

Rural Housing Project Steering Group Meeting
Tuesday 28th February 2006, Exmoor House

1. Attendance and Apologies

Attending:

Ruth McArthur (RMc) (Chair) – Exmoor National Park Authority
Jo Cox (JC) – RHE Exmoor, North Devon and West Somerset Rural Housing Project
Susan Ayre (SA) (Notes) – Exmoor, North Devon and West Somerset Rural Housing Project
Chris Blake (CB) – Government Office South West
Cllr. Roger Webber (RW) – West Somerset District Council and Exmoor National Park Authority
Heather Crockford (HC) – West Somerset District Council
Rachel Webdell (RaW) – North Devon District Council
Rufus Strong – Falcon Rural Housing
Graham Mansbridge (GM) – North Devon Homes Ltd
Trevor Ives – Housing Corporation
Tony Murray (TM) – Magna West Somerset
Jennifer Gould (JG) – Magna West Somerset
Sue Southwell (SS) – Rural Housing Enabler for Devon

Apologies:

Sarah Barney – Magna West Somerset
Gail Cleverdon – North Devon Homes Ltd
Mary Crowley - WSDC
Angie Devine – West Somerset District Council
Cllr. John Edwards – ENPA and SCC
Chris France – Exmoor National Park Authority
Justin Roxburgh – Falcon Rural Housing (Rufus Strong attended in his place)
Barbara Venn (Rachel Webdell attended in her place)

2. Minutes from the last meeting

The relevance of including initials on the minutes was discussed. It was decided to continue to include them as they provide background should anyone wish to follow up on any points discussed.

3. Matters Arising

Budget issues were discussed including the use of second homes council tax to help fund projects. It was stated that most posts funded through the LSP were secure. JC confirmed that the project for Exmoor North Devon and West Somerset is awaiting formal letters of approval regarding funding. CB made the group aware of an event

being held in Truro, Cornwall on the 27th of March regarding second homes tax re-distribution. Further details can be found on the Commission for Rural Communities website. (www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk).

4. Project Status

JC confirmed that most of the projects were progressing as anticipated at the moment.

North Molton – NDH Ltd are still considering North Molton.

East Anstey – Full planning application is being prepared.

Brayford – Being dealt with by Hastoe, highways issues are being discussed.

Dunster – 2 shared ownership dwellings. Starting on sight March 2006. Dunster Marsh discussed.

Exford – Several sites have been considered. There are highways issues, which have put stop to several sites.

There followed a discussion on the process of approving options if challenging refusals made by Highways, and the perceived inequality in delivery of the transport plan. TI highlighted the need to invite highways representatives to contribute to the debate.

It was agreed that Highways is a major issue in the process of providing affordable homes and will be considered further at the Affordable Rural Housing Day on Friday 3rd March.

Knowstone – Ongoing.

Dulverton – Ongoing.

Lynton and Lymouth – Magna have expressed interest in ‘the Cleeve’ site.

West Down and Woolacombe – The preferred site is located by the school. Positive written feedback has been received from North Devon planners.

Morthoe – There is the possibility of a site at Once Upon a Time being re-developed.

Brushford – Non-starter at the moment. TM asked whether Dulverton are happy for Brushford housing need to be absorbed into Dulverton and vice versa. There are settlement issues re: park boundaries.

Brendon – Falcon are considering possible sites. There is some difference between Falcon’s and the planners preferred sites and consequently a need to meet in the middle.

Parracombe – Private application was turned down.

Bratton Fleming – S.106 needs to be sorted.

Stogumber – Magna have a reserved bid in 2006/07 for seven units.

Carhampton – Unit 5, large development, should be online for 06/07 financial year.

Porlock – Highways issues over Villes Lane junction. Engineer has been instructed to do some cost work for Magna.

Old Cleeve – Need was not proved. There are two affordable dwellings planned for Washford and one in Old Cleeve as part of the nursing home re-development. Options regarding the nursing home affordable dwelling were discussed such as the possibility of an RSL buying the property to rent. The issue of housing policy and its

impacts on delivery of housing in small rural communities was highlighted. There has been correspondence between RHE and the parish council regarding affordable housing need within the parish.

Combe Martin – Ongoing.

Cutcombe – The issues facing the Cutcombe project were discussed, which included finance, communication and the concern that the right the correct process are being gone through in delivering the aims of the development. These issues need to be discussed with the relevant organisations and resolved. Additional applications to the cattle market site have since been submitted.

Simonsbath – RW updated the group on the situation. There was a meeting with the parish council and West Somerset District Council to consider live/work units.

Horwood – Possible sites have been considered and we are awaiting comments from North Devon planners. Process has been helped by a positive parish council approach.

Stogursey – Magna/Strongvox application just been submitted.

Bishops Nympton - RaW informed the group that there was a £40,000 commuted sum available for Bishops Nympton.

5. Newsletter

Newsletters were distributed among the group for their consideration. It was indicated that the Media Support Officer's help would hopefully be available for the next edition of the newsletter in order to give it a more professional look. The next edition will be prepared for autumn and is likely to have a focus on planning policies that affect the provision of affordable housing and include some photos to show the progress of the various projects.

6. Affordable Rural Housing Day

It was noted that there was a good response to this event, with a wide range of attendees that included Exmoor national park members, district councillors and parish council representatives. A range of representatives from the park authority, district councils and housing associations will be available to help facilitate the event. RW will offer feedback on the Rural Housing Commission Hearing at Skipton.

There followed some debate on issues arising from the hearing. This covered the possibility of disclosure of details of those in housing need, subsequent data protection issues and the need for an approach that makes sure people feel their needs are being represented effectively and that all parties are doing their best to address the affordable housing situation.

Discussion topics for the day were not finalised. Possibilities such as highways, design of housing and funding were considered.

Action Point 1 – Once discussion points for the Affordable Rural Housing Day have been finalised they will be e-mailed to all members of the Steering Group.
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JG highlighted some of the stumbling blocks facing deliverers of housing and the reliance on planners to help the delivery of affordable housing. It was acknowledged that there was also competition between rural areas and their regional urban centres (such as Taunton). In light of the Regional Spatial Strategy urban areas and their hinterlands are often favoured. TI suggested that it is necessary to take a different approach to provide affordable 'rural' housing. One of the key issues is getting land released by landowners for affordable housing; there are also financial considerations and the need to consider housing on a village by village basis.

7. Report Format

The draft report format will be circulated among the Steering Group and it was requested that any feedback be given to the project by Friday 10th March 2006. It was emphasized that the report is part of a larger process. The importance of having an easy to read summary page on which details regarding the parish and the recommendations made were included was emphasised.

8. Recruitment

An advertisement for a replacement for the current Rural Housing Enabler (JC) was placed in the 'Inside Housing' publication and three local papers on 3rd February 2006. There were six respondents, of which none were considered to have sufficiently met the necessary requirements for the post, and thus be suitable to interview. Therefore three options were considered;

- 1) Re-advertise the post.
- 2) Reconsider the salary – make it more competitive.
- 3) Possibility of RHE taking a career break and returning to the post in November 2006.

JC, SA and SS left the room whilst further debate regarding the Rural Housing Enabler post took place.

9. AOB

SS told the group about a Community Land Trust Briefing being held at the White Hart at Holsworthy 7.30pm to 9pm at the end of March

Chris France (Head of Planning and Community ENPA) will be leaving at the end of March. The recruitment process is currently underway.

TI indicated to the group that between now and the next Steering Group meeting the Housing Corporation bids will come out.

RW hoped for good outcomes from the Affordable Rural Housing Day on Friday and highlighted the importance of communication and promotion/publicity of the issues that will be discussed.

10. Date and Location of Next Meeting.

The dates of the next two meetings were agreed, SA will book the Committee Room.

- Tuesday 13th June 2006 (2pm – 4.30pm), Exmoor House Committee Room
- Tuesday 12th September 2006 (2pm – 4.30pm), Exmoor House Committee Room