

## Rural Housing Advisory group

9 December 2009

Maple House, London

**Chair:** Candy Atherton (CA) Homes and Communities Agency

### Members present:

Sylvia Brown OBE (SB)	Action for Communities in Rural England
Sue Chalkley FCIH (SC)	Hastoe Group
Fenella Collins (FC)	Country Land and Business Association
Jim Dixon (JD)	Association of National Parks Authorities
Helen George (HG)	Improvement and Development Agency
Stephen Hall (SH)	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Helen Kelly (HK)	Department for Communities and Local Government
Arlene Kersley (AK)	Community Council of Berkshire
Colin Molton (CM)	Homes and Communities Agency
Catherine Grannum (RM)	Tenants Services Authority
Stephen Parsons (SP)	Regional Rural Affairs Forum Chairs
Mike Haines (MH)	Local Government Association
Graham Russell (GR)	Commission for Rural Communities
Neil Sinden (NS)	Campaign for the Protection of Rural England
Cameron Watt (CW)	National Housing Federation
Debby Wheatley (DW)	Chartered Institute of Housing

**In attendance from the Homes and Communities Agency:** Paul Abey (PA), Dan Berlin (DB), Trevor Beattie (TB), Matthew Dodd (MD), Susan Fallon (SF), Dinah Roake (DR).

### Apologies:

James Hulme	The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment
Gary Porter	Local Government Association

Item	Discussion	Action
Welcome and apologies	Helen George, Housing Advisor at IDEA was welcomed to the Group. The Chair expressed her thanks to Ms George's predecessor, Richard Greening.	
1. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising	The minutes were accepted. MD noted that the HCA is on target to initiate two rural programmes by March 2011. AK stated that CLG had provided legal training on the new protected areas legislation and thanked them for this. The HCA circulated guidance on Protected Areas.	

2. Feedback from Ministerial meeting	<p>On 13 October Candy Atherton, Fenella Collins, Colin Molton and Matthew Dodd met with the Housing Minister, John Healey MP.</p> <p>The Minister endorsed the RHAG's business plan. He stated that rural was high on his agenda and wanted to discuss Village Greens and with Defra find an acceptable solution. He was interested in the HCA's programme approach to rural delivery; interested in mixed used schemes; and was keen to visit any schemes, particularly those that showed a high environmental standard whilst adhering to the village vernacular.</p>	
3. Feedback from the HCA Board meeting and HCA's corporate planning	<p>The HCA Board signed off the RHAG business plan and were interested in the report on the last 12 months of RHAG. The Board discussed the 'independent' nature of RHAG.</p> <p>Trevor Beattie reported on the process of corporate planning in the HCA. The plan is being built 'bottom up' with the regional business plans and priorities creating the corporate plan. He explained that regional teams have been instructed to ensure that rural priorities are included in the regional business plans. RHAG will have a key role to play in 'rural - proofing' the revised draft corporate plan.</p> <p>The Chair requested that the HCA corporate team focus their efforts working with those regional teams that do not yet have rural issues as an intrinsic part of their business plans.</p> <p>In response to SB's question as to whether the plan was focused on pure housing or mixed use approach, TB informed the group about the Big Picture staff consultation exercise which has informed the planning process. HCA staff overwhelmingly wanted the Agency to focus on communities and not just housing. CM further emphasised that the central plank of the Single Conversation is communities. It is important to remember that this is in the context of the HCA's current programmes which are based around affordable housing; it is hoped that in future there will be further flexibility around this.</p>	Colin Molton
4. National Affordable Housing Programme Update	<p>THE FIGURES DISTRIBUTED ARE NOT OFFICIAL STATISTICS AND ARE FOR ILLUSTRATION PURPOSES ONLY.</p> <p>Issues raised were:</p> <p><u>Regional variations:</u> JD pointed out that this sort of variation can be a result of Local Authority performance. The HCA in the South West has broken its figures down by Single Conversation area. CM suggested Regional Champions across the country could look at this.</p> <p><u>Grant per rental home and grant per person in rural and urban areas:</u> a comparison showed no statistically significant difference between settlement size.</p> <p><u>Grant per LCHO home in rural and urban areas:</u> a comparison showed a difference and would be investigated.</p> <p><u>Rejected bids:</u> these figures were presented as requested with the caveat that bids are often rejected due to cost; either too low to make a project deliverable; or too high in relation to other deliverable bids. There was also very little data cleansing of bids that have been rejected.</p> <p>SC stated that the Rural Alliance are bench-marking costs and grant in rural areas and would be pleased to hear from people.</p> <p>If organisations have specific questions on grant rates they can ask the HCA directly via Matt Dodd.</p>	<p>Matt Dodd</p> <p>Matt Dodd</p>

<p>5. Community Land Trusts</p>	<p>Dinah Roake presented the HCA's work on CLTs. Discussions were around:</p> <p><u>Costs</u>: CLTs are very expensive. They are also currently resource intensive for organisations and the HCA. An example given was the Holy Island CLT where for 4 units one person in the region (which has a total of roughly 40 staff) worked nearly full time on the CLT. DW voiced the concern of RSLs that CLTs are too costly. AK stated that RHE's also find the enabling costs are prohibitively high.</p> <p><u>HCA</u>: NS asked if the HCA Board wants to have a clear strategy, do they want to put themselves in a leadership position. The Group felt that the CLT discussion is very much a local one, at parish level. CM stated that where Local Authorities specify CLTs as a priority the HCA will work with them to deliver, but essentially HCA's role would be to help deliver a "toolkit" to avoid CLTs having to continually reinvent the wheel, and for delivery to be addressed at the local level.</p> <p><u>HCA grant</u>: the issue of the grant agreement and other paperwork involved with grant was raised. There is a perceived need to limit the amount of paperwork involved for CLTs, but there are legal requirements and it is proving very difficult to make this a reality.</p> <p><u>CLTs as part of wider rural needs</u>: SB was joined by others in calling for communities to see CLTs as a means not just to deliver housing but to look at the wider needs of their communities sustainability, including delivering more mixed use schemes. This may also attract a wider portfolio of funders.</p>	
<p>6. Business Plan</p>	<p>Milestones and timescales are now being fixed in the plan. A template will be issued in the New Year to be completed monthly by task leads.</p> <p>The HCA Academy has agreed to host a rural award within its wider award scheme. The rural award will have an RHAG selection panel and members would be consulted on criteria for the award.</p>	<p>Susan Fallon Matt Dodd</p>
<p>7. Rural Affordable Housing Project</p>	<p>DB updated the Group of the Project's progress. He presented the Project's plans for a knowledge hub to capitalise on the enthusiasm the Project has received. The HCA has agreed to provide the administration resource for the knowledge hub (web based) and the meeting agreed that RHAG members would rotate the responsibility for moderation decisions. Members asked that the website had an independent name, links with stakeholders, and that RHAG had a preview of the site.</p> <p>CW expressed his thanks to both Dan Berlin and Sophie Atkinson. The Project and its associated events had been very well received by the NHF members.</p>	
<p>8. Notice board</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Rural Coalition: a report would be produced post election and drafts would be sent to interested members when available.</li> <li>2. DCLG consultation on incentivising private landowners is open until 18 February 2010. It is hoped that guidance resulting from this consultation would be published before the election.</li> <li>3. The Group was informed that there had been parliamentary questions tabled on the RHAG.</li> <li>4. CW presented a paper on problems around CSH requirements for surface water run-off in Cumbrian rural developments. He requested the HCA to join with the NHF to lobby CLG on this issue. TB stated that the Department is planning a consultation of the Code soon (Clive Clowes of the HCA is</li> </ol>	

	<p>currently assembling information for the consultation which would be a full 12 week consultation in the New Year). CW asked if there would be grant rate flexibility to deal with the situation in Cumbria.</p> <p>5. FC updated the group on the Scottish Governments Affordable Homes for rent scheme; members requiring further information should contact FC directly.</p> <p>6. Green Standards Consultation was raised and the Chair requested that the issue be raised on the agenda of another RHAG meeting and that organisations responded individually to the consultation.</p> <p>7. DR raised the Rural Master planning fund from CLG. The HCA will circulate available information.</p>	<p>Matt Dodd</p>
<p>9. Next Meeting</p>	<p>12 March 2010 Maple House, Tottenham Court Road, London</p>	