

Rural Housing Advisory Group

Minutes of the RHAG Meeting held on 21 May 2014 in Evesham, Worcestershire.

Members Present	
Professor Peter Roberts	Independent Chair
Arlene Kersley	Community Council Berkshire
Danielle Troop	Country Land and Business Association
Fiona Forgham	Defra
Matthew Dodd	HCA
Neil Sinden	CPRE
Nigel Stone	Association of National Parks
Andrew Dack	DCLG (by telephone)
Sue Chalkley	Hastoe Housing
Jake Berriman	Shropshire Housing
Jim Harker	LGA
Nick Chase	ACRE

Apologies	
Keith House	HCA Board
Caryn Innes	4 Homes
Pippa Read	NHF
Colin Molton	HCA
Caroline Green	LGA
Marie Hodgson	HCA

In attendance	
Martin Collett	English Rural Housing Association
Amy Brennan	HCA
Tracy Payton	HCA
Sandhya Ward	HCA
Ann Seipp	HCA

Item	Discussion	Action
1. Welcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peter Roberts (PR) opened the meeting. Introductions were made and apologies were given. 	
2. Minutes of the previous meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2014 were agreed as an accurate record with a correction to who was responsible for an action on the Future of Farming topic. It was also noted under the Monitoring and Guidance item that the statistic provided about one Registered Provider's (RPs) conversions' arrears did not exclusively relate to rural housing. 	
3. Matters arising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John Gummer has agreed to attend an RHAG meeting and asked PR to contact him about it after the summer recess. 	PR

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members agreed that the new Planning Practice Guidance published on 6 March was a useful resource and would assist in the delivery of more housing. Arlene Kersley (AK) commented that RPs were being offered a small number of units here and there which were not viable for them, but that local authorities should be made aware as they may have an interest in them. The Lyons Commission: PR reported that he had spoken with Sir Michael Lyons and reiterated RHAG's view that it was important the review takes rural housing into account. The Future of Farming: Danielle Troop (DT) had sent CLA's response to the DCLG consultation on Local Lettings to Cherida Warner (CW) for circulation to the rest of the group. 	CW
4. Representation on DCLG Housing Sounding Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The group felt that it would be beneficial for someone to sit on the DCLG Housing Sounding Board to highlight the issues around rural housing, and in particular work to ensure there was an awareness of the people in housing need in rural areas. It was noted that housing supply would be a key issue, but not the only one and that the agenda is general and topical. It was decided that Sue Chalkley (SC) and Jake Berriman (JB) would agree between themselves about who would go forward to sit on the board. They may agree to take it in turns. DT who also expressed an interest in taking a seat to represent her members' views would contact Andrew Dack separately. 	SC JB AD DT
5. Monitoring and Challenging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Matt Dodd (MD) reported that the national statistics for the end of year house-building figures for 2013 – 2014 were not collated yet. These will be published by the National Statistics Office in June and MD would circulate these to members when they are ready. Bids for the HCA's new Affordable Housing Programme 2015 – 18 had been received and were currently being appraised. MD explained that the difference with this programme is that the HCA would initially be allocating up to 75% of the funding pot and retaining 25% for continuous market engagement. The group also noted that this programme would employ like with like comparisons (e.g. comparing rural schemes with rural schemes) when it comes 	MD

	<p>to assessing value for money, quality etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announcements about allocations would be made by the minister before summer recess. • HCA colleagues responded to queries about what support RPs are offered, stating that contract managers engage with them at a regional level. • The group discussed what support the community-led projects receive. It was noted that there are some local and umbrella bodies in existence, that some LEPs provide money and that there are community-led champions at the HCA who can signpost and support community-led groups. • The group noted the HCA offers a revenue support scheme which provides funding for forming, planning and Community Right to Build. The South West region approved 15 schemes and there are more in the pipeline. The group noted that given that the end of the current programme was approaching it was unlikely that any more would be funded after the summer. • The group discussed the Builders Finance Fund which they noted was a recoverable investment fund available to help developers unlock projects comprising of 15 to 250 units. It would run for two years and is not open only to rural developments. 	
6. Charity Bank Lenders and Mortgages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The HCA's Rural Champions had a presentation from Charity Bank about what the organisation does and the funding it offers, including for rural and non-rural housing. Matt Dodd agreed to share the presentation. • The group discussed their concerns that there were only two main national lenders who provided mortgages for shared ownership homes, and how it was local building societies that were propping up the scheme. • The group agreed that further dissemination of information about the benefits and risks of the shared ownership scheme may encourage small/medium lenders to grant mortgages. • SC and JB agreed to work on an information sheet. It was felt that it needs to be cross-sector to be also used with local authorities. 	MD SC JB
7. Information Event 21st October 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group discussed options for the upcoming information event on Planning Guidance. • Nick Chase stated that ACRE could lead on the event with staff resource and organisation provided by the HCA. MD and NC to liaise on this. 	NC MD

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jim Harker to contact Local Authorities to seek offers for suitable venues. 	JH
8. Local Lettings Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group discussed the findings of papers about Local Authority Allocations Schemes by English Rural Housing Association and ACRE. • The group discussed their concerns about how lower need category applicants are no longer eligible to apply for local affordable homes. • It was also noted that some local authorities do not have a local lettings policy in place. • DT explained that case law states where a statutory allocations policy is in place, it is acceptable that local authorities have local letting schemes, as long as other groups don't suffer as a result. She understands that some local authorities are reluctant to have local lettings policies. • It was felt that RHAG members should make representation to Frances Walker of DCLG about this, and that it was also an issue for LGA to discuss with its members. • The group considered the survey of The Rural Housing Alliance members which suggested that people in the lower bands of housing need were not being allocated homes by local authorities. It was felt that in some cases this was happening as a result of decision-making by Housing Officers. • There were concerns that this would have a knock-on effect for the success of schemes if the news began to spread in a community that local people would be unlikely to be eligible as the lower band of housing need had been removed. • Examples of where "rural-proofing" has worked, and where local lettings did not work were given. • It was stated that there is flexibility within legislation for local authorities to take a local lettings approach. • Good practice by local authorities is mentioned in ACRE's paper and NC stated that they will be doing more detailed work on what has worked well, and what has been less successful. • It was suggested that some RPs are reluctant to apply for HCA funding because it means that they would be obliged to use the local authority housing lists. • It was noted that the Rural Housing Alliance will be coordinating activity individually and collectively. • It was suggested that this topic was covered at the group's information event in October. 	
9. Notice Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sue Chalkley notified the group that Richard Best (RB) has been chairing a review into the four commissions to see what has worked well. RB will be writing to PR to meet with the group. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group discussed the implications of the proposal for developments of fewer than 10 houses to be exempt from Section 106. The group noted that 80% of Shropshire's affordable housing is schemes of less than five houses. Shropshire is noted for its high delivery of new homes. The group also noted that in national parks smaller settlements were more likely to be approved. • DT stated that the CLA is in touch with Shelter and the National Housing Federation and was waiting for clarification on open market rent for historic rural exception sites. DT will provide update on that for the next meeting. 	DT
10. Date of next meeting	Dates of Next Meetings 1 October 2014 – RHAG meeting 21 October 2014 – Information event	