



Rural Area Working Party 12 November 2009

'Save Our Villages' Campaign

1. Summary and Reasons for Recommendation

- 1.1 The National Housing Federation is requesting housing organisations and local authorities sign up to carrying out actions under a 'Save Our Villages' campaign. This is a national campaign aimed at ensuring housing needs are identified in villages, and actions taken to try and meet those needs by housing organisations and local authorities.
- 1.2 This report outlines the campaign and the Council's proposed response to it.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Rural Area Working Party considers the response to the invitation to join the campaign, and make recommendations to Cabinet.

3. Corporate Objectives

- 3.1 The recommendation meets the following, as contained within the Corporate Plan:-
- (a) Corporate Priorities : *'...Improving the safety and well being of the community' and 'securing a sustainable and attractive environment...'; and*
- (b) Cabinet Commitments : *'managing the future development of the borough' and 'rural services'*
- (c) Vision 2025 : *St Edmundsbury will be a place which: 'has an affordable range of housing to meet the needs and demographic profile of the community'*

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4. Key Issues

- 4.1 The National Housing Federation has issued a briefing on its 'Save Our Villages' campaign, and has asked local authorities and housing organisations to sign up to it. The aim is to try and halt the decline of rural England, by ensuring each village is covered by an action plan to get the affordable housing it needs.
- 4.2 The campaign briefing is attached as Appendix A, and outlines the three point plan which the Federation is asking organisations to commit to.
- 4.3 The Strategic Housing Team has worked with Suffolk Acre, and several Parish Councils and villages to develop housing needs assessments for those villages, and this has taken both staff and financial resources. To date, there are eleven parish housing needs appraisals completed, which have all identified a need for more affordable housing. These eleven parishes make up five rural wards.
- 4.4 There are 18 rural wards within St Edmundsbury, and to achieve an up to date assessment of housing need for every rural ward would require additional commitment of resources, both Council and Suffolk Acre staff, over the next three years to ensure there was an assessment and action plan for each ward. Meeting the full commitment may, therefore, be very difficult to achieve without additional resources.
- 4.5 However, it is felt that the Council should sign up to the principle of the three step housing plan, and aspire to meet the commitment for housing needs assessments and action plans being developed. Further reports on progress can be brought to the Working Party on a regular basis.
- 4.6 There may be an opportunity for Parish Councils to assist in carrying out the assessments and meeting the commitments of the action plan, and it is proposed to explore this further with them.
- 4.7 The action plans developed from the housing needs assessments can be incorporated in to the existing Rural Action Plan where the need to address affordable housing in the rural areas has already been identified. The Housing Strategy also identifies rural affordable housing as an objective for the Council to target.

5. Other Options considered

- 5.1 To not sign up to the campaign. Meeting the housing needs of the residents of the Borough is a clear commitment of the Housing Strategy, and this includes rural housing. Signing up to this campaign will further show the Council's commitment to meeting the housing needs of its rural communities.

6. Community impact *(including Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and diversity issues)*

6.1 General

- 6.1.1 Committing to this campaign will ensure there is an action plan to meet the housing needs of all sections of the community within the rural areas.

6.2 Diversity

- 6.2.1 This will impact on all sections of the community and address their needs

- 7. Sustainability Impact** *(including environmental or social impact on the local area or beyond the Borough)*
- 7.1 This campaign will commit to trying to sustain all villages by addressing their housing needs, and help with the decline of some villages.
- 8. Consultation**
- 8.1 Portfolio Holder for Haverhill and Housing.
- 9. Resource implications** *(including asset management implications)*
- 9.1 There may be some future staffing and financial implications of meeting the commitments of the three point action plan if the housing needs assessments cannot be completed within existing resources. Further reports will be brought back to the Working Party.

10. Risk Assessment *(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)*
10.1

Risk area	Inherent level of Risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual Risk (after controls)
	High/Medium/Low		High/Medium/Low
Ensuring there is a supply of affordable housing in rural areas to meet the needs of the residents	High	Partnership working with Parish Councils, RSL's and developers to bring forward affordable housing schemes in the rural areas	Medium

- 11. Legal or policy implications**
- 11.1 The Housing Strategy 2008-2011 Action Plan aspires to carry out housing needs surveys in rural areas and deliver affordable housing to meet the identified needs. This campaign will reinforce the commitment to housing in the rural areas.

Wards affected	All Rural Wards	Portfolio Holder	Haverhill and Housing
Background Papers		Subject Area	Housing

Save Our Villages campaign briefing

We want to halt the decline of rural England. That's why we are campaigning to ensure every village is covered by an action plan to get the affordable housing it needs.

The rural housing crisis

England's countryside is in crisis. The average price of a house is now over £40,000 more expensive than in urban areas¹, even though average wages are lower. Against a backdrop of declining social housing provision and an influx of second home owners, many rural areas have been left with a desperate shortage of affordable housing for those who need it.

Scarce availability of suitable land, planning obstacles and local opposition often mean the necessary homes are never built, contributing further to lower income earners and younger people being priced out of their home villages.

The knock-on effect is that businesses and local services – including shops, schools, Post Offices, pubs and village halls - struggle to survive as regular local users disappear, leaving rural communities in danger of becoming the preserve of only the wealthy and the isolated elderly.

More than 315,000 households are currently registered on housing waiting lists in rural England², a 23 percent increase over the previous five year period. In some areas the need has more than doubled over the same period.

It is also likely that these already alarming figures vastly underestimate true housing need in rural communities. Local housing need surveys, when undertaken by parish councils and local authorities, tend to reveal that many more households are struggling to afford to live in their village but have not officially registered their need. Sometimes this is because they simply do not believe the affordable homes needed in their community will ever be built.

Our three step rural housing plan

The Federation wants to halt this decline of rural England. Our three-step plan seeks to ensure that housing need is understood and dealt with at a local level, ensuring mixed, sustainable and working villages:

- 1. Every local authority should have an up to date assessment of housing need for every rural ward.**
- 2. Authorities should publish a rural housing action plan to show how they will meet 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.**

With rural housing the ultimate responsibility of the Government, we will also press the responsible ministers to ensure that local authorities can prioritise affordable housing.

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Case study

Nottingham Community Housing Association *Walker Close development, Market Overton, Leicestershire*

In the tiny Rutland village of Market Overton just outside Melton Mowbray homes can sell for anything up to £1m, pricing many local people out of the area.



Now Nottingham Community Housing Association (NCHA) has provided nine new homes for the village – five houses and two flats for affordable rent, plus another two houses for shared ownership - after working closely with the local authorities and the Rural Housing Enabler to gain planning permission in a region dominated by green belt land.

Local reaction to the new homes has been positive. “There is always a fear that new homes won’t fit into what is a very traditional village but we have all been pleasantly surprised by the quality of the build,” said Parish Council Clerk John Southerington.

“Keeping young families in the village keeps employment in the village too. The Parish Council would have no hesitation in considering new homes in the future.”

What you can do to help

You can help our campaign in three ways:

1. Ask your local authority to commit to our three point rural housing plan.
2. Ask your local MP to raise the rural housing crisis with the Government.
3. Add yourself or your organisation to our online supporter map.

Want further information?

For more details about the campaign or to sign up to our supporter map please visit our website at www.housing.org.uk/rural

Alternatively please contact William Summers, Campaigns Officer, on 020 7067 1031 or by e-mail at williams@housing.org.uk

¹ Commission for Rural Communities, Rural Economies Recession Intelligence report, March 2009

² Latest figures from April 2008