

PRESS RELEASE

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‘Right-to-buy’ threatens rural housing supply

Government plans to revive tenants’ rights to buy their council house are unlikely to work in rural areas, the government has been told.

Current proposals threaten to reduce the amount of social housing in villages and hamlets across England, said the Rural Services Network[1].

The warning is contained in the network’s response to a government consultation on reinvigorating the right-to-buy[2].

Rural Services Network chief executive Graham Biggs MBE said the government consultation had recognised the need to replace any property sold.

But he added: “We find it difficult to understand how this can be achieved in rural areas without further significant refinement to the current proposals.”

The network agreed with the principle that a balance had to be struck between the level of discount and having enough receipts to fund replacement homes.

But Mr Biggs said having sufficient receipts may not be enough in itself.

He said: “The opportunities also need to exist in terms of available developable land which can be developed at reasonable cost.”

The Rural Services Network was skeptical about how one-to-one replacement could work in rural areas.

Without additional funding and free/discounted land, deals were unlikely to be viable. This was seen as a huge barrier to successful application in rural areas.

In terms of public land being available to make deals work, not all public sector land would necessarily be in the right place for replacement.

Mr Biggs said one of the biggest concerns raised by network members was around the criteria that would be put on replacement dwellings.

“In rural areas, replacement properties might end up being in, say, the nearest market town rather than in the village where the original property was sold.”

This would exacerbate problems for low income households to remain in their original villages, said Mr Biggs.

The government would need to consider carefully the impact on rural areas.

Exceptions may be required to ensure that the sale of rural council properties did not exacerbate the significant shortage of properties in villages.

ENDS

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

1) The Rural Services Network is a group of more than 200 organisations working together to improve the delivery of rural services across England. The two operating arms of the network are the Sparsity Partnership for Authorities Delivering Rural Services (SPARSE) and the Rural Services Partnership. Further information and a full list of members are available at www.rsnonline.org.uk

2) The Government announced its intention to increase the caps on Right to Buy discounts, to encourage more tenants to take up the Right to Buy last autumn in Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England. The document also sets out the Government's commitment to ensure that the receipts on every additional home sold under the Right to Buy are used to fund replacement, on a one for one basis, with a new home for Affordable Rent. The consultation sets out the proposals for how this will be achieved. For consultation details, see: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/reinvigoratingrighttobuy

3) [LINK TO RSN FULL CONSULTATION RESPONSE HERE](#)

4) The Rural Services Network seeks to establish best practice across the spectrum of rural service provision. The network has representation across the complete range of rural services, including local authorities, public bodies, businesses, charities and voluntary groups. We are devoted to safeguarding and improving services in rural communities across England. We are the only national network specifically focusing on this vital aspect of rural life.

5) The Rural Services Network exists to ensure services delivered to the communities of predominantly rural England are as strong and as effective as possible. The term 'predominately rural' refers to counties and Local Authority districts with at least 50 percent of their population living in rural settlements (ie. rural towns, villages, hamlets and dispersed dwellings) as identified in the Office for National Statistics' rural definition, and including larger market towns as identified in the Defra classification of local authority districts. The rural

definition and classification were devised by the Rural Evidence Research Centre (RERC) at Birkbeck College. Further details can be found at www.rerc.ac.uk