WEDNESDAY 20 OCTOBER HELD AT GOYH, LEEDS**

Organisations In Attendance:

Rural Community Council	Humber and Wolds Rural Community Council
Yorkshire and The Humber Rural Affairs Forum	Guinness Northern Counties (HA)
Re'New	
Bellway Homes	
Yorkshire Local Councils Association	
Mott MacDonald	
Mott Housing GOYH	
Head of Planning, Calderdale MBC	

The YHRAF has identified the need for further discussion on affordable rural housing, particularly within the context of the imminent cuts expected (at the time of this meeting) in the CSR which will affect future funding. In some areas there has been a positive rural housing strategy with considerable investment by the Homes and Communities Agency and Local Authorities but there is concern that this will not continue and delivery by LAs will become extremely limited.

It will be important that the limited grant funding available is directed towards priority areas where no section 106 opportunities are likely to exist. LAs can only support the management of small numbers of houses. Registered Social Landlords and private development are only part of the solution, particularly in the rural hinterland.

Needs and issues vary from area to area within Yorkshire and The Humber and it was agreed that as part of the new locally driven agenda (eg Community Right To Build and the Localism Bill) a collaborative model is needed where a wide range of partners are engaged, if successful delivery of affordable housing in rural areas is to be achieved in the current economic climate.

The following ideas were suggested:

Partnership working:

When the current funding model has gone, the rural housing enablers will disappear and it is crucial that the current skills, knowledge and expertise are not lost.

- Private Sector and HAs need to drive the programme together.
- Local Investment Partnership collaboration is needed.
- Expertise in engaging effectively with communities (with HAs and rural community councils/RHEs) needs to be utilised in any private sector/section 106 /exception site development.

- Private sector Corporate Social Responsibility can be developed through collaboration with the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- Private sector house builders (supported by the Facilitation Fund) could engage more closely with willing local communities and support them by helping with any skills deficit when CLT development opportunities are to be progressed.

Thorough consultation and communication should be compulsory between the private sector and local communities when land is being considered for development for housing. Planners should have the power to insist upon it.

Councillors need training: both local politicians and parishes – to ensure they are able to embrace the Localism agenda properly for the benefit of their communities. Models of good practice need to be shared.

CHALLENGES

1. Availability of land:

- The Church, landowners, trusts and large estates own large amounts of land.
 - There are sensitivities to overcome within the CRTB agenda: many landowners are part of the community; balancing the ‘bottom up’ rule with land availability opportunities and community need.
 - Many LAs are uncertain about how this affects the Local Development Framework
 - Exception sites policy has been successful in providing 100% affordable homes by some authorities, but has had limited usage by others.
- NB ‘Faith in affordable housing’ report: the Church is able to sell/gift land as part of its charitable purposes.

Develop gifts of land opportunities:

- Is there public land available - could the LA gift it to a Community Land Trust?
- Encourage farmers to leave land in their will in a CLT/for the benefit of the community.

2. Scale

Many of the small building firms who have previously worked in this market have gone out of business, which has led to a current loss in capacity for small housing schemes.

Smaller scale development, but in a wider geographical area – the small scale developments suitable to rural environments are too small to interest large private house builders, but they may be interested in considering the development of smaller clusters of affordable houses over a wider geographical area and deliver in partnership with Housing Associations.

3. Sustainable and innovative opportunities

‘Sustainable’ and ‘rural’ are both factors which increase building costs. ‘High specification’ build (code 4 instead of code 3) is not ‘affordable’ and only achievable in high density, urban locations.

Actual housing need for a community has to be identified rather than the perceived housing need often set out within Community Led Plans. Identify the problem and focus on solving it.

The model needs to be smarter - focus should be:

- on interface with the people living in the community rather than solely on design of the building
- looking at how a building will be used
- teaching sustainability in schools
- understanding that Business is part of the solution
- looking at solutions, impacts and environmental improvement in totality

Some innovative building options might be:

- to encourage community self build using local skills/creating local jobs
 - to use of different materials, such as straw bale housing– there are businesses within Yorkshire with this expertise eg Amazonails in Todmorden, to look at all options.
- Some of the most successful developments in rural affordability have been mobile homes!

4. Financing options

Investment by institutional investors is unlikely, but local landowners/large estates/Church are more likely to take a long term view regarding business opportunities through development, particularly if it is proportionate.

Local/mutual building societies (eg Silsden Building Society) are more likely to be interested in lending for shared ownership schemes than many major lenders.

Properties for rent:

There is currently little to attract the private sector in developing opportunities for intermediate rental provision, despite rental rates having a tendency to be higher in rural areas.

Most HA offer ‘rent to buy’ properties at 80% of open market rent.

There is a dysfunction between tenure and reduced costs - there is an ongoing requirement for grant funding.

Develop a shared-ownership business model

- Create long term investment for the benefit of the community by encouraging landowners and communities to work together, creating a partnership.
- New build schemes could prove attractive as a business opportunity to landowners as new build will outperform agricultural growth.

