Frequently Asked Questions: Affordable Housing and Rural Exception Sites

How is the amount and mix of housing determined?
The Housing Needs survey will indicate the amount and type of affordable housing required. Once the results of the survey have been analysed, proposals for the site will be produced, including property types and numbers of properties for rent and shared ownership. Any affordable housing scheme will always be designed and built to be in keeping with its surroundings, to enhance the character of the village in which it is built.

How can affordable housing be built on land outside the development boundary?
There are planning regulations in place to achieve this under certain circumstances, provided the following criteria are met:

- The Parish Council support the scheme
- It will be kept affordable for local people in perpetuity
- It is supported by a recent housing needs survey

Even when the above criteria are met, the planning application will be subject to approval by planners, who will consider additional wider issues.

Will this development lead to further properties being built in the Parish?
Affordable housing on exception sites will not set any precedent for building homes outside of the development boundary. However, if an initial scheme does not fully cater for the level of housing need in the village, a further affordable housing scheme can be considered. For this to happen, the whole process will have to be repeated, including the creation of a new Housing Needs survey.

How do we identify a potential Rural Exception site?
Rural Exception Sites are identified through a logical and transparent comparative assessment of potential sites in relation to planning policies and constraints. Matters taken into consideration include:

- Relationship of the proposed site to the built form of the existing settlement
- Impact on highways and pedestrian safety/access
- Environmental factors (landscape form/character, flooding, archaeology, historical character, ecology, agricultural land quality, etc.)
• Implications of existing relevant planning policy (Green Belt, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Conservation Areas)

Further advice on site selection assessment can be obtained from the Council’s planning officers.

**How much will be paid for the land?**

Exception sites have a land value that sits between agricultural and ‘hope’ value. The price agreed for the land is important, so as to ensure that the housing provided remains affordable.

**What are Housing Associations and Registered Providers?**

A Registered Provider (RP) is a social landlord who is registered with the Homes and Communities Agency. Most RP’s are housing associations; but they can also exist as Trusts, co-operatives and companies.

They run as businesses, but do not trade for private profit. Any surplus they make is ploughed back into the organisation, to maintain existing homes and help finance new ones. Many RP’s have been formed to manage and develop housing stock transferred to them by local authorities. Housing Associations or RP’s are also the main providers of new social housing.

**Are grants available to RPs?**

RP’s can apply for funding from specific schemes. However, there are strict conditions to obtaining funding and high standards regarding design, specification, energy efficiency, security, etc. These are measured by an appropriately qualified third party. If these standards are not achieved, the RP will not be able to claim funding.

**Will the Parish have to make a financial contribution to the scheme?**

The Parish would not be expected to make a financial contribution to the scheme; although to facilitate a scheme, some can choose to donate land or sell it at a reduced rate.

**What is a Section 106 (S106) Agreement?**

A Section 106 agreement is a mechanism that makes a development proposal acceptable in planning terms that would not otherwise be acceptable. They are focused on site specific mitigation of the impact of development. The obligation can:

- Restrict the development or used of land in a specific way
- Require specified operations/activities to be carried out/in/under/over land
- Require land to be used in a specific way
- Require sum/sums to be paid to the authority on a specific date, multiple dates, or periodically
If the s106 is not complied with, it is enforceable against the person who entered the obligation and any subsequent owner.

**Are affordable homes low quality homes?**
No. They must achieve the Code for Sustainable Homes which enhance the requirements of Building Regulations. There are six main elements:

1. Energy Efficiency
2. Water efficiency
3. Surface Water Management
4. Site waste management
5. Household waste management
6. The use of materials

In addition, Building Regulations set minimum standards for performance for each element, which must be met. This can include the reduction of CO2 emissions and adaptation to climate change. In achieving this standard, homes need to remain affordable to run. Homes built to this standard are pleasant and healthy places to live are adaptable to future needs.

**How are the properties allocated?**
If the scheme has been developed by an RP, the homes will be allocated via a nomination agreement. The Local Authority will nominate people from a register based on their need and suitability, in relation to the local connection criteria. The RP will then allocate the property and become the landlord to those residents.

The parish council have an obligation to make people aware that they must put their names on this register if they wish to be nominated for a property, and how to do so. This register can include those who have left the parish in the past, but would now like to return. When allocating properties on Exception sites, local connections to the area are the most important factor.

**How can we be sure that the properties will go to local people?**
This assurance is outlined in the S106 agreement; which is legally binding to the Housing Association and the Local Authority. People will have to qualify as being local to be nominated for a property. If no-one can be found, a lists from neighbouring parishes can be put forward as reserves.

**How will the homes remain for local people in the future?**
The Section 106 agreement also ensures that all future lettings/shared ownership sales must meet the same local connection criteria as when the homes were first built. Tenants will have the right to exchange their home with another social housing tenant, but only if the incoming tenant meets the local connection criteria.
What is Choice Based Lettings (CBL)?
Choice Based Lettings are different from the traditional way of allocating housing via the waiting list. CBL allows applicants for social housing (and tenants who want to transfer) to apply for vacancies which are advertised widely. Applicants can see the full range of available properties and can apply for any home to which they are matched based on need.

Priority is given to those with urgent needs, but where possible properties are allocated on the basis of who has been waiting the longest. Authorities provide feedback that helps applicants assess their chances of success in subsequent applications. However, CBL systems have to comply with the local connection criteria which have been agreed in the S106 agreement and therefore will only be allocated to local people.