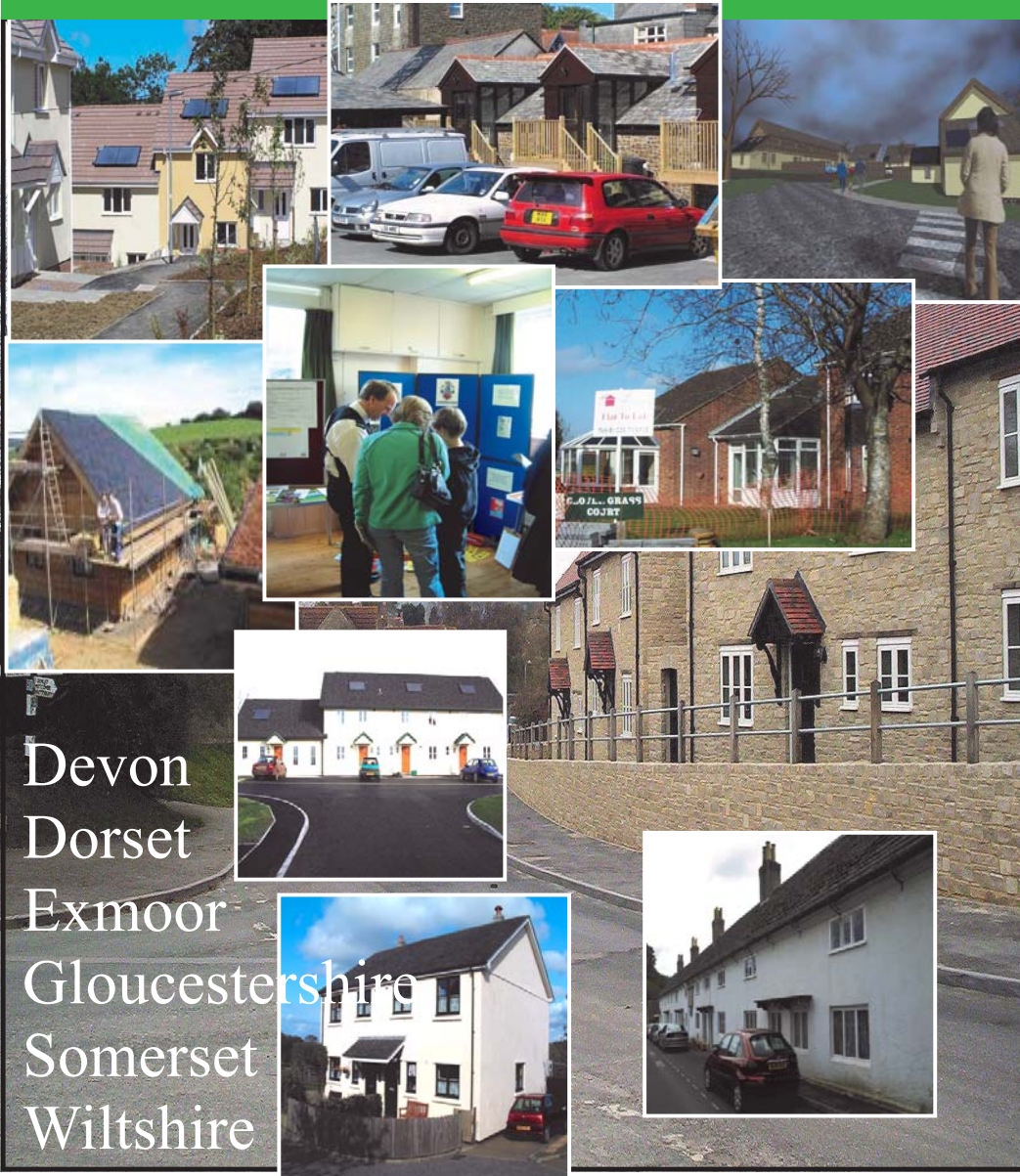


RURAL HOUSING PARTNERSHIPS IN THE SOUTH WEST OF ENGLAND



Devon
Dorset
Exmoor
Gloucestershire
Somerset
Wiltshire



Foreword

The pressure and demands on the rural housing market are well documented. Many people would like to live in a rural area; however, it can be an expensive option, even for those with jobs and reasonable incomes.

Rural areas are facing a continued loss of young people driven by a lack of affordable housing and limited opportunities or access to employment, training and entertainment.

Even in these difficult economic times, affordable housing remains a serious problem for rural communities. Despite decades of research, analysis and policy interventions, continued efforts will be needed to 'make it happen' at national, regional and local levels.

Dr. Stuart Burgess
Rural Advocate and Chairman of the Commission for Rural Communities

Rural Housing Partnerships—An Overview

Rural Housing partnerships were set up across the South West following the Housing Green Paper of 2000 in order to increase the number of affordable homes in the rural areas of the region.

A number of Rural Housing Enablers (RHE's) work across the South West for countywide partnerships. The partnerships fund the RHE's and also provide steering groups for their work.

The partnerships include the Local Authorities and the Registered Social Landlords working in the counties. Other partners include the Housing Corporation and the Government Office of the South West. A number of additional organisations are inevitably involved.

The partnerships and their officers have amassed a large and comprehensive knowledge of their area and the specific problems of delivery of rural affordable housing. All the RHE's in the South West apart from the one based in Exmoor are hosted by a Community Council. This is one way to ensure that the RHE's are perceived by rural communities as independent from the local authorities and the RSL's.

The role of a Rural Housing Enabler

- Providing advice to local communities on the process of securing affordable housing.
- Undertaking housing needs surveys, and running community consultation events
- Identifying potential development opportunities (buildings/sites), and appraising their suitability
- Liaising with Housing and Planning Authorities, Housing Associations and other developers to identify development options to meet identified housing needs.
- Progressing schemes and resolving blockages to progress.
- Increasing awareness of issues affecting rural housing and influencing future policy, locally, regionally, and nationally.

During the past two years the focus of the RHE has moved from assessing need and now focuses on delivery of houses. This is because it is clear that most RSL's and other potential deliverers of rural housing require additional resources at a local level to help deliver small housing schemes in isolated rural locations.

Therefore RHE's are taking an increasingly active role in the project management of the delivery of small rural schemes, particularly those on Exception sites where no open market housing is permitted.

This involves identifying sites, and assessing their suitability for housing and liaising with landowners, planners, housing strategy officers, the local community, to bring these sites forward.



Mere, Salisbury, Wiltshire

Supporting individual initiative with self-build low cost home ownership.

Exmoor National Park planning policies allow for anyone to provide affordable housing provided that occupants meet the local connection criteria. Four households in Cutcombe have chosen to have their own houses built. Two obtained land from their parents farm, the other two bought land at significantly below open market value from another landowner. The first two have built single storey homes to very high environmental standards, the second two will be more traditional two storey kit homes.



The Exmoor Rural Housing Project has provided support and guidance to landowners and purchasers on the planning process, and on land values. It has also assessed purchasers housing need and local connection. The RHP will promote this approach and support a network of self-builders

Towards the Code for Sustainable homes

Fifteen homes in Bratton Fleming, North Devon achieved code level 3. They were built using prefabricated timber frames, allowing speedy construction of the weather tight external shell of the building. This makes it easier to programme the work of the internal trades, who are able to work in a dry environment at any time of the year. These homes incorporate solar thermal panels which have a pump driven by a solar photovoltaic panel. This system requires no electronic controls. It will produce hot water even if there is a power-cut and should provide up to 70% of the hot water required over the year, and use large thermal stores to provide mains pressure hot water without the need for a pump



Balancing need in Hobbs Yard and Jubilee Court , Lynton.

Two schemes on adjoining sites were brought to an RSL by a local developer. One involved converting former storage buildings and an existing frontage house, into 5 rented homes. The other involved the conversion of a redundant chapel into 12 apartments, which included 3 shared ownership.

There was local pressure for both schemes to be low cost home ownership, as the Town Council wanted people to have the opportunity to get a foot onto the housing ladder. The RHP produced additional evidence to demonstrate that these home ownership options were not affordable for many local people, and negotiated over a period of time for most to be retained as social rented..



Subsequently the RHE checked applicants eligibility against local connection criteria. Negotiations have produced some flexibility over the lettings cascade.

Community Land Trusts (CLT's) are a mechanism that may increase the capacity of rural communities to promote and develop local affordable housing solutions. CLT's are locally based, democratically run, not-for-profit membership organisations that own land and property in trust for the benefit of a defined community. The CLT captures the value of land and employs innovative development finance and equity sharing solutions in order to address local housing need and encourage social enterprise. This model has attracted national government interest because of the opportunity it offers for local people to work out their own solutions to local problems.

CLT activity in the South West

The RHE's are currently supporting the following emerging CLT's through assessment of need, awareness raising within the community and promotion.

Devon

- High Bickington Community Property Trust
- Holsworthy Community Property Trust
- Roborough CLT
- Appledore CLT
- South Hams CLT Pilot Project
- Chudleigh Cluster of Parishes
- A project to establish an umbrella CLT organisation to support new CLT's in Devon it is funded by Devon County Council and works in partnership with Devon and Cornwall Housing Association.

Dorset

- Buckland Newton
- Worth Matravers

Gloucestershire

- Chedworth



Community Land Trusts offer the following benefits:

- No public subsidy - available for all communities
- No exposure to Right to Buy
- Better initial & ongoing affordability
- Less dependency & hanging around
- Less red tape: easier to innovate
- Community involved and empowered
- Reassurance to land owners low value will not become personal windfall in future
- Partnership on allocations policy
- helps everyone achieve objectives

Change of Use—Clover Grass Court, Wiltshire



Clover Grass Court was originally built to fulfil the need for sheltered accommodation in Bratton and Edington in Wiltshire.

However over time, people's needs changed and studio flats became unattractive making them difficult to let.

In 2004, the RHE carried out a local housing needs survey

The project was carried out in partnership with West Wiltshire District Council (WWDC). In order to gain local support for the scheme a great deal of time was spent in talks with the Parish Council and the planning officers. The RHE liaised with the Parish Council and the Housing Society to help them make decisions about the scheme.

Funded by a combination of Housing Corporation social housing grant of £600K and private finance raised by the West Wiltshire Housing Society the scheme cost a total of £1.2m as the site was already owned by the RSL.



The scheme benefits people who cannot afford to purchase homes in their local community owing to rising property prices. Clover Grass Court now enables local residents to remain close to family and friends which helps to strengthen the local community.



The Housing Society was determined to ensure that the new build houses are in keeping with the aesthetic appeal of the village. All the new houses have been built to Eco Homes "Very Good" standard, "Lifetime Homes" standard ensures that families will be able to remain in their home if they develop a disability.

Completion date: August 2007



Community Development Approach

Frogmore and Sherford Parish Council

Following agreement to conduct a Housing Needs Survey, the Chair, the Parish Council and the RHE, were very clear about engaging with the community in its widest sense in order to promote the survey and therefore encourage take-up and involve the community in understanding the issues facing the Parish in terms of affordability and choices.

The RHE and the Parish Councillors set about developing an appropriate approach for the community that would cover all aspects of concern in relation to the survey.

The plan was to drip feed information and also engage the community through public meetings in both village communities. Careful dissemination of information was initially started through the delivery of the survey and encouragement to complete it, and then through regular articles and reminders in the local press.



The Parish Council is also interested in considering different approaches to address the identified housing need. It is engaged in a pilot Community Land Trust project with South Hams District Council along with several other Parishes. It is keen to progress development on the identified land. Throughout this period and into the future the Parish remains keen to engage with the RHE and other interested parties to work on the highlighted issues and at the same time to keep on board the wider community.

The public meetings were run in two sessions, one in each community at differing times of day. This enabled 50 residents to engage with the issues of affordability in South Hams, planning issues within the Parish, and the housing need questionnaire. 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%. The meetings were run informally in a question and answer style format. This allowed an open discussion to cover all the issues.



This project shows the value of adopting a community based approach to assessing need. It has been effective because of close co-operation and commitment from the RHE, the Parish Council and the District Council.



Devon Rural Housing Partnership

Newland Almshouses, Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire



In 2007 the Gloucestershire RHE's became involved with helping the community of Newland in the Forest of Dean to secure their Almshouses for affordable housing for local people.

The Almshouses were built for the parish over 400 years ago and form an important part of the community. The Haberdashers Association decided several years ago that they were no longer viable to run and that they were to be sold on the open market with residents relocated to new Almshouses in Monmouth. Understandably, the community did not want to lose this important

source of affordable housing and to see the Almshouses re-developed as holiday cottages for wealthy weekenders as it was felt that the Almshouses do a good job in helping to maintain a balance of inhabitants, keeping the community mixed and vibrant.

In October 2007 the RHE's helped to organise a large community consultation event in the parish church to discuss the possibility of purchasing the Almshouses and running them as a type of Community Land Trust. It was felt by attendees that there are huge benefits to the idea of having the Almshouses as a community asset – both to Newland and the Forest of Dean District Council. The District Council was keen to see the Almshouses saved and kept as affordable housing in perpetuity. Due to land constraints in the Forest, development opportunities are few and far between and therefore keeping what is already available seemed to be one solution to the affordable housing problem.



The community, with the help of a local housing association, are now raising the funds to purchase the Almshouses and subsequently will fund-raise for the refurbishment. This is an example of where the RHE has acted as a co-ordinator and managed a project that may well have otherwise failed. It illustrates the diversity of the role and the various skills that are required.

Plaque on front of Almshouses

Nether Stowey: Somerset

In May 2003 the Rural Housing Enablers for Somerset completed their Housing Needs Report for the parish of Nether Stowey. The Parish is a picturesque settlement of just under 700 households which has particularly high property prices due to its location on the edge of the Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Parish Council felt that it was their duty to ensure that the village did not become a dormitory settlement with an ageing demographic and wanted to act to prevent the possible loss of the local school, pubs and shops that may have accompanied this development.



The RHE's analysed the report which revealed that 45 households were in need of affordable housing in Nether Stowey and that any future development should include a mix of shared/low cost home ownership and rented units. The RHE's then organised an 'affordable housing working group' consisting of several Parish Councillors, Local Authority Housing Enabling Officers and Falcon Housing Ltd, the registered

social landlord chosen by the Parish Council to work on the project.

Finding a suitable site is invariably the most difficult and time consuming part of any affordable rural housing project and this was certainly the case in Nether Stowey. Following a sequential site assessment many potential 'exception sites' were ruled out by planning officers. The reasons given for the rejection of these sites included difficulties with access, concerns over flooding and the need to preserve the character of a village with a large Area of High Archaeological Potential.



Following successful negotiations with the landowner of a site Falcon Housing started on site in 2007 with plans to develop 7 affordable homes for local people. The RHE's helped Falcon by organising a public consultation event which gave the local community the opportunity to comment on the scheme design and lay out. The development was designed to be extremely sustainable and environmentally friendly with timber frame homes incorporating ground source heat pumps and solar panels. Four of the homes were rented units with three being low cost home ownership. Falcon's low cost home ownership model differs from traditional shared ownership in that occupants do not have to pay rent on the percentage of the equity that they do not own. The 7 homes were completed and allocated to households which met with Sedgemoor District Council's local connection clause in March 2008. The project has been received with great enthusiasm by both Nether Stowey Parish Council and the wider community to the extent that a second phase of development is being planned for the near future.



Somerset Rural Housing Partnership



**Devon, Gloucestershire, Somerset
and Wiltshire**

- Number of housing needs surveys undertaken from April 2004 until March 2008 **261**

- Number of people found to be in housing need in surveys undertaken from April 2004 until March 2008

3385

Widcombe Devon

- Number of homes developed in rural communities with a population of less than 3000 from April 2006 until March 2008

485



- Number of homes allocated **Hawkchurch East Devon** Housing Corporation funding in the first round of funding in rural communities with a population of less than 3000 from April 2008

172

- Number of homes where planning applications have been made in rural communities with a population of less than 3000 from April 2008

314

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Cover photos (clockwise from the left)

[Cutcombe, West Somerset : Exmoor National Park](#)
[Bratton Fleming, North Devon](#)
[Lynton, North Devon: Exmoor National Park](#)
[Buckland Newton eco CLT, West Dorset: Dorset](#)
[Bratton, West Wiltshire: Wiltshire](#)
[Newland Almshouses, Forest of Dean: Gloucestershire](#)
[South Tawton, Dartmoor: Devon](#)
[Nether Stowey, Somerset](#)
[Community Consultation in Devon](#)

[Background Picture: Mere, Salisbury : Wiltshire](#)