

Rural Affordable Housing Improvement Plan

Letter to landowners on Rural Exception Sites

The recipients of the correspondence of 9 July 2009 from the Council Leader and the Chief Executive are listed below. The sample letter attached was amended slightly to meet the needs of the various recipients. Complete individual final letters are available on the housing services p drive (Housing Enablement/ Rural Housing/ Scrutiny Review/ Land Opportunities).

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Chief Executive's Office

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Distribution – See above

Sample Letter



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9 July 2009

Dear

Rural Affordable Housing within the Cherwell District – Rural Exception Sites

We are writing to the small number of major owners of land within Cherwell to promote the need for rural affordable housing within the District. This letter outlines the Council's commitment to enabling the bringing forward of rural affordable housing schemes specifically on Rural Exception Sites, the need to identify suitable land opportunities as part of this process, and the role landowners can take in supporting this process.

The Council, in its Corporate Plan, has a stated clear commitment to providing affordable housing within the District. We recognise the importance of affordable housing to meeting housing need – this housing need has increased over a number of years as household income has failed to keep pace with increasing house prices. For many people in rural areas, access to housing that meets their housing need is insufficient resulting in local people having to move away from their village or parish for their need to be met., or face living in unsuitable housing. Clearly the economic recession has impacted on house prices, but there remains a clear need for affordable housing across the District, most notably in most rural areas where house prices tend to be higher than the rest of the District and turnover of properties is lower.

Sustainability of villages is very important to the Cherwell Rural Strategy and new housing has a direct positive impact on other local services and facilities such as shops, public houses and schools, all of which can add enormously to peoples' livelihood and wellbeing. Equally the Taylor Review found that nationally rural businesses have had to recruit people living in towns because unaffordable rural housing potential had forced potential employees to move out of rural areas.

Rural affordable housing is normally established on sites identified within the Council's planning framework or through Rural Exception Sites – this

correspondence highlights the need on the latter. The term 'affordable housing' includes social rented and intermediate housing provided to specified eligible households whose needs are not met by the housing market.

The Rural Exception Site approach involves permitting new affordable housing as an exception to normal planning policies (which place strong restraints on market housing development in rural areas). It requires a willing landowner to offer a site for development on the basis of land values that can secure affordable rent levels. The housing is retained by a Housing Association as affordable social housing in perpetuity under the terms of a legal agreement entered into alongside the planning permission.

Very recently, we have produced a rural affordable housing improvement plan to ensure we are developing rural housing initiatives, and as part of this process we are trying to improve the availability of land and rural affordable housing options across the district that can be taken forward as Rural Exception Sites. We acknowledge the invaluable support of a number of Parish Councils who were consulted in the bringing forward of this plan – this work may present opportunities for meeting joint strategic aims of Parish Councils and the District Council.

We would like to identify suitable land that major landowners may be willing to release to enable potential affordable housing schemes to be developed as Rural Exception Sites. We hope your organisation as a major landowner will consider this request further, and inform our officers of any opportunities that you think may be available. We are specifically seeking land that is available at prices that makes rural affordable housing financially viable, including possible leasehold arrangements. We would also be interested to know what factors would actually motivate and encourage you to work further with the Council in releasing land for Rural Exception Sites

We would encourage you to register any interest you may have releasing land with the Council's Strategic Housing Team – details are listed below. Should you have any queries, we are very willing to assist you, and our officers are able to offer a meeting to discuss opportunities further.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Barry Wood
Leader of the Council

Mary Harpley
Chief Executive

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