

Rural Housing Project Steering Group Meeting  
Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2006

1. Attendance and apologies

**Attending**

Susan Ayre	Rural Housing Project – Exmoor, North Devon and West Somerset
Cllr. Mary Crowley	WSC member
Anjie Devine	WSC Housing Department
David Edwards	Hastoe
Cllr. John Edwards	ENPA and SCC member
Graham Mansbridge	North Devon Homes Ltd
Ruth McArthur	ENPA
Tony Murray	Magna West Somerset
Justin Roxburgh	Falcon Rural Housing
David Wyborn	ENPA
Rachel Webdell	NDDC
Cllr. Roger Webber	ENPA and WSC member

**Apologies**

Mike Bellamy	Somerset Highways
Jennifer Gould	Magna Housing Group
Trevor Ives	Housing Corporation SW
Ceri Victory	Housing Corporation SW

Discussion took place on highway department representation at steering group meetings. It was considered that it would be useful to invite the relevant area officer. It was suggested that once yearly attendance would provide reassurance that highways are assisting in the process of affordable housing provision.

**Action 1** – E-mail Mike Bellamy regarding appropriate highways attendance

2./3. Minutes of the Last Meeting and Matters Arising

RMc indicated that when advertising the RHE post a recruitment agency was not used. DE reminded the group that the Exeter office of the Housing Corporation have been appointed lead on rural policy and suggested that it may be appropriate for the relevant representative to attend the steering group meeting.

**Action 2** – SA to draft a letter inviting the HC representative to future steering group meetings. Contact details are available from Anne Harries at Hastoe.

JR stated that no précis on the ARHC report had been prepared (as per Action 4, 13<sup>th</sup> June minutes). As RMc had also prepared a similar document it was agreed that it would not be necessary for JR to take the matter further.

AD informed the group that the Policy Development Committee review of WSC Housing Strategy would be based around the findings of the ARHC report.

#### 4. Work Programme for the RHE

RMc informed the group that the new RHE should be starting on the 16<sup>th</sup> October. His name is Colin Savage and he has a good background in housing and community development and experience of utilising funding streams effectively. It was recommended that a meeting be organised soon after Colin starts to allow him to meet the steering group. A copy of the job description was circulated to the group.

Discussion took place on the funding available for RHE posts. Funding guaranteed until 2008. The ARHC recommends that funding be made available beyond 2008. RW suggested that it is important to ensure that the RHE post is value for money and is helping deliver housing, focusing on delivery rather than more surveys, in order to help secure future funding.

TM reminded the group of discussions on priorities for the post that had taken place in June. It was suggested that the focus of the project should be on what can be delivered and prepared in time for the next bidding round (2008/10).

13 schemes that should be concentrated on were discussed at the June meeting. It was suggested that the RHE's role should be out dealing with communities and housing associations and local authorities. JR emphasised that in the first year it should be important to work with parishes and bring forward sites, to get to the point where it is possible to bid confidently, as we cannot afford to miss out on the next bidding round. RW expressed concerns as to why there was only one bid, TM suggested that maybe the post was spread too thinly and the RHE was attending too many additional meetings/groups.

Discussion took place on Cutcombe and the lessons that can be learnt from it. DW reminded the group that there have been success stories such as Lynton with the Hobbs Yard development, and other sites coming through. This has resulted from co-operation of interested parties and the town council who have driven the process, and ensured progress through local knowledge and working with planners and developers. Where process of delivering affordable housing has met obstacles e.g. Brendon and Hobbs Yard the RHE would be looked upon to take the role of project manager. DE emphasised that where people want a project to move, they need a central figure to push the project forward and co-ordinate it, and this should be part of the RHE's role.

DE suggested that leading on housing provision should be a larger proportion of RHE's time than the current 30% that is currently stated in the job description. RMc explained that the job description was prepared at the beginning of the project and since then the

emphasis of the project has changed. JE requested an explanation of the bid timescale. JR explained that it would be necessary for the next bid round to either own, or have the land available for development, have planning permission and projects prepared. GM mentioned the Housing Corporation's inter year bid round allowing those that have a project ready to go can bid for funding. However in all cases it is important to ensure that delivery can be made to a strict deadline.

JE enquired as to whether there is flexibility and provision for housing associations to land bank. TM confirmed that the land banking option is available. JE suggested that this is something that needs to be pushed.

JR noted that there is land in Brendon that Falcon is planning to purchase for development and that their work in Exford is coming up against landowners. JE requested an update on the Exford situation from Falcon.

The group discussed the offer that Jo Cox had made to assist with the RHE's induction. It was agreed not to decide on this before Colin Savage was in post and to possibly look into it once Colin had started if it seemed appropriate. JR extended an invite to the new RHE and assistant to visit Falcon Rural Housing a part of the induction.

<b>Action 3</b> – SA to circulate available dates for the induction programme.
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Discussion on land values took place. On some sites where the groundwork has been done (i.e. outline planning permission for affordable dwellings has been granted) it is necessary to understand land values and important that the land is sold on for development at exception site values. DW suggested that the RHE can provide independent advice on land values possibly via a leaflet/advice on webpage. RW highlighted that the people that are in housing need are not aware of who can help. It was suggested that there needs to be a structure and a network of help, such as a group of organisations that can inform and advise those in housing need on financial aspects, and a list of solicitors and mortgage lenders. GM informed the group of the Home to Own website as a central location from which people can find information and advice on the process of obtaining an affordable home. He also briefly described a project that NDH Ltd was working on with some households to deliver some self build units in Newton Tracey. NDH Ltd is guiding the households through the process of planning and helping to construct the wooden frames of the units. It is important that communities are aware that this kind of help is available. RMc suggested that a leaflet could be prepared that provides information on people/organisations that can help, what price levels housing associations are paying for land – with examples and links on the webpage. RW suggested that a webpage would be useful to develop a network for prospective house builders and assist in the process of delivery. JR indicated that self finish through housing associations was also available.

JE proposed that an article in Park Life or a similar publication about the new RHE may be useful.

**Action 4** – RMc to prepare a press release about the new RHE starting and update on the project.

DW made some suggestions of what could be included in the press release

- Reflecting on what has been done
- What is being built at the moment
- Developments that the project has helped deliver where people are living.
- What direction the project is taking
- Promotion of removal of holiday occupancy conditions and barn conversions to provide local needs affordable dwellings.
- RW suggested that quotes from steering group members and photos of projects could be incorporated.

MC proposed that the perception of ‘social’ housing needs to be addressed. It was considered that homes need to be individualistic. RW brought the steering group’s attention to ENPA’s Design Guide (currently being developed) which should address the issue of appropriate design within the National Park. JR also indicated that Falcon Rural Housing’s use of timber clad Canadian style homes, and barn conversions at several sites in Somerset.

The list of 13 parishes that it was initially agreed that the project would focus on and those that would require the new RHE’s involvement were discussed

- Woolacombe - Ongoing NDH Ltd project, **RHE involvement required**
- West Down – “ “ “
- Horwood, Lower Lovacott and Newton Tracey – Site found (Council Field), **RHE involvement required.**
- Knowstone – Possibility of County Farms site in the pipeline, revisit those in housing need, **RHE involvement required.**
- Bishops Nympton – Mixed development, not considered priority for RHE
- Selworthy/Luccombe – Issue over condition of NT rented accommodation. Possible property review, HA investment in properties through 10/20 year leases. **RHE involvement required.**
- Porlock – Villes Lane costs involved in junction work, require county funding. **Priority project, RHE involvement required.**
- Exford – 3 possible sites, Falcon coming up against resistance. Site meeting with Falcon, ENPA, PC and RHE.
- Lynton – Other sites being suggested, **RHE to chase up.**
- Brendon – Progressing
- East Anstey – Planning application is in for Market Field site, not considered a priority.
- Combe Martin – **RHE involvement required**
- Brayford – Suitable site been found.
- Cutcombe – Debate. Important for RHE to consider history of the site and whole issue. **RHE involvement required.**

- Carhampton – Large development, WSC considering the use of Community Land Trust model.

From the list should be able to prioritise what sits could be ready in 6, 9, 12 months in preparation for the next Housing Corporation bid round. This suggests that there could be around 10 sites that may become suitable.

Those not on the list;

- Dulverton – Possibility of developing a SWW site.
- Parracombe – Site been identified.
- East and West Buckland – small need identified
- Simonsbath – Live/work units. Small need identified, though if negotiations in Exford are unsuccessful.

RMc suggested that it would be useful to;

- Draw up a clear list of priorities for the Rural Housing Enabler
- Organise an induction programme (including addressing any gaps in his knowledge).
- Prepare a press release.

RaW wanted to know the situation was with regard to addressing new surveys. NDDC have identified some land at Chittlehampton and wanted to assess the need within the parish. A reserve list of parishes was circulated to the group for their consideration. It was decided that the focus of the project will be on existing projects but that Chittlehampton could be addressed by the new RHE to gain knowledge of the survey process.

AD indicated that the RHE induction will be a good opportunity for him to meet members (ENPA, WSC and NDDC), and the relevant district councils officers can organise the days when this can happen.

RMc raised the issue of relocation allowance. It is not permitted for non-permanent staff and the RHE is a fixed term post. It was requested that an exception be made in this case and £1,500 be provided to Colin Savage. The steering group agreed to this.

5. AOB –

6. Date and Location of the Next Meeting

Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2006 (9.30am) Exmoor House, Committee Room.