

Rural Housing Advisory Group

7th October 2010

Board Room, Maple House

Chair: Candy Atherton (CA)

Homes and Communities Agency

Members present:

Tim Adey (TA)	Defra
Sylvia Brown OBE (SB)	Action for Communities in Rural England
Sue Chalkley FCIH (SC)	Hastoe Group
Fenella Collins (FC)	Country Land and Business Association
Catherine Grannum (CG)	Tenants Services Authority
Tim Adey (TA)	Defra
Mona Johansson (MJ)	Rural Housing Enabler Surrey
Liz Sealey (LS)	Department for Communities and Local Government
Colin Molton (CM)	Homes and Communities Agency
Graham Russell (GR)	Commission for Rural Communities
Liz Sealey (LS)	Department for Communities and Local Government
Neil Sinden (NS)	Campaign for the Protection of Rural England
Cameron Watt (CW)	National Housing Federation

In attendance from the Homes and Communities Agency: Abdul Ravat (AR), Anthony Brand (AB), Baggi Matu (BM), John Cowdell (JC), Matthew Dodd (MD), Paul Abey (PA), Simon West (SW), Susan Fallon (SF), Tim Willcocks (TW).

Apologies:

Arlene Kersley (AK)	Community Council of Berkshire
Helen Kelly (HK)	Department for Communities and Local Government
James Hulme (JH)	The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment
Nigel Stone (NSt)	Association of National Park Authorities
Stephen Hall (SH)	Defra

Item	Discussion	Action
1. Notes and issues arising from the last meeting	MD reported that the spatial intelligence maps discussed in the last RHAG meeting are now available electronically. They are available by emailing the HCA via the rural housing website at www.ruralaffordablehousing.org.uk . The aim is to eventually have a tool for Local Authorities (LAs) to use, such as a website, containing these maps.	
2. Community Right to Build	TW provided a brief update on Community Right to Build (CRtB). However, until the Localism bill details are finalised it is very hard to discuss CRtB. The Group agreed to wait for this discussion once DCLG can reveal more details. CW asked about seed corn funding for community groups, LS replied that DCLG will not be able to announce anything on funding until after the spending review. SB questioned the role of Parish Councils within CRtB and asked whether they	

	<p>will be able to act as a community group. LS said that there is nothing to preclude a parish councillor taking part in a CRTB grouping. The CRTB grouping may not just be based on the parish council though - it will have to form itself on the lines to be set out in forthcoming legislation. TW advised that there had been mixed feedback with regards to this, and opinion was split. Further questions were raised, such as whether a Parish Council would have to become a constituted group to be recognised as a CRtB, and who would get priority if a community group and Parish Council supported different schemes. The Chair requested that these concerns were taken back to DCLG.</p>	LS
3. Update on the HCA Community Led Development Working Group	<p>CM provided an update on this HCA Task and Finish Group. It was set up to bring together, in conjunction with partners, the HCA's work on community-led development. The group also incorporates a stakeholder forum. The group has been modelled on RHAG and has an action plan. The Group is putting together a body of work that can be replicated by community groups. SB raised the problems of replicating work where each community development is different and each group struggles to compile information on value for money. CW asked how the Group and RHAG's work could be joined up given the direction of government policy. The Chair agreed and stated this is planned but needs to wait on the Spending Review and Localism Bill. It was requested that the Group's Action Plan be distributed to RHAG members.</p>	SF
4. Rural Coalition Report	<p>SB reported that The Rural Challenge was launched on 16th August 2010 with 38 recommendations, some of which have been made before in previous reports, but are worth repeating. http://ruralcommunities.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/RuralCoalitionWEB_MH.pdf The report, whilst addressing policy makers, begins to address the RHAG Business Plan task 4a (Securing the support of rural communities for affordable housing).</p>	
5. Update from the Rural Alliance	<p>SC provided a written report from the Rural Alliance. Including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Alliance suggests a directory is compiled by county boundaries clearly showing specialist rural associations that operate in the area. • A brochure has been put together which is a simplified guide to producing affordable housing. This has proved very popular and they have been overwhelmed with requests for this brochure from landowners and Parish Councils. • SC also advised that the Hastoe Passiv Haus is now online at www.wimbishpassivhaus.com, Hastoe have set up a blog for people to share good practice and lessons learned. • SC reported that the Alliance has agreed to launch a Rural Pledge that will offer assurance to communities about the way the rural associations will work with them to build affordable housing. FC reported that some landowners have been upset to find that land they have given as affordable housing has ended up on the open market. She believes that something needs to be written into contracts or planning agreements to prevent this from happening or to allow landowners to claw back profit made on the land at a later stage. • CW stated that NHF members support cross subsidy from Open Market sale on rural exception sites. 	

<p>6. National Affordable Housing Programme (NAHP) and budget Update</p>	<p>THE FIGURES DISTRIBUTED ARE NOT OFFICIAL STATISTICS AND ARE FOR ILLUSTRATION PURPOSES ONLY.</p> <p>Forecast completion and Starts on Site figures were distributed to the Group. MD reported the HCA is currently on target to exceed the target 8,300 completions in settlements of less than 3,000 population over 2008-10. MD explained that Start on Sites are slowing as the programme comes to an end and funds cannot be committed. CA asked whether slippages have occurred in particular parts of the country; MD said he would check and report back. CW stated that HCA data collection on NAHP outputs in rural areas is valued, and hoped that it would continue to do so in 2011-15, whether there is a target set or not. SC informed the Group that 17 rural housing providers had submitted a call for a rural target to the CSR.</p>	<p>Matt Dodd</p>
<p>7. HCA South East Rural Update</p>	<p>Paul Abey, Head of Strategy in the South East provided an update on rural delivery in the area. He covered issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rail links and motorways to London – improved access to London has widened the commuter zone and affected the chances for local people to buy homes in rural areas of the South East. • Older and vulnerable people in rural areas, which has been identified as a priority in the South East. • <3000 settlements – trying to overcome barriers to providing rural housing. • Looking at public land initiatives – lack of provision has been identified as one of the main issues causing setbacks. • Looking at other sources of energy, i.e. solar panels, and how they can be applied to rural areas. <p>CW raised questions on the Local Investment Plan (LIP) process and how it fits with local economic partnerships (LEPs). CM replied that in the South West of England all Local Authorities (LA) were asked if they wanted to continue with the LIP process and 100% requested to do so. HCAs business planning is now going through the process of working up from what is coming out of the LIPs. He went on to say that LEPs are a long way off from delivery; if they do gain momentum in the future that may not incorporate housing and place making as LIPs do; he also stated that the geographical lines LIPs and LEPs are drawn on can be tested and realigned in the future if there is a need. CM also acknowledged that the process of the LIPs had been a little 'clunky', but that the product is very good, (especially in the light of the sweeping away of regional structures and the Regional Spatial Strategies). LAs seem to want to complete LIPs and work on the next iteration. PA informed the Group that there are 14 LIPs in the South East and currently the team is collating information from the LIPs to assess the priority given to rural housing across the piece.</p> <p>GR asked PA what is the biggest challenge in the South East for rural delivery. PA replied that it was the supply of land (the South East being an expensive area). He went on to say that landowners who are in a position to provide exception sites are holding onto land to maximize the value. FC suggested the use of long leaseholds to encourage landowners to release their land for development. The next problem they experience in the South East is planning and the strength of the NIMBY agenda. The South East has a well educated, affluent cadre of objectors; they suffer from a lot of Village Green applications. PA explained that shared ownership does help values, but there are more</p>	

	<p>disputes in the South East than any other part of the country. SB raised Community Led planning and the HCA funded research carried out by the University of Reading. PA said that his team is working with Professor Parker of Reading University to use the research proactively. PA raised the concern that local democracy can work both ways and more people believe they can block development.</p>	
8. Development of Rural Programmes	<p>MD briefly updated the Group on the progress of developing rural programmes within the NAHP. It emphasised that rural programmes would sit inside the LIP process and not separate to it. Currently this work is still being taken forward internally within the HCA. It was agreed that MD would present a paper on rural programmes within the NAHP at the next meeting.</p>	Matt Dodd
9. Update on Business Plan work streams progress	<p>SF has highlighted new entries in the business plan, as it was recently added-to. Please refer to the RHAG Business Plan for details on task aims and plans.</p> <p><u>Task 1b:</u> CW reported that the National Housing Federation (NHF) has commissioned a piece of work which looks to assist LAs to better understand and evaluate their rural housing needs. So far, approximately 30 LAs have been surveyed, of which approximately half had completed SHMAs, half had rural-proofed and only 11 had produced a figure for rural housing need. A rural housing checklist was produced earlier in the year based on this research, but is already outdated in many ways. New government has placed an emphasis on individual communities identifying their own housing needs. However, this could lead to a lot of data and information being lost. DCLG are currently being lobbied to allow research, such as Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs), to continue – it is important that evidence is continually acquired, for use in advising and assisting LAs accordingly. The NHF has commissioned Tetlow King to do a further piece of work in this area. CW will provide a more detailed briefing at the next RHAG meetings.</p> <p><u>Task 2a:</u> LS reported that the Minister has not taken a final decision on this work to incentivise landowners; it is linked to CRtB and needs to await process on this policy. She encouraged people to write to DCLG with their views. FC pointed out that on CRtB it must be remembered that it is not the only way affordable housing is going to be delivered in rural areas.</p> <p><u>Task 4b:</u> NS asked about skills and capacity and also rural-proofing. MD reported that there will be a member training event with the Local Government Group, but it is on hold until after the details of the localism bill are known. The funding is in place to hold one training session in each area (excluding London). RHAG representatives were sought and SB, FC and NS volunteered.</p> <p>CM advised that the LIP process needs rural-proofing; the Rural Champions have been looking at this. The next major task is to rural-proof any mechanisms that come out of the spending review, and this should be included on the next RHAG agenda.</p> <p>SB asked whether there was, or would be, anything to define what is a good planning policy and how specific policies have helped/hindered.</p>	<p>CW</p> <p>SF</p>

	<p><u>Task 4c:</u> The Chair advised that the winner of the Rural Housing award at the recent HCA Awards 2010 was Green Lane, Holy Island, due to the passion and commitment invested into the project.</p> <p>The group was reminded again about the Rural Affordable Housing website (www.ruralaffordablehousing.org.uk) and the many examples of good practice it contains. MD asked whether people could also try to engage with the forum on the website, as this remains largely unused but could be an excellent way for people to share good/bad experiences, difficulties they have endured/overcome and good practices and solutions that have been discovered as a result. CA asked whether other organisations could link to the Rural Affordable Housing Website from their own websites. SF is also looking to regularly update the site and would welcome any suggestions from members.</p> <p>The Chair suggested to the group that RHAG hold a spring/summer event in 2011, to help promote the fact that RHAG and HCA are separate and to avoid becoming too internalised. The Chair also believes that a conference would be a good way of engaging people; it is important that, as the HCA evolves, the rural element evolves with it. The group agreed that the event was a good idea provided it is used constructively, links people together and builds on the good work undertaken with the Rural Affordable Housing Project. The Chair suggested that it might be a good idea to invite the Housing Minister to the end of the event, rather than the start, so he can hear conclusions and ideas rather than problems and issues.</p>	ALL
10. Chair and Director's report to HCA Board	The Chair stated that a report is currently being drafted for submission to the HCA board, outlining RHAGs plans and achievements, and reiterating the importance of rural housing and of RHAGs role in this. The group was asked to email any input to this report to either MD or CM by Wednesday 13 th October.	
11. Protected Areas	TW met with DCLG to discuss issues re. protected areas and retention of stock. A major problem is that in a number of areas provides have ceased developing, as they feel the DPA restrictions too onerous. The parallel concern is that DPAs now cover much wider areas than before, and many are in areas of suburban growth, strategic development or new towns. This is contrary to the policy aim of retention of stock in hard to protect areas. HCA are working with CLG to find a solution which may allow LAs to request that the HCA flex its grant conditions if a site is in an area where the LA feels that retention is not an issue. This will need to be discussed with LAs and also with rural interest groups – with this in mind TW would welcome any comments on this. A more detailed proposal for this issue is likely to come back in the next meeting in January.	
12. Other Business	The NHF has set up a new CLT network; the contact is Catherine Harrington.	
13. Next Meeting	3 February 2011 12.00 – 16.30 lunch provided. HCA, Maple House, London.	