

GRCC

Rural Affordable Housing

Affordable homes - part of the foundation of our thriving, healthy communities



Rural Housing Enablement (RHE) at GRCC – Values

Focus on: Social Rent; Affordable Rent; Shared Ownership

Approach - **Localism in Action**:

- **Community Action** – bottom up, led by communities;
- **Person-centred** – enabling those in housing need to self-identify; getting their voice into planning decisions;
- **Empowerment** – building trust to enable communities to take the lead in developing their own affordable housing projects



Affordable Housing Delivery in Rural Areas

Challenges:

- **Finance** – no longer viable for our Registered Provider (RP) partners to deliver on 10 units or fewer;
- **Lack of grant support for delivery;**
- **RP capacity** – limited resources to focus on rural delivery;
- **Local Authorities (LAs)** – limited resources to focus on rural delivery;
- **Pressure on LAs to deliver on new housing numbers** – strategic delivery via Section 106 agreements for larger scale development
- **Changing demographics** – ageing population



Affordable Housing Delivery in Rural Areas

The planning system for rural areas dictates that housing need is identified as justification for approving planning applications. GRCC identifies this need through hard copy and online surveys to every household.

Challenges:

- Majority in rural Gloucestershire are not in housing need
- Parish Councillors tend not to be in housing need
- Parish Councillors often see themselves as representative of the whole community

Outcome: identified need is lower



Identifying Housing Need

DEFRA RHE funding enabled analysis of GRCC's Housing Need Surveys (HNS) 2019 to 2024

- 61 HNS were conducted, with 35 identifying a need of 5 units or fewer
- It is no longer viable for Housing Associations (HAs) / RPs to develop schemes of this size
- Parish Councils are reluctant to accept affordable housing (AH) developments

Challenges:

- How do we now identify housing need in rural areas?
- How do we enable the voice of those in housing need to influence planning decisions on a local / parish council, place-based level?



Identifying Potential Solutions

GRCC is exploring various options, including:

- How to engage with those in housing need, and allowing more time to do this;
- Following up opportunities to expand the number and type of RPs working across Gloucestershire to deliver small rural schemes, with a focus on developments of 5 units or fewer;
- How Parish Councils could become partners in the provision of AH;
- How SMEs could become RPs – local provision to strengthen local economy, e.g. Marion's Walk development, Forest of Dean



Changing Engagement

- Devising new methods of identifying affordable housing need
- Discussing 'generic', non-geographic, rolling HNS with GRHP – identifying where people want to live rather than where they currently live
- Identifying and targeting those in housing need who are not on the Housing Register
 - Using DEFRA RHE programme funding 2025-2026 to explore, identify, and engage with this audience, extending GRCC's pre-HNS engagement work
- Allowing more time for pre-HNS engagement work in parishes and with targeted demographics



Changing Demographics – Emerging Evidence

Increasing numbers of older households are under-occupying homes. HNS results are identifying housing demand rather than need – older households not in housing need wanting to downsize / right-size if suitable properties were available:

- There is a lack of smaller, accessible, and affordable homes being developed to rent or to buy;
- Older persons shared ownership, social rent or affordable rent as a new area of work;
- Planning policy could be altered to allow this type of housing on rural exception sites / in rural areas - potential for cross-subsidy;
- May result in communities being more receptive to affordable housing;
- More data for Local Plans and to help identify housing that communities want; a bottom up approach, rather than developer led



Working in Partnership

- Government partnership – plea for central government to set targets for rural affordable housing
- Homes England financial support – increased grant support needed for delivery of AH in rural areas
- Lack of RP partners' capacity – competing priorities for staff resources and finances (Building Safety Bill, available grant funding, biodiversity net gain, landowner aspiration on land values, etc.)

Need to adapt our approaches to continue delivery of affordable rural housing.



Four Proposed Policy Changes – how Central Government could help

- Make **‘local connection’** mandatory for **Section 106 agreements** – to ensure local need is met; i.e. those who self-identify via a HNS rather than the Housing Register ‘local’ criteria
- **RPs to deliver more cross-subsidy sites** – use housing demand rather than just housing need from HNS as evidence to deliver a cross-subsidy model on Rural Exception Sites, incorporating rarely used affordable housing options such as Older Persons Shared Ownership
- Better use of **‘right-sizing / downsizing’** affordable housing data for older people – to take advantage of discounted market sale properties
- **Opening up delivery for other providers** – e.g., businesses to provide housing for staff; Land Trusts; large farms / estates; Parish Councils

Also, legislation enabling AH to be built where no ‘housing need’ identified.



Benefits of GRCC Rural Housing Enablers

- Operate in a **neutral, independent capacity** – as a charity, GRCC is a neutral, apolitical VCS organisation
- **Diverse skillsets, knowledge, and expertise** – including strategic housing, policy development, housing development, the political landscape, community development, and community-led approaches
- Experienced in **Community Engagement** – local knowledge; ability to initiate and deliver pre-engagement with communities, businesses, and wider stakeholders; wider community planning, such as NDPs
- Collaboration and **Partnership Working** – GRHP is a partnership of GRCC, rural LAs, RPs, and Homes England
- **Business and Planning Knowledge** – understanding development viability; site identification; planning constraints; negotiation with landowners and RPs



Questions



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