



Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Why do we need affordable housing in our village?

Many people living on low or modest incomes in rural communities are finding it difficult to find a place of their own locally. Research has shown that around 45% of newly-forming households (aged between 16 and 35 years) in rural areas could not afford to set up home in the rural ward where they have been brought up.

This means that many young people and those with specific needs housing are moving away. This contributes towards the break down of social networks of support and impacts on local services such as schools, shops, pubs and public transport links because there are not enough people using them. Without affordable, low cost housing villages can no longer be the mixed communities they once were.

Q. Why do we need to have a Housing Needs Survey (HNS)?

A Housing Needs Survey is a questionnaire that is distributed to every household in the parish. The parish council is usually asked to arrange for the delivery of the HNS forms. This gives everyone an opportunity to state if someone in their household requires affordable housing. It identifies not only if there is a need but helps to indicate the number, size and tenure of the homes.

The Rural Housing Enabler is employed by the Rural Community Council of Essex to work independently with local communities and can therefore carry out the HNS and produce a report summarising the responses from an impartial standpoint.

The parish council would not see the forms since they contain sensitive information and are treated as confidential by the Rural Housing Enabler.

Q. What will it cost my Parish Council?

The parish council will not be charged for the Rural Housing Enabler's time. The only cost to the parish council is for photocopying of the Housing Needs Survey forms. The Rural Housing Enabler post is funded by contributions from a number of local authorities and housing associations.



Q. How can we be sure that the homes will be for local people?

Because the land has been granted planning permission under the exception site rules a legally binding document will be put in place called a section 106 agreement. This ensures that not only are the houses allocated to local people when they are first built but they continue to be allocated to local people in perpetuity. People interested in renting or part-ownership of the homes will be asked to show documented evidence of their living or working in the village for a period of time.



Frequently Asked Questions *continued*

Q. How is the housing association that will develop and manage the scheme selected?

Four housing associations have been selected to work in partnership with the Rural Housing Enabler in Essex. They have been chosen for their experience of this type of development and local knowledge. The parish council may want to select one of the four otherwise the Rural Housing Enabler will suggest one taking into consideration the geographical district and previous connections to the area.

Q. Why do we need to involve a housing association?

A housing association will have to be involved because they can bid to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) for funding to build the homes. They will then develop and manage the homes taking care of maintenance, rent collection etc. Housing associations are regulated by the Tenants Services Authority which ensures that they all work to a set of standards to provide good quality service to their tenants.

Q. How long will it take?

The process from initial contact between the parish council and local people occupying the newly built homes will take years. Affordable housing schemes have been developed in a couple of years but can take several years to come to fruition.

Each stage must be gone through including identifying the need, consulting with the local community, bidding for funding, finding a site, applying for planning permission and construction. Be prepared for things to take a while.

Q. Can the Parish Council have a say in who gets the homes?

The allocation of the homes is the responsibility of the housing association through the choice based lettings system or local authority nominations system. Everyone who wants to live in one of the houses will be invited to register an interest by joining the local authority housing needs register if they have not already done so. Potential residents will be prioritised according to their needs and the cascade of priority within the Section 106 agreement and houses allocated on that basis.

The parish council may be asked to verify that the people who are going to be successful do have a genuine connection or link to the village.

Q. Will this open the flood gates to further development?

The homes are developed under the exception site policy and do not change other planning policies. Any other developments will be subject to the usual procedures.

Q. How much will the rent be?

Rents are calculated using a formula set by the government and housing associations are bound by this. It takes into account property values and earnings in the area and also a bedroom factor so that other things being equal smaller properties have lower rents.