

# ***Report to Local Councils Liaison Committee***

***Date of meeting: 16 November 2015***

**Subject:** Rural Affordable Housing Schemes - Planning Exceptions Policy

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## **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**That the Committee note the opportunities available for the provision of local affordable housing schemes.**

## **Report:**

1. The District Council's Director of Communities, Alan Hall, and Ulrike Maccariello, Development Manager with Hastoe Housing Association will give a presentation to the Committee on the opportunities available to provide affordable housing schemes - comprising affordable rented, shared ownership and low-cost market housing – in rural areas, that are restricted to residents of the village (and possibly neighbouring villages if there is insufficient demand). This is to help meet the local housing need of people living in rural areas.
2. This opportunity arises as a result of the Council's current Local Plan's "planning exceptions policy", which recognises that the lack of affordable housing in villages is likely to have a greater effect on individuals and the community than in urban areas, and that the opportunities for increasing the amount of affordable housing is less than in urban areas. This is because less suitable sites for development usually become available, and local inhabitants are more likely to have to move away from their local area than in larger areas.
3. Under the planning exceptions policy, planning permission may be granted on sites that only provide affordable housing (plus some market housing, if necessary, in order to make the development viable) to meet a local housing need, for which planning applications for developments comprising predominantly market housing would be refused.
4. However, certain conditions set out in the Local Plan must be met, including that the development must be:
  - in smaller settlements that have a recognisable community, distinct and separate from the metropolitan area;
  - small scale;
  - in response to a demonstrable local housing need (identified through a rural housing survey);
  - supported by the Parish Council;
  - well-related to the existing settlement; and
  - providing predominantly affordable housing in perpetuity.
5. The Local Plan states that settlements which could therefore be suitable include Epping Green, Matching Tye, Matching Green, Moreton, Sheering, Fyfield, Willingale, Toot Hill,

Little End and Stapleford Abbotts – and that those which would specifically not be appropriate include Lower Nazeing, Theydon Bois, Chigwell Row, North Weald Bassett, Sewardstone and Chipping Ongar.

6. In order to ensure that these rural affordable housing schemes only provide accommodation for local residents, applicants must be:
  - long-established local residents (i.e. those who have lived in the village for at least five of the preceding ten years) requiring separate accommodation;
  - immediate family dependents of long-established local residents;
  - former long-established residents; or
  - living elsewhere, who cannot otherwise take up, or continue to, work in the village.
7. To date, four rural housing schemes have been provided in Epping Forest under the planning exceptions policy (providing a total of 26 affordable homes), namely: Mann's Yard, Willingale; Houchin Drive, Fyfield; Harlow Rd, Matching Tye; and School Lane, Abbess Roding. Affordable Housing Grant is available from the Homes & Communities Agency to fund rural housing schemes in certain circumstances.
8. A number of years ago, the Council selected Hastoe Housing Association to be its Preferred Partner to deliver rural housing schemes, who have a wealth of experience in working closely with parish councils to assess their local housing needs and to provide rural housing schemes, including three of the four schemes provided in the Epping Forest District in the past, referred to above.
9. The presentation will include details of how local housing needs are assessed (through a bespoke rural housing survey), the identification of suitable sites, the role of parish councils, the forms of tenure provided for the accommodation, the development process and the safeguards put in place to ensure that only local residents are eligible for the housing when they are available for occupation.