

Rural Services APPG

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services
28th October 2014, 8:30am
Room S, Portcullis House, Bridge Street, London, SW1A 2LW

PRESENT

Graham Stuart MP
Lord Cameron of Dillington
Sir Nick Harvey MP - North Devon
Roger Williams MP – Brecon & Radnorshire
Phil North – Office of Dr Therese Coffey MP
Pippa Page – Office of Sir Nick Harvey MP
Zakiy Manji – Office of Stephen O'Brien MP (Eddisbury)
Caroline Scott – Office of Robert Walter MP (North Dorset)
Bob Davidson – Office of Sheryll Murray MP
Sam Hall – Office of Graham Stuart MP

Secretariat

David Inman – RSN
Andy Dean – RSN

Others in Attendance

Peter Moore – Chair Rural Housing Alliance & Chief Executive Cornwall Rural Housing Association
Ursula Bennion – Director of Business Development, Housing Plus
Sue Chalkley – Chief Executive Hastoe Housing Group
Adrian Maunders – Chief Executive English Rural Housing Association
Charlotte Riley – Housing Plus

1. Notes of previous Meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 1st July 2014 were agreed as a correct record.

2. Rural affordable housing delivery on the ground – the importance of Section 106 Agreements and the relevance of local connection

Andy Dean briefly outlined the key topics covered in the Rural Manifesto being developed by RSN and the close working partnership established with the Rural Housing Alliance.

Peter Moore then explained the Rural Housing Pledge to which all Alliance members had signed up and the often unintended consequences of government policy on rural communities.

Adrian Maunders referred to the longstanding success of the Rural Exception Policy since being introduced in the 1980s and now referred to in the NPPF. However, Adrian explained that housing policies of local authorities were in danger of undermining planning policy in relation to housing for local needs. A relatively simple amendment to guidance issued to local authorities could rectify this.

Sue Chalkley explained how Rural Exception Policy worked in practice with close involvement from communities and often generous local landowners willing to sell sites at agricultural value in order to enable much needed affordable homes to be developed for local people. Unfortunately, local authorities are increasingly prioritising acute need above local connection meaning that local people effectively become invisible and are not allocated homes when they become available.

Roger Williams MP stated that difficulties could arise in areas where a National Park exists with the roles of Housing and Planning Authority split between the National Park and Local Authority, particularly in relation to commuted sums.

Graham Stuart MP asked if there was any statistical evidence of the impact of this issue. A report has been produced by the Rural Housing Alliance based on a survey of members (copy attached).

It was agreed that the Alliance suggest draft wording to act as potential amended guidance to local authorities on this issue.

Ursula Bennion then outlined the concerns of the Alliance regarding the proposed exemption of small sites, with fewer than 10 homes, from planning agreements that require developers to include some affordable housing. In addition to Exception Sites this was the second main delivery tool for Housing Associations in rural areas. Government figures for 2011-13 show that this currently delivers two thirds of affordable housing in smaller rural settlements. In South Staffordshire, for example, 165 homes would have been lost had this exemption been in place.

Lord Cameron stated that an announcement regarding the consultation outcome on this issue was expected shortly and, following discussion, it was agreed that the Rural Housing Alliance should write to the APPG chair setting out its desire to remove the proposed small site threshold and proposed wording for guidance in relation to local connection.

The meeting closed at 9.30 a.m.