

South Gloucestershire Council's Rural Affordable Housing Statement of Commitment

South Gloucestershire Council is committed to delivering much needed affordable homes in rural areas where meeting housing need is a particular challenge.



Introduction

Rural South Gloucestershire comprises 80% of the District's total area, accommodating approximately 20% of its population and is significant in its make-up and character. Meeting the housing needs, and especially the Affordable Housing needs, of rural communities is a priority for the Council, which recognises that Affordable Housing can promote mixed and inclusive communities and improve sustainability for rural towns and villages.

At one time, most rural settlements had a number of council houses which met local needs. Over the past 30 years, this stock has been depleted through the Right to Buy but not replaced. This has contributed to the gradual loss of services, diversity and sustainable communities.

The Council wants to encourage rural communities to consider their current and future housing needs and long term sustainability. Rural areas face particular challenges as typically there is a limited choice and range of housing available and accessibility to housing is further restricted by more distinct issues of affordability. Affordable Housing to meet local needs, including opportunities for people to build their own homes, can also help support the local economy such as village shops and schools as well as allowing households to remain in or return to a community to which they have a local connection.

The Council wants to take a proactive approach to maintaining thriving rural communities and is committed to working together with residents and other stakeholders to meet housing needs and to identify available funding streams and other resources.

Localism and Neighbourhood Planning

The Localism Act gives local communities greater opportunity to shape the future of their places. Through planning reform and the opportunities that Neighbourhood Planning can bring, communities are empowered to influence the future of their areas. Neighbourhood Planning provides the following opportunities:

- Neighbourhood Development Plans, prepared by the community, which cover land use planning issues, for example, allocating sites for new houses including affordable homes, shops and facilities and providing guidelines about how development is designed; identifying which green spaces should be protected and improvements to infrastructure and the public realm. Neighbourhood Development Plans must be prepared within the context of national and local planning policy.
- Neighbourhood Development Orders drawn up by the community, which define types of development (e.g. house extensions) which can take place without needing to get planning permission.
- The Community Right to Build will enable the local community to approve a development (e.g. a housing development, including Affordable Housing, which may include opportunities for people who want to build their own homes, if such a need is evident, or a community building) without needing planning permission.

Planning policy

National planning policy is set out in the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This includes policy on Affordable Housing in rural areas. Further guidance on Rural Housing is available in the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG).

The South Gloucestershire adopted Core Strategy (December 2013) and the adopted Policies, Sites and Places Plan (November 2017) are the key planning policy documents for South Gloucestershire, setting out the general location of development, its type and scale, as well as protecting what is valued about the area. The Core Strategy contains the Council's approach towards Affordable Housing and rural exception sites which is set out below. The Core Strategy also acknowledges that communities are able to shape their areas through Neighbourhood Planning, which could include addressing local housing need.

The West of England Joint Spatial Plan (JSP), is a development plan document produced jointly by South Gloucestershire Council and the area's three other local planning authorities of Bristol, North Somerset and Bath and North East Somerset. The plan details the housing and employment needs alongside improved transport and other infrastructure across the sub-region to 2036. It

proposes an increase in the numbers of new market homes and Affordable Housing, over and above those proposed by the Core Strategy.

The JSP locational strategy is for the majority of these additional homes to be located in existing urban areas, urban extensions and through town expansion and the development of new settlements. The JSP also identifies a requirement for an element of “non-strategic” housing development in the rest of South Gloucestershire. The JSP target for these sites is 1300 homes with a further contingency of 500 new homes, all of which will include up to 35% Affordable Housing.

The new South Gloucestershire Local Plan will follow on from the JSP, adding further detail to the strategy for development and updating and replacing the policies in the Core Strategy and Policies Sites and Places Plan. This will include identifying sites for small scale “non-strategic” development in the rural areas of South Gloucestershire for market housing and Affordable Housing. The Council’s Affordable Housing and Extra Care Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (adopted May 2014) will be refreshed following the adoption of the new Local Plan and will provide further detail, clarification and guidance.

Status of Affordable Housing Policy in Adopted Core Strategy

Affordable Housing can be provided through planning obligations on market housing developments, in compliance with Core Strategy Policy CS18. In rural settlements Policy CS18 seeks 35% on-site Affordable Housing from planning applications for 5 or more dwellings or on sites of 0.2 hectares or more. As a result of recent appeal decisions in South Gloucestershire, this adopted policy is currently not considered to have greater weight as a planning consideration than the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) published on the 19th May 2016. The NPPG states that Affordable Housing contributions should not be sought from developments of 10 units or fewer and which have a maximum floor space of 1000sq.m. It is only in the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty that a lower threshold of 5 dwellings or fewer can be applied.

The impact of this current situation is that the opportunities for the delivery of Affordable Housing in small settlements through planning obligations have been limited, unless through Rural Exception Sites, which often do not meet landowners’ expectations. The Council, with its West of England partners, is working towards the adoption of a lower threshold in the West of England Joint Spatial Plan and the new Local Plan, which would be considered to have greater weight as a material planning consideration than the NPPG, if underpinned by sound evidence.

Exception sites

Affordable Housing can also be developed on land which is well related to a rural settlement through the Council’s exception site policy (CS19). This allows would not usually be granted planning permission because of planning policy constraints. A small proportion of market housing may be included to assist in delivering a viable scheme, if necessary, for example in the absence of grant funding. This type of development can be justified where it meets an identified

housing need, has the support of the appropriate Parish Council and the development is modest in scale and in keeping with the form and character of the settlement and local landscape setting. Please see the Core Strategy Policy CS19 and the Affordable Housing and Extra Care Housing SPD for additional guidance. Policy CS19 will be incorporated in the new Local Plan.

Identifying Local Housing Needs

A housing needs survey is a method of identifying what housing need there is in a community. The survey is carried out using a questionnaire form which should go to every household in the Parish. The questionnaire and analysis report can be carried out by the Council or should be in a format approved by the Council (the Strategic Housing Enabling Team can provide further advice on Affordable Housing and needs surveys).

The survey should be carried out in partnership with the Council or another independent organisation approved by the Council. Resources for carrying out surveys are limited but the Council is committed to carrying out up to two housing needs surveys per year where there is support from the Parish Council or local community.

If the Council does not have the resources available or if the survey is instigated by a speculative landowner/developer the Council can refer to a suitable third party to carry out the survey and related work.

The need for Affordable Housing can also be assessed through the Neighbourhood Planning process as part of a wider assessment to include market demand. This has the advantage of identifying local demand for particular types of market housing, e.g. smaller dwellings and bungalows.

Partnership working

The Council works with the West of England HomesWest partnership of housing associations and other registered providers who have satisfactorily demonstrated their ability to develop and manage Affordable Housing. The Council wants to work in partnership with key stakeholders, in particular local communities and their parish councils together with housing associations and landowners to deliver sustainable housing to meet the identified needs of the community.

Strategy to increase delivery

The Council has two main processes to increase delivery of rural Affordable Housing:

1. As part of the new Local Plan process, additional allocations will be considered in suitable settlements across the rural area. The Council will undertake consultation on rural site allocations through the new Local Plan process. Allocations will be made for sites for more than 10 homes, and will be subject to planning obligations for a percentage of the new homes to be Affordable Housing.

2. The Council will also concentrate its resources on assisting Parishes to bring forward exception sites in those areas where Affordable Housing will not be provided through planning obligations, focusing on locations with identified housing needs, a supportive Parish Council and where it has been identified as an action in a Community Led Plan.

The Council will carry out up to two housing needs surveys a year to assess the need for Affordable Housing in Parishes or groups of settlements. There may be a need to prioritise Parishes according to the following criteria:

1. The community is willing and supportive of a survey or it is community led.
2. A deliverable site has been identified and is available.
3. A housing needs survey has never been carried out in the Parish before.
4. HomeChoice and other secondary data show an unmet need.

Other information to be considered;

5. If there has been no Affordable Housing development in the settlement in the last 5 years.
6. If there is a lack of existing affordable stock in the parish.
7. If grant funding is available (or another form of subsidy to deliver the project)
8. Any planning constraints that severely restrict the ability to develop in the village/Parish i.e. flood plain, green belt, AONB, listed building.
9. An assessment of any residential development already in the pipeline, i.e. approved planning permissions and other opportunities that may meet local housing need without the need for an exception site scheme.

Conclusion

This statement confirms the Council's commitment to rural communities and the sustainability of rural areas in the forthcoming period of change and growth in South Gloucestershire.

South Gloucestershire Council
January 2018

Useful websites and information:

- South Gloucestershire Council Sustainable Communities Plan 2012-2026
<http://www.southglos.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/localism/sustainable-community-strategy/>
- West of England Rural Network provides an expert resource for rural communities across the West of England. Currently WERN are commissioned to support community led planning in South Glos <http://www.wern.org.uk/>
- The Homes and Communities Agency is the national housing and regeneration agency who invest in new Affordable Housing.
[HCA Rural Housing Advisory Group - GOV.UK](http://www.hca.gov.uk/rural-housing-advisory-group/)
- National Housing Federation: Rural Housing
[Rural housing | Investing in communities | National Housing Federation](http://www.nationalhousingfederation.org.uk/rural-housing)
- Department for environment, food and rural affairs (DEFRA) provides general information, relevant statistics and links to government policies.
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/communities/>
- The Community Land Trust Network provides information, guidance, contacts and case studies on Community Land Trusts. A Community Land Trust provides a community led model to secure assets or carry out development for the benefit of the community. www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/home
- Wessex CLT Project provides help and guidance to communities wishing to set up a Community Land Trust. <http://wessexca.co.uk/wessex-clt-project/projects/>
- Action in Communities of Rural England is the national umbrella body of the Rural Community Action Network (RCAN), which operates at national, regional and local level in support of rural communities across the country.
www.acre.org.uk/
- The Government's National Planning Policy Framework sets out national planning policy:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/2116950.pdf>
- The National Planning Practice Guidance provides further guidance on the implementation of policy: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rural-housing>
- South Gloucestershire Core Strategy (adopted Dec 2013), provides a framework to guide and promote new development (e.g. housing, employment, retail, leisure, community facilities), its type and scale, whilst protecting the quality of South Gloucestershire's historic, natural and built environment:
<http://www.southglos.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/planning-local-plans/core-strategy-2006-2027/>
- South Gloucestershire Policies, Sites and Places Plan (adopted Nov 2017):
<http://www.southglos.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/planning-policy/planning-local-plans/policies-sites-and-places-dpd/>
- South Gloucestershire new Local Plan (2018-2036):
www.southglos.gov.uk/newlocalplan.