

RSN Seminar: Rural Affordable Housing

Date: Wednesday 29 June 2022
Subject: Rural Affordable Housing
Chair: [Kerry Booth](#), Chief Executive Designate, Rural Services Network
Host: Online Event via Zoom

Speakers

- Speaker 1:** [Chris Parsons](#), Hastoe Housing Board Member, [Hastoe Group](#)
“Carbon costs and comfort”
- Speaker 2:** [Jenny Divine](#), Research Officer, [RTPI](#)
“Levelling up or letting down rural communities”
- Speaker 3:** [Shaughan Dolan](#), External Affairs Manager, [National Housing Federation](#)
“Affordable rural housing during the cost of living crisis”

Learning Outcomes

Examples of Good Practice/Reports/Information

“Carbon costs and comfort”

- Hastoe Group is the largest rural housing specialist in England, with over 7,500 homes offering a mix of social rent and shared ownership.
- Sustainable development is key. For homes to be built effectively there is a need to reduce energy consumption thereby making homes more affordable to run and lessening environmental impact. Hastoe uses a fabric first approach to ensure homes built require minimum energy by using features like triple glazing, high levels of insulation and good airtightness.
- Hastoe’s new homes standard ensures affordable rural homes are: beautiful in design, energy efficient, have minimal environmental impact, are adaptable and accessible, are an appropriate size, have quality control throughout, future proofed and have reduced water consumption. To read more about the standard visit: <https://www.hastoe.com/about-us/building-homes/our-new-build-standard/> and <https://www.hastoe.com/about-us/building-homes/design-guidance/>.
- Uncertainty over planning reforms is a concern for housing associations, it is difficult to plan with so many potential changes afoot: the move from S106 to Infrastructure Levy, Right to Buy, nutrient neutrality to name but a few.
- Other challenges facing the sector include the cost-of-living crisis, labour shortages and contractors unfamiliar with sustainable building techniques.

“Levelling up or letting down rural communities”

- Rural areas are not the same as urban areas. Rural incomes are typically lower, the fuel poverty gap is higher, employment and training is harder to access and last but not least homes are less affordable (with perhaps the exception of London).

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

Rural Services Network

PO Box 101, Craven Arms, SY7 7AL

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www.rsnonline.org.uk email: events@sparse.gov.uk twitter: [@rsnonline](https://twitter.com/rsnonline)

- High demand and scarcity of supply in rural areas push house prices beyond what local residents can afford – often resulting in their displacement. This particularly impacts the younger generation who have not yet entered the housing market, or who are looking to rent/buy for the first time.
- But it's important to note that not all rural areas are the same, some areas (particularly coastal) may be experiencing an influx of retirees, whereas in peripheral high amenity areas, a predominance of second and holiday homes has emerged – for example in the Lake District. This is in contrast with more remote rural areas that are experiencing a declining economic base where housing is perhaps more of a symptom of these economic challenges (rather than because of external housing market pressures).
- There need to be much stronger ties between the levelling up and rural proofing agendas. They must work collaboratively and side by side if they are to have meaningful positive implications for rural communities. To do this, there needs to be a clear understanding of the challenges rural areas are facing right now, and the important role that rural communities and businesses play in the national economy, in achieving our net zero targets, and in enhancing national wellbeing.
- Rural areas are not stagnant, isolated or backward. They're diverse, they're dynamic, they're innovative. And we're all reliant on their success. And this success, to a significant degree, relies on a good supply of housing that is affordable for rural residents to both buy and to rent. This is one of the biggest challenges rural communities are facing today, and it's a significant barrier to their economic prosperity.
- To find out more about RTPi's Rural Planning in the 2020s research project please follow this link <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/ruralplanning>.

“Affordable rural housing during the cost-of-living crisis”

- All rural areas are impacted by the cost-of-living crisis and lack of affordable housing. Unfortunately, it is not a new phenomenon for rural areas.
- 46% of rural delivery of housing is concentrated in just 6 local authorities which is a concern. To address this the Rural Housing Network has commissioned research to find out why so few local authorities are responsible for the bulk of delivery. It is hoped barriers will be identified including lack of capacity and suggestions made on what can be done differently.
- Need to reverse the trend that rural areas are the most expensive areas to live in. A key expense is the cost of energy. The National Housing Federation have released a roadmap to Net Zero – A Guide for Housing Associations. See: <https://www.housing.org.uk/resources/decarbonisation-guide-for-housing-associations/>
- Homelessness is an issue in rural areas but the problem is it is less visible due to the large geography of rural areas. The Rural Housing Alliance has come together with others including the RSN to commission research to better understand rural homelessness. To contribute to the research visit: <https://research.kent.ac.uk/rural-homelessness/survey/>

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- Rural Housing Week is 4-8 July 2022, the theme this year is levelling up rural communities, see:
<https://www.housing.org.uk/our-work/rural-housing/rural-housing-week/>
Or to book specific sessions see:
Rural Homelessness: England's Hidden Crisis?
https://www.housing.org.uk/nhf_catalog/event-products/webinars/rural-homelessness-englands-hidden-crisis/
Is housing the key to levelling up the rural economy?
https://www.housing.org.uk/nhf_catalog/event-products/meetings/is-housing-the-key-to-levelling-up-the-rural-economy/
- There has been speculation about extending Right to Buy to rural housing association tenants. If you would like to share your views, please complete the following survey:
Housing Association: <https://forms.gle/1mv4Y6JSWv1h4XRU8>
Local Authority: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/QL256P9>

Open Forum Discussion

Air Source Heat Pumps – question posed about the high costs associated in running electric pumps. It was agreed that developers and consumers need to understand that air source heat pumps are not a direct replacement for a boiler. A house needs to be heat pump ready (well insulated and airtight) and the pump properly installed and set up for a heat pump to work efficiently.

Increased Electricity Demand – debate about whether the increased electricity demand caused by adding EV chargers, air source heat pumps etc., had any implications on network approval for new schemes. It was highlighted that there was an assumption that additional sub stations are needed (often making small rural schemes financially inviable) but if houses are built efficiently this needn't be the case.

Skills Gaps – are there skills gaps in rural areas due to a lack of affordable rural housing? It was agreed that yes there were, we know for example there is a shortage in health and care worker staff in rural areas particularly in tourist hot spots.

Average incomes - how appropriate is it to use average incomes as the measure of affordability when the average can be seriously skewed by the dominance of well-off households? A really good point and an important issue that's needs to be understood. The RSN's position is that average **local earnings** is a much better metric to use as a true measure of local pay, rather than commuter pay or income derived from share dividends, pensions, etc.

Accessing Funding – small rural housing associations find it difficult to access grant funding as they have limited capacity. It was highlighted that Homes England are looking at this issue and that Lord Benyon is keen to see more but smaller developments across rural communities, policy however hasn't caught up with this thinking yet. That said Wave 2 of Social Housing Decarbonisation Funds will be easier for smaller housing associations to bid into.

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Useful Links

- **RSN Revitalising Rural chapter on Availability of Rural Affordable Housing:**
<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/revitalising-rural/availability-rural-housing.pdf>
- **The economic and fiscal case for investing in rural affordable housing to drive post pandemic recovery – research by Pragmatix Advisory:**
https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/campaigns/pragmatix/2020_10_08_Report_to_CPRE_Engli.pdf
- **Rural as a region: the hidden challenge for Levelling Up – research by Pragmatix Advisory:**
<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/publications/rural-as-a-region-the-hidden-challenge-for-levelling-up.pdf>
- **A rural critique Home ownership and Housing Quality in England as detailed in the recent Levelling Up White Paper see page 21 at:**
<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/images/rural-lens/levelling-up-white-paper-rural-lens-review-chapter-3-and-4.pdf>
- **Further RSN Rural Lens reviews:**
<https://rsnonline.org.uk/tag/rural-lens>
- **“Community partnership converts iconic cottage hospital into community hub and affordable homes”:**
<https://rsnonline.org.uk/community-partnership-converts-iconic-cottage-hospital-into-community-hub-and-affordable-homes#>
- **RSN housing members:**
<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/category/rural-services-partnership-members#housing>
- **Future RSN events, follow the link to book your space:**
<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/future-meetings-and-events>
Please note, our events are free to attend for RSN members only.
RSN National Rural Conference 2022 (there is a dedicated day on rural housing on Thursday 22 September, follow the link to book:
<https://national-rural-conference2022.eventbrite.co.uk/>

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