

Save our villages

A short guide for rural authorities

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Introduction

Since the National Housing Federation launched the *Save our villages* campaign in mid 2009, more than 20 of the most rural local authorities have committed to our three step rural housing plan.

Over 90 MPs from all parties support our call for every village to be covered by an action plan for affordable homes – as well as parish, district and borough councillors.

Many local authorities have asked for more information about the campaign and its aims. This booklet addresses some of those queries, as well as sharing some of the more innovative ways local authorities are meeting the asks of the campaign.

In order to properly address the rural housing shortage, we must begin by fully understanding the need. So we are asking all rural housing authorities to make a pledge to assess need in all rural wards every three years, and to follow this up with an action plan to show how that need will be met.

Of course, every area is different. That is why we do not prescribe exactly how the information should be collected or how the plan should be presented. But the end result should be that local people can get an accurate picture of how much housing is needed, where, and what their local authority intends to do about it. We believe making this information easily available is essential if people are to take part in the local debate and plan for their community's future.

If your local authority wants to back our campaign and commit to the three step plan – outlined in more detail on page four – then please do let us know. You can find contact details at the back of this publication or simply add your local authority to the Federation's [online supporter map](#).



David Orr
Chief executive
National Housing Federation

The *Save our villages* campaign

In rural areas, the average price of a home is around £40,000 more than in cities and towns, despite lower wages for those working in the countryside.

Many lower earners and young people are priced out of the countryside. The Federation is concerned that rural England is becoming the preserve of the well-off and the increasingly isolated elderly.

We want England's villages and market towns to be mixed, working communities supporting a range of local businesses and services, in line with the recommendations of Matthew Taylor MP in his *Living Working Countryside* report published in 2008.

Affordable housing lies at the centre of the battle to save traditional village life. Unless we build more affordable homes for local people, they will continue to be priced out of rural areas and the services they help support will vanish with them.

Our three step rural housing plan

Our three step plan seeks to ensure that housing need is understood and met at a local level, ensuring mixed, sustainable and working villages:

- 1. Rural local authorities should make a comprehensive assessment of housing need in each rural ward**
- 2. Authorities should publish a rural housing action plan to show how they will deal with that need**
- 3. To ensure the rural housing crisis is addressed not just now, but also for future generations, assessment and action planning should be repeated every three years.**





Frequently asked questions

Why are local authorities the main focus of the campaign?

The National Housing Federation is clear that the provision of rural housing is a joint responsibility. However, local authorities are vitally important in the successful development of rural homes and often set the tone for local debate. Housing associations, parish councillors, rural housing enablers and local residents must also work to ensure affordable homes get built where they are needed.

The Federation is pressing the Government and its ministers to ensure rural authorities have adequate resources to prioritise affordable rural housing.

For example, local authorities should have easy access to all relevant information about their local housing situation. National and regional organisations, as well as county councils, often hold significant amounts of data relating to housing markets which is not readily accessible to local authorities and their residents. This includes CORE data on social housing turnover, CACI

Paycheck local income statistics and Land Registry sales records.

Making this information available free of charge and in an easily usable form would help rural authorities to understand local housing need and reduce the burden they face in the collection and analysis of data.

A robust evidence base will also ensure local authorities are fully equipped to participate in the [Homes and Communities Agency's \(HCA\) Single Conversation](#) and the wider rural housing agenda.

What is already expected of local authorities?

Rural authorities are already required to take an evidence based approach to rural housing.

[Planning Policy Statement 3 \(PPS3\)](#) states that local and regional planning should adopt 'a positive and pro-active approach which is informed by evidence, with clear targets for the delivery of rural affordable housing'.

The primary source of housing evidence for local authorities is provided through Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs) – cross boundary studies of housing markets which should inform local policy making. Government guidance on SHMAs advises that authorities distinguish between urban and rural areas, and should include specific information about housing in rural settlements.

An evidence based approach is promoted through the work of the Planning Inspectorate, and given added emphasis through the recently introduced Single Conversation process. With input from the public, private, housing association and voluntary sectors, the Single Conversation is intended to set out the long-term development priorities of authorities through [Local Investment Plans](#) and [Local Investment Agreements](#).



The success of your rural housing policy will depend on good evidence

Without having a full and accurate picture of the affordable housing shortage at village and town level, it is difficult to ensure new homes are provided where they are most needed. The Federation is therefore calling on all local authorities to assess need in each of their rural wards and to keep that information up to date. As a minimum, each rural ward should be assessed for housing need every three years.

- **A detailed self assessment checklist for compiling and analysing rural housing need in your area is available on the [Federation's website](#).**

Is the Federation advocating widespread use of Housing Needs Surveys?

Housing Needs Surveys (HNSs) are an important tool for assessing need, and are likely to be part of a local authority's approach to delivering affordable rural housing. But the cost of HNSs makes it unlikely that every village can be assessed in this way on a regular basis.

Importantly, the Federation does not propose that HNSs are carried out in every parish or village every three years and we do not equate HNSs with 'comprehensive assessment'. Rather we would like to see local authorities effectively analysing key housing data from 'secondary sources' to ensure a comprehensive understanding of where need exists.

A secondary source of information is that which has been collected or published by another organisation rather than by the authority itself and can be used to give a more accurate and detailed picture of the local housing situation. This is likely to include statistics relating to local incomes, affordability, housing stock turnover and migration patterns.

In addition to having a clearer picture of their current local housing situation, authorities that have a thorough understanding of wider housing and affordability indicators are in a far stronger position to prepare for future housing need.

What is meant by a 'comprehensive assessment of need'?

In order to properly address the rural housing shortage, it is important to first understand what level and type of need exists, and where. Local authorities are of course best placed to do this, and should have an in-depth knowledge of their local area.

Although approaches to rural housing across the country vary from authority to authority, the outcome should be the same – that local people can find out how much housing is needed, where, and what their local authority intends to do about it.

Essentially, are you able to accurately pinpoint where need for housing exists in your authority, beyond the basic information held on the housing register?

Without this basic evidence of housing need, made freely and easily available, it is extremely difficult for anyone but those opposed to any new homes to get involved in debate about local housing needs.

Rural authorities, working alone or in partnership with others, should rural proof their housing evidence base and take steps to strengthen it where it is found to be weak. Tools include: Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs), Strategic Land Availability Assessments (SHLAAs) and Economic Viability Assessments (EVAs). Authorities should also consider how they can make resources available to ensure all relevant information about rural housing need is kept up to date and accurate.

What is meant by a 'rural housing action plan'?

It is important that local authorities make their rural housing strategy available to local people. The Federation is asking rural authorities to publish an action plan to show how they will tackle rural housing need in their area.

What an action plan looks like will vary depending on circumstances. Many authorities will want to produce a plan relating specifically to rural areas, in addition to their general authority-wide housing strategy. For authorities covering very rural areas, a rural housing action plan may essentially be the general housing strategy document itself. Ideally the plan should include specific reference to the numbers of affordable homes needed in rural areas, as well as timescales for when new homes will be delivered.

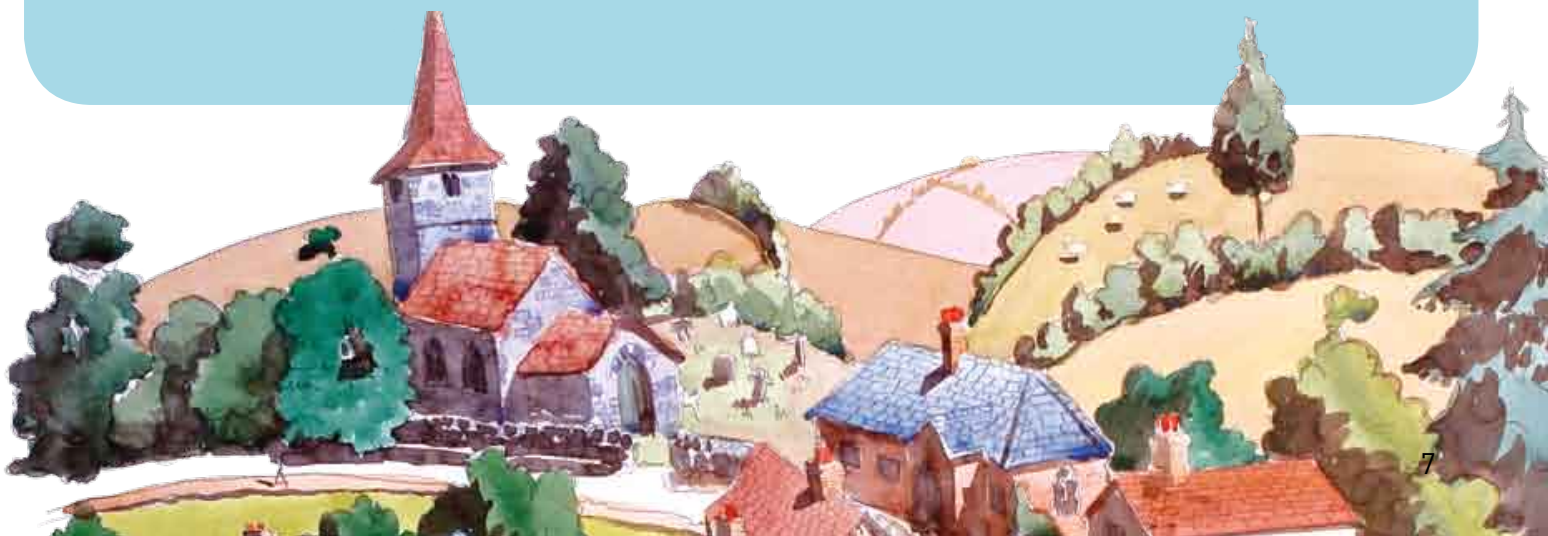
The most important thing is that the plan directly addresses the shortage of affordable rural housing and is easily accessible to local councillors and residents.

Taking action: Winchester City Council

Winchester City Council – where almost 60% of the local population lives in a rural settlement – has published a [Rural Housing Development Action Plan](#) to outline its rural housing strategy.

As well as an eight page written summary outlining the authority's approach, a 'needs matrix' table is published setting out the housing shortage in each parish. The document also incorporates a timetable of key actions and responsibilities for the council, the lead housing association, the Homes and Communities Agency and others involved in developing the new homes.

This information is made freely available to local residents and other interested parties on Winchester City Council's website, or by request.



Case studies

Peak sub-region: collecting the evidence

The Peak sub-region – made up of Derbyshire Dales District Council, High Peak Borough Council and the Peak District National Park – has assembled a solid evidence base for affordable rural housing, and continually works to keep that information up to date.

The local Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) was completed in 2008, incorporating the area's 2006 Strategic Housing Needs Assessment (SHNA). To understand the different housing market dynamics the SHMA provides an analysis and reports by 11 sub-areas. In addition, the SHNA

included a sample survey to identify the needs of key workers, including those in local private sector jobs.

Recognising that the housing market is never static, the sub-region purchased a Hometrack licence to enable them to keep the evidence base up to date, part-funded through a grant from the Regional Housing Group. Using ward level analysis, this data is used to produce in-depth reports on affordability, property sales, profile of housing stock, demographics and the local economy.

Peak sub-region approach to affordable rural housing

- Consistent collection of strategic rural evidence base across the sub-region, with a shared approach to data collection and analysis
- Ongoing process for updating the secondary evidence base using both internal and external sources, including analysis of Hometrack and Choice Based Lettings (CBL) data
- Combining the secondary evidence with community surveys undertaken by the Rural Housing Enabler to provide more robust parish level evidence
- Use of secondary evidence base to inform development of Core Strategy and Development Plan documents, Strategic Housing Market Assessments, the Strategic Land Availability Assessments and Economic Viability Assessments, as well as the HCA Single Conversation
- Use of combined evidence to target further enabling activity, inform scheme design and support, planning applications for rural exception sites, as well as informing spatial planning policies and the Single Conversation.



After approaching the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) the Peak sub-region has become one of the first Single Conversation areas. Using the SHMA – along with their Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) and an Economic Viability Assessment (EVA) – the Peak sub-region has prepared a draft Local Housing Investment Strategy that includes a stream of funding for rural delivery.

Combining the evidence from local Housing Needs Surveys with established secondary data has ensured parish housing needs surveys are suitably robust. Local authority planners, ward councillors and local communities now have much greater confidence in the evidence presented to support rural exception site applications. It has also helped to counter local opposition.

The success of this approach is evident in the delivery. This year Derbyshire Dales District Council will deliver 32 units in five rural villages, with 152 units to be provided across the district.

Ever keen to share their experiences with other rural authorities, Derbyshire Dales District Council and Rural Action Derbyshire produced a [video](#) about the approach used to involve the community of Hartington in finding a suitable site for new homes and agreeing on their design.

The [Derbyshire Dales District Council website](#) also carries parish profiles that bring together the combined evidence to provide details of the level and type of need in its parishes.

Nottingham Community Housing Association provided new homes in the Derbyshire Dales village of Brassington



Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing: strength in numbers

The Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing (HARAH) was formed in 2005 to address the need for affordable housing in the villages of Hampshire.

Growing out of the steering group for the Hampshire Rural Housing Enablers, HARAH is an alliance of local authorities and other bodies working to ensure local people are able to afford to live in the places where they were brought up, work or have family connections.

The partnership was initially established as a rural housing delivery vehicle, though it has developed a strategic role influencing planning and housing policy co-ordination.

HARAH has a single development partner, HydeMartlet, which was awarded a three year contract in 2005 following a comprehensive selection process. In 2008 the contract was renewed for a further three years.

Through HydeMartlet, HARAH has access to a dedicated team with rural expertise and knowledge, which has also gained the trust of parish councils. Economies of scale and other efficiencies have been realised through working across the whole area with a single contractor, which is prepared to work on small, complex and costly sites.

By working together, costs and resources can be shared, thus increasing capacity and knowledge. For example, HARAH has been able to:

- Share the cost of Rural Housing Enablers, giving more certainty to their funding
- Fund the HARAH Strategic Housing Officer through Beacon Council funding with a revenue budget funded by all the partners
- Share policies and protocols, and a starter pack for rural communities
- Encourage the spread of good practice, which is identified and rolled out across HARAH
- Involve partners in research projects, with the resulting knowledge shared across the partnership.

Whilst HARAH has a shared commitment to assessing rural housing need, the member authorities may vary their approach to how this is done. This may include for example a combination of Housing Needs Surveys, analysis of housing register data and housing surgeries with local residents. The Rural Housing Enablers, working across all the authorities, provide an overview of rural housing need.

When registering for affordable housing, applicants are asked about the connections they have to local parishes, enabling local authorities to collect some of the information that might otherwise be collected at a later stage. This gives the authority a head start in planning any

Members of HARAH:

- Hampshire Rural Housing Enablers
- Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
- East Hampshire District Council
- Hart District Council
- New Forest District Council
- Test Valley Borough Council
- Winchester City Council
- Homes and Communities Agency
- Hampshire County Council (joined in 2007)
- New Forest National Park Authority (joined in 2009)

new schemes and a better understanding from the beginning about where more acute need for affordable housing exists.

As an outcome of taking part in IDeA's Rural Excellence Programme, HARAHA established a members' board, set up by the chief executive and leaders group. The board comprises the portfolio holders for housing and planning of each of the local authorities, a county councillor, the chief executive of the National Park Authority and key HARAHA officers. It meets six times a year and plays an important strategic and influencing role.

The HARAHA officers group, which includes officers from all partner members as well as a representative of the Government Office for the South East, also meets six times a year.

An independent evaluation of HARAHA was undertaken in 2008, which highlighted a number of positive outcomes of the partnership including raising the profile of affordable housing, high levels of political commitment and an increased certainty of delivery.

Some barriers to delivery were identified and HARAHA has sought to find and share solutions to these. Its current two year business plan incorporates targets, action points and timescales, which will be monitored.

Most importantly, delivery of new homes has improved. HARAHA has a pipeline of schemes across Hampshire, maintaining a flow of rural homes. To date, 16 projects have been completed (122 homes), four schemes are currently on site (32 homes) and two schemes have planning permission but have not yet started (20 homes). A further 51 projects comprising approximately 461 homes are under discussion.

HARAHA has been quoted as an example of best practice by the Housing Corporation's *Future Investment Approaches*, the Affordable Rural Housing Commission's *Final Report*, and the Commission for Rural Communities' *Making it Happen: HARAHA*.

Residents of Cottsway Housing's new homes in Ramsden, Oxfordshire



Tunbridge Wells Borough Council: identifying need

HeLP Project

**Rural Homes
for Local People**



The Rural Homes for Local People (HeLP) project was set up in 2006 to address the affordable housing needs of local people in rural parts of Tunbridge Wells.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) has a rolling programme of rural housing needs surveys, with three parishes surveyed per year. The surveys, which ask every household in the parish about the kind of housing they require, are carried out independently by Action with Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK). Parish councils are also involved in the process from the outset.

Once the nature of housing need is understood, officers from both planning and housing services work with the parish council to identify suitable sites.

TWBC also asks people about shared ownership, enabling them to identify who is interested and able to obtain a mortgage at an early stage. The survey includes more information about shared ownership, including the restrictions on buying larger shares in the property and selling the property. By researching income levels in the parish, the housing association leading the project can devise a scheme that is truly affordable to local people.

Parish councils are encouraged to select the housing association that will design, develop and manage the new homes, as well as having a continuing presence in the parish.

TWBC regularly brings together representatives from housing, planning, highways and the housing associations involved to discuss progress of the scheme and resolve any potential problems early on.

All homes delivered through the Rural HeLP project are aimed at people with specific local connections to the parish and are allocated via the Choice Based Lettings process.

To date, TWBC has surveyed 12 parishes, with planning permission granted for a further three rural exception sites. In six other areas, suitable sites with willing vendors have been identified and bids are being developed for the planning application stage.

The schedule of parish surveys – along with results of surveys already undertaken – is published on the council's website, ensuring interested local residents are kept up to date with progress.

TWBC reviewed its rural programme in 2009 to find out what was working well and what improvements could be made to ensure the timely delivery of new homes. An action plan for changes to improve the whole process was agreed by its cabinet in October 2009.

How local authorities can support the *Save our villages* campaign

We are asking rural authorities to officially support the *Save our villages* campaign and commit to our [three step rural housing plan](#).

If your authority has not already given its backing to the campaign, please consider doing so. The sign off process for this will be different in each authority, and could come from the head of housing, the cabinet member with responsibility for housing or the chief executive.

After gaining internal agreement about becoming an official supporter of the campaign, you can let us know by simply adding your authority to the [online supporter map](#).

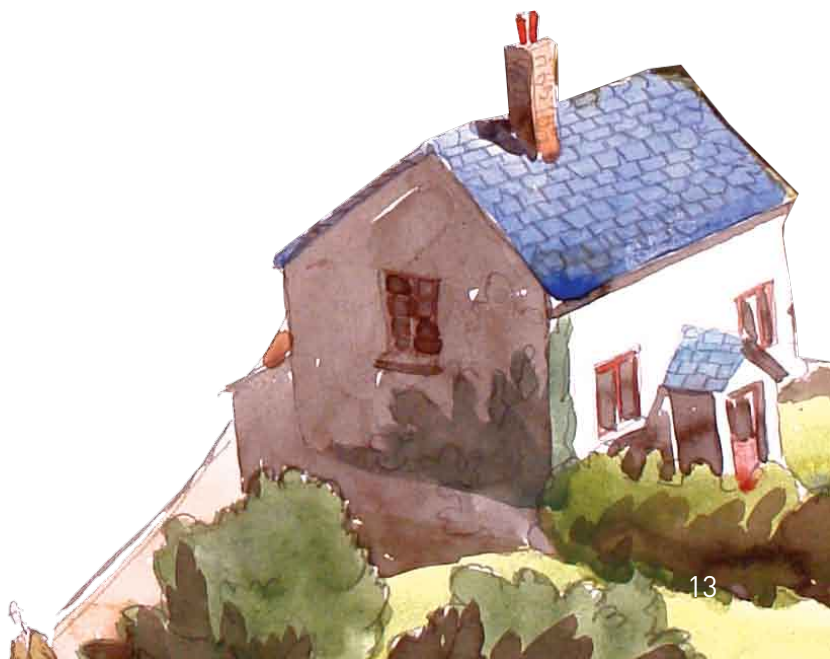
A list of [rural authorities already backing the campaign](#) is also available on the Federation's website.

Need more information?

If you would like to discuss the *Save our villages* campaign further, please get in touch with William Summers by telephone on 020 7067 1031 or by emailing williams@housing.org.uk

More information is also available at

www.housing.org.uk/rural



Our website www.housing.org.uk/rural provides further information about the *Save our villages* campaign including:

- Latest campaign news
- A list of local authorities backing the campaign
- A supporter map pinpointing the location of rural authorities, Members of Parliament, local councillors, housing associations and members of the public backing the campaign
- Resources for rural authorities and campaign supporters.

The National Housing Federation represents 1,200 independent, not-for-profit housing associations in England and is the voice of affordable housing. Our members provide two and a half million affordable homes for more than five million people.

National Housing Federation
Lion Court, 25 Procter Street, London WC1V 6NY
Tel: 020 7067 1010 Email: info@housing.org.uk
www.housing.org.uk www.inbiz.org

Contact: William Summers, campaigns officer
Email: williams@housing.org.uk Tel: 020 7067 1031