

RURAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is really meant by ‘Local Connection’?

In most cases, ‘local’ will include current residence in the parish, previous periods of residence within the parish, local connections and family ties with the parish, and those in employment in the parish. This is normally secured through a ‘Section 106 Agreement’. This is a legal agreement that is secured in the sale and planning permission of the land limiting the occupancy of the homes for local people in perpetuity. It is also important to remember that all applicants must also qualify for the District / Borough Council’s Housing Register i.e. have proof that they cannot access private property to buy or rent in that immediate area. A robust Housing Needs Survey will provide figures proving the need and therefore the correct number of affordable units can be built.

What happens when there are more households in need with a local connection than homes available?

The District / Borough Council and the Housing Association assess all applicants to the Housing Register in terms of their housing need. A cascade clause would be implemented so that those who meet the above criteria and have the most points would be given priority. The Parish Council verifies the local connection of any applicants.

What do you mean by “affordable”?

Research will be carried out into the local level of wages, local need, what mortgage level can be obtained and the price set having considered these things. Affordable housing is housing which is either provided through social rent or on a shared ownership basis through a Housing Association.

Why can’t the Parish Council decide who gets the new homes? They know local people better than the District Council.

The Parish Council will not know about all applicants on the Housing Register who may be eligible for a home in their village, and many applicants will not want to disclose personal circumstances to people they may know in their village. It is also important that Parish Councils do not risk being accused of favouritism or prejudice. The Parish Council has an important role, however, in initiating the Housing Needs Survey, and encouraging and assisting all those who may be in need to get onto the District Councils waiting list as well as verifying an applicant’s local connection.

What is the point of building new affordable homes for rent or shared ownership for local people, when the tenants will buy them at a discount and sell them onto incomers for profit?

All new housing on Rural Exception Sites is exempt from the Right to Acquire. The legal agreement in the sale and planning permission of the site states that these homes will be available for local people in perpetuity.

This is a pretty village and affordable rented housing would be an eyesore. Why should we have our village spoilt?

The Surrey Rural Housing Group comprises Housing Associations and architects committed to designing new homes sympathetically so that they blend in with the local character of the village. Close liaison with Planning Officers from an early stage also ensures good design. Try visiting one of their recent schemes in another village – you will probably be surprised to see the quality of the homes!

We don't want the countryside built all over!

Exception sites are intended to meet the local affordable housing need. They are by their very nature small schemes, often consisting of only 6-10 units, and have to be built on a site adjacent to existing development. These sites do not pave the way for mass development as this is completely against planning policies.

Our public transport is poor and there are no facilities for the young.

The houses are built to meet the local need so it is more than likely that the people who move into them already live in the community and are aware of the state of public transport and facilities. It is highly likely that they would have their own transport and are used to living in a rural environment. Affordable homes are not just for the young. They can enable older people to remain in the village where they have lived all their lives and keep families in villages when relationships fall apart.

What about traffic congestion?

Affordable housing built on an exception site is to meet the local housing need. More often than not the houses are lived in by people who were already living in the parish, often in overcrowded houses. Therefore, there is little increase in traffic as most people already lived in the village with their vehicles.

This will reduce the value of my home!

There is no real evidence that affordable housing reduces the value of property around it. However, a small affordable development could actually bring added benefits to your community. It could be that a local family are able to remain in the area and help keep numbers up in the village school or spend money in the village shop.

What if it opens the floodgates to private development?

The legal agreement on the sale of the land restricts any development of private homes on the area, it is for 100% affordable homes only.