

Case Study: Rural Affordable Housing development in Bluntisham



Summary

Meridian Close is a scheme on the western edge of Bluntisham.

This was a developer led rural exception site, with Rose Homes constructing the homes. Hastoe were involved in the planning process and the affordable homes were built in alignment with Hastoe's design requirements. These requirements aim to maintain high standards at all stages of development and ensure that the resulting homes are energy efficient, well designed, of high quality and provide for the needs of residents.

The scheme is unique in that it includes 9 private sale homes. This large proportion of private sale homes is possible through Huntingdonshire District Councils policy allowing up to 40% of a rural exception site to be used for private sale. These homes assist in making the rest of the scheme, i.e. the affordable homes, viable and possible to be provided for the village.

Project Information

No of properties:	20 including 11 for rent and shared ownership and 9 for private sale
Property types:	Rental: 2 x 1 bed house, 3 x 2 bed house, 1 x 2 bed bungalow and 3 x 3bedroom house Shared Ownership: 1 x 2 bed house; 1 x 3 bed houses
Housing needs survey completed	December 2012
Planning permission granted:	April 2019
Start on site:	March 2020
Completion:	July 2021
Funding:	£420,000 grant from Homes England



The community

Bluntisham is a mid-sized village with a current population of an estimated 1,900. The village has a number of services including a primary school, village hall, petrol station, supermarket and local pubs/restaurants.

Partners

- Hastoe Housing Association
- Rose Homes
- Huntingdonshire District Council
- Bluntisham Parish Council
- Cambridgeshire ACRE

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Case Study: Rural Affordable Housing development in Colne

Summary

Howgate Grove is a development off Bluntisham Road of 10 affordable homes and two market homes for sale.

The homes were designed in a traditional style with a mix of materials and details that are sympathetic to the character of the village.

The parish council were gifted additional land on the site. This has since been opened as a community orchard with an official opening in April 2022.

The scheme has been developed and managed by Hastoe Housing Association, a partner in the Cambridgeshire Rural Affordable Housing Partnership.

Key statistics

No of properties:	12 including 7 for rent, 3 shared ownership and 2 for private sale
Property types:	Rental: 2 x 1 bed houses; 2 x 2 bed houses; 3 x 3 bed houses Shared Ownership: 3 x 2 bed houses Private sale: 2 x 4 bed houses
Planning permission granted:	August 2016
Start on site:	March 2017
Completion:	August 2018
Project value:	£1.1 million
Funding received:	Homes England Grant; £196,000 Huntingdonshire District Council; £46,000



Photo 1 - Howgate Grove

The community

Colne is a small parish with a population of approximately 850. It is located between Bluntisham and Earith to the south and Somersham to the north. The nearest large town is St Ives, located 10 miles to the west.

Colne has a pub, church and village hall but there are limited local facilities outside of this. Residents have to travel to surrounding areas to access most services but the proximity of key service centres, such as Somersham, help to accommodate this.

Partners

Colne Parish Council; Hastoe Housing Association; The Design Partnership (Architect); Duncan, Cameron and Hutchinson (Contractors); AECOM (Employer's Agent); Huntingdonshire District Council; Homes and Communities Agency; Cambridgeshire ACRE.

Project History

Cambridgeshire ACRE was initially approached by a local estate agent, January's, to commission a housing needs survey. The aim of this was to gauge opinion on the value of developing affordable homes in the parish and determine existing and future levels of affordable housing need.

The survey showed there were potentially 13 households in need of affordable housing within the village. The need was largely for smaller properties for households that were primarily families with young children and young adults seeking their independence.

As a result of this identified need, work was undertaken to identify a housing association who may be interested in developing a scheme. Hastoe were identified as a suitable partner and acquired the land allowing plans to begin to be developed.

Two of the homes on the scheme were required to be sold on the open market, providing cross subsidy for the affordable homes needed for the community.



Photo 2 - Howgate Grove (entrance)

Hastoe held a drop-in meeting in September 2014 to show the parish the proposed plans and took details of all interested people. 73 people attended this meeting. The proposals did receive a mixed response initially, with concerns over aspects such as access to the development, ensuring that the additional land would not be developed and some general concerns over the workings of a rural exception site. Hastoe modified their designs in response to the comments.

Once planning permission had been granted a follow-up drop-in session was held in December 2017 to show the community the revised plans and provide details of how residents could apply to live in the homes.



Photo 3 - Howgate Grove (street scene)

One feature of the scheme was to minimise the living costs for tenants. This was achieved by building the homes to Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes.

A unique aspect of this site was additional land being donated to Colne Parish Council for community use. This was not developed at the same time as the scheme but has completed since. The parish council decided to create a community woodland which consist of a community garden, picnic area, sun clock, wildflower meadow, wildlife areas and an orchard. The orchard is particular symbolic, reflecting the historic use of the land. The space officially opened to residents of Colne in April 2022.



Photo 4 - Opening of community woodland

In total, the 10 affordable properties all had a local connection criterion applied. As a result, all 10 were handed over to people who lived in the village.

The allocation process was labour intensive and took several weeks with local connections all having to be checked. However, the outcome was clearly successful with one tenant summing up how valuable the development has been to them; "I love my new home and being able to live back where I know everyone. My life has changed so much for me and my three children since we moved back to Colne..."

Celebrating success

Howgate Grove was officially opened on 28 June 2018. The opening event included residents, local councillors and North West Cambridgeshire MP, Shailesh Vara, and gave the opportunity to celebrate the development.



Photo 5 - The opening ceremony

Richard Quallington, Vice Chair of Hastoe's board, at the time of opening, welcomed residents and guests to the opening. He commented:

"Homes built on rural exception sites are reserved solely for local people and must always be kept affordable. Working alongside the local parish council and local community, we make sure our houses are designed and built to suit the local environment and meet real local housing need. Our homes often have a big impact on local village life too, helping to keep families together and local amenities open."

Ryan Fuller, whose role was Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning and Economic Development at Huntingdonshire District Council at the time of opening echoed this;

"So often we see housing schemes developed with no real community involvement so for me to support a scheme like this is extremely important. We would like to see 500 new homes being built similar to this across Huntingdonshire. I commend Colne Parish Council for being brave and leading the way. It is not often that you get truly local homes for local people."



Key learning points

Affordable homes are about more than houses for those in need: Affordable homes prioritised for people with a connection to the parish can help to sustain the community. Retaining young families in the village can be the difference between local services surviving or closing.

Public consultations are key to getting the community on board. Showcasing the scheme to the community whether through presentations, newsletter, questionnaires or public forums allows residents to ask questions and speak their views. The aspect of transparency this provides means it is much more likely to gain public support for an affordable housing development.

Mixed schemes do not take away from the benefits of rural exception schemes: Reductions in government grant are likely to push Housing Associations into looking for alternative ways of addressing the funding gap. Mixed schemes which integrate affordable rental properties with shared ownership and outright market sale properties will become more frequent.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all partners, particularly Hastoe Housing Association for supplying photographs and other inputs and also to Huntingdonshire District Council for advice and input.

The Cambridgeshire Rural Affordable Housing Partnership

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Case Study: Rural Affordable Housing development in Fordham

Summary

Rule Gardens is a development of 32 homes including rental, shared ownership and outright sale properties. The scheme has a specific focus on supporting the sustainability of Fordham by prioritising people who live or work in the village. The site lies on the edge of Fordham village and those properties deemed to be outside of the village envelope - 22 in total - had a local connection criteria attached as part of the section 106 agreement.



Photo 1 - Rule Gardens

Key statistics

No of properties:	32 including 23 for rent, 6 shared ownership and 3 for private sale
Property types:	Rental: 4 x 1 bed flats; 9 x 2 bed houses; 2 x 2 bed bungalows; 6 x 3 bed houses; 2 x 4 bed houses Shared Ownership: 4 x 2 bed houses; 2 x 3 bed houses Private sale: 1 x 2 bed houses; 2 x 3 bed houses
Planning permission granted:	July 2010
Start on site:	February 2011
Completion:	March 2012
Project value:	£668,000 - Land / £3,160,000 - Build
HCA Grant received:	£1,132,500

The community

Fordham is a large village with a population of just under 4,000. It is located 5 miles north of Newmarket. Mildenhall lies about 6 miles to the east and Ely about 9 miles to the north. Easy access to these service centres means that local facilities are limited. The village does have a primary school and a small number of shops and pubs/ restaurants.

Good access to the A14 has also shaped Fordham's development. A number of logistics related employers are based between the village and the nearby junction. Enabling the local workforce to live nearby and hence reduce gross commuting flows was a key objective of East Cambridgeshire District Council in supporting the Rule Gardens scheme. The village also now benefits from a bypass which has reduced through traffic significantly.

Partners

Fordham Parish Council; Hastoe Housing Association; Wincer Kivenaar (Architect); Cocksedge Building Contractors (Contractor); Potter Raper Partnership (Employer's Agent); East Cambridgeshire District Council; Homes and Communities Agency; Cambridgeshire ACRE.

Project History

Hastoe Housing Association was originally approached by a local developer who had secured an option on a site suitable to meet the exception policy to address local housing need.

Before progressing plans further, Cambridgeshire ACRE was commissioned to undertake a Housing Needs Survey. This showed there were potentially 43 households in need of affordable housing within the village. The need was largely for smaller properties but the household composition was mixed including families with young children, young adults seeking their independence and older people looking to downsize into smaller accommodation.

The position of the identified site – part inside and part outside the village boundary – enabled Hastoe to include three open market homes following initial refusal for grant funding. The cross subsidy of the open market homes meant that the grant needed was substantially reduced and the scheme was funded by the Homes and Communities Agency, thus making the scheme economically viable. The houses for sale on the open market were located within the village boundary.



Photo 2 - Rule Gardens (entrance)

Hastoe held a drop-in meeting in January 2010 to show the parish the proposed plans and took details of all interested people. They also showed the plans to the Parish Council. The main concern of the Parish Council was that the school was oversubscribed at the time, but following consultation with the education authority, this concern was resolved.



Photo 3 - Rule Gardens (street scene)

One objective of the scheme design was to minimise the living costs for tenants. This was achieved by building the homes to Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. This meant incorporating solar thermal panels, well insulated walls, gas central heating and a range of water saving devices.

Another objective for East Cambridgeshire District Council was the improved economic sustainability of Fordham. The village experiences a significant level of out-commuting. However, more unusually for a rural area, the parish also experiences a high level of in-commuting driven by the logistics businesses, such as Turners, that have congregated near to the A14 junction just south of the village. Therefore in applying a local connection criteria to the homes outside of the village envelope, an employment connection was given equal weight to a residential connection.

In total, 20 out of 23 rented properties had a local connection criteria applied although in practice 22 were let to people with a local connection such as the demand. Eleven were let to people who lived in the village, five to people who worked in the village, one to a person with a close family connection to the village and five to people who

live in Soham (the adjacent parish). Although many applicants were left disappointed some of these were able to access other properties in the village vacated by successful applicants.



Photo 4 - Rule Gardens and open space

The allocation process was labour intensive and took several weeks with local connections all having to be checked. However, the outcome was clearly successful with one tenant summing up local sentiment, “it was good that they all went to people from the village who already knew each other”.

Celebrating success

Rule Gardens was officially opened on 18 July 2012. Despite the scheme not being completed until May 2012, residents were in place to throw their homes open to the public on the day. In fact, such was the demand for the properties that all the rented properties were occupied by the launch date with many of the properties for sale also occupied with the remainder all having purchasers lined up.



Photo 5 - The opening ceremony

Cllr Tony Parramint, chair of East Cambridgeshire District Council, welcomed residents and guests to the opening. He commented:

“It was a great pleasure to officially open the new housing development at the Rule Gardens, Fordham for Hastoe Housing Association. Over the last few years, we have seen how the housing market in particular has suffered during the recession with many developments being mothballed or stopped altogether. This has made it increasingly difficult for people who are in real need of a home to find somewhere to live. It is therefore heartening to see the completion of these homes in Fordham ready to welcome new families, first time buyers and local people.”

John Lefever, Regional Head of Development for Hastoe East region echoed this view:

“We are thrilled to have been able to build these much-needed new homes for local people, in partnership with the local authority. We are also grateful to the Homes and Communities Agency for the investment that helped make it possible.”

Key learning points

Mixed schemes are likely to become more common place: Reductions in government grant are likely to push Housing Associations into looking for alternative ways of addressing the funding gap. Mixed schemes which integrate affordable rental properties with shared ownership and outright market sale properties will become more frequent. The new National Planning Policy Framework means that this can now be done outside of the village boundary subject to Local Authorities’ own planning policies.

Affordable homes are about more than houses for those in need: Affordable homes prioritised for people with a connection to the parish can help to sustain the community. Retaining young families in the village can be the difference between local services surviving or closing. And enabling the local workforce to live locally can provide a real boost to local spending power.

Engaging employers is key to improving links between local employment and housing: Some villages have a significant employment base, perhaps the result of natural resources, location or even some historical quirk. However, the related housing needs can only be addressed if they are captured through the Housing Needs Survey, and ultimately, the Housing Register.

Implementing locally tailored approaches to affordable housing requires good quality intelligence: Reliable information from both the Housing Needs Survey and the Housing Register are fundamental to designing a scheme that genuinely addresses local need. However, good quality management information systems are also needed to ensure local connections can be corroborated and that the allocation system is seen to work fairly for all.

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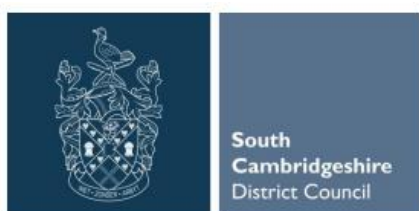
Case Study: Rural Affordable Housing development in Foxton



Summary

Chalk Hill is a development of 15 affordable homes on the edge of Foxton village. The sensitive location, facing onto green belt land, presented some design challenges. However, strong partnership working between the design team and South Cambridgeshire DC resulted in a scheme which won the regional LABC Building Excellence Award for 'Best Social or Affordable New Housing Development'.

The scheme has been developed and managed by South Cambridgeshire DC, a partner in the Cambridgeshire Rural Affordable Housing Partnership. This is the second rural exception site development for new council owned homes as part of South Cambridgeshire DC's new build programme.



Key Partners

- South Cambridgeshire District Council
- The Design Partnership
- Foxton Parish Council
- Burmor Construction
- Landowner
- Cambridgeshire ACRE

The community

Foxton is home to about 1,300 people and 500 houses. The village is situated on the southern side of the A10 midway between Cambridge and Royston. There is a train station on the Cambridge-London line at the northern edge of the village.

Foxton is classified as a 'Group Village' in the South Cambridgeshire Local plan reflecting the limited range of services available. The Local Plan restricts housing development to 8 dwellings within the village envelope or 15 dwellings on a single brownfield site in group villages.

Key statistics

No of properties:	15 affordable homes
Property types:	4 x 1 bed houses 6 x 2 bed houses 5 x 3 bed houses
Tenure type:	All for Affordable Rent (capped at LHA rate)
Planning permission granted:	July 2015
Start on site:	January 2016
Completion:	January 2017
Project value:	£2,397,530
Right To Buy receipts	£719,259

Project history

A Housing Needs Survey was undertaken by Cambridgeshire ACRE in 2009. This identified 12 households with a potential need for affordable housing and a local connection to Foxton. However, by the time the scheme was being considered at planning committee the level of need, based on the Housing Register, had risen to 18.

A range of sites for a rural exception scheme were considered. Pre-application advice from the planning department and discussions with Foxton Parish Council concluded that this site on land adjacent to Hill Farm, Fowlmere Road was the optimum site.



The site viewed from Hill Farm

The chosen site is at the southern end of the village on the western side of Fowlmere Road. The site is separated from the village framework by Hill Farm, a working farm which was not available for development. Opposite the site, on the eastern side of Fowlmere Road, is agricultural land within the Green Belt. The southern and western boundaries also face onto agricultural land.

The site is well related to the village with key services – village shop, primary school, church and recreation ground – all within 1km.

There was a concern that planning consent for use of land to the north of the site, within the same ownership, for the parking of up to four lorries and associated trailers, would have a negative impact on residential amenity. However, assurances were received that the consent was

no longer in operation and the Environmental Health Officer confirmed that existing farm uses would not cause undue disturbance. This did cause some delays but was clearly an important step in ensuring a high-quality living environment.



The entrance to the scheme

The scheme design underwent several iterations as discussions with the planning officer and urban design officer progressed. The aim of the scheme was to create an extension to the village that is sympathetic to, and in character with, its surroundings.



Sketch scheme 5 was submitted for formal pre-application

A public event was held to share the initial designs and a further session was held prior to commencement where local residents could find out more about the scheme and how they or their family could apply for tenancies.

Key changes to the scheme included:

- a more linear layout and moving the local area of play (LAP) to a more central position;
- at the southern end of the site the plots were turned to be perpendicular to Fowlmere Road to create a more prominent edge to the scheme. Four of these dwellings were incorporated into a barn like design;

- plots nearest to Fowlmere Road were brought forward and parking re-arranged to create a stronger building line and more active street scene;
- extra landscaping was introduced to soften the scheme into its surroundings and provide buffers between garden boundaries and Fowlmere Road. New trees were planted throughout the site;
- a new footpath was constructed from the site access to adjoin the end of Hillfield. This allowed safe pedestrian access into the village centre; and
- the scheme access was moved providing a new access into Hill Farm, designed so that farm traffic did not affect the road surface or pose risks to the residents.



A range of finishes were used

The boundary fencing and landscaping were the first completed parts of the scheme which meant that the scheme had a ‘settled’ feel by the time residents moved in.

Tony Welland, a Director with The Design Partnership, was adamant that the use of the ‘Project Partnering Contract’ process played a key role in driving quality. This contrasted with the usual ‘Design & Build’ approach by locking in design standards and materials and capping the budget. Any budget savings are shared by the builder and client. Chalk Hill was delivered on time, to a high-quality specification and £55,000 under budget.

Nine out of the 15 homes were let to households with a local connection to Foxton. The remainder went to households with a local connection to nearby villages (mainly Shepreth) through the cascade system. This relatively low occupancy by local people was due to the size mix of the houses. All 1-bed houses and all but one 2-bed houses were let to local households. A cascade was used out to surrounding villages for the 3-bed houses. This was due to changes in the allocations policy as a result of the government welfare reform legislation (‘under-occupancy’ rules).

Looking forward

The success of this scheme has encouraged the Parish Council to look for sites for a further rural exception scheme. The emerging Foxton Neighbourhood Plan contains a strong policy on supporting rural exception schemes where such schemes can demonstrate they are meeting local



The final site plan

Negotiations were still on-going when the scheme went to planning committee. In fact, the Parish Council, despite finding ‘the scheme and house design very satisfactory’ objected as it felt a number of details had still not been addressed fully. However, revised plans largely sorted these. For example, the new footpath was confirmed, parking spaces re-arranged and the roads built to adoptable standards.

The final scheme comprised 4x1 bed houses; 6x2 bed houses and 5x3 bed houses. All properties have been let at an Affordable Rent but capped at the LHA rate. The scheme can justly claim to have been completed to a very high finish. The houses were built to achieve Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. Photovoltaic panels were avoided to improve their appearance but air source heat pumps were used which also reduced heating costs for tenants.

needs and are acceptable in terms of their environmental impact.

Celebrating success

Many local residents were able to benefit from the scheme. One good example is a man with disabilities who had lived in the village for over 30 years when he moved not his new home in Chalk Hill. He still lives with health issues but his new council home has allowed him to live independently in a community he knows, with supportive family close by.



A 'barn-style' building incorporating 4x1 bed houses

Key learning points

Consultation and design are part of an iterative process. The fundamentals of the scheme have changed little since inception but many minor changes have made a significant cumulative impact on the final scheme quality.

A local landowner with a vested interest in the community has different motivations to an institutional landowner. In this case the landowner looks out over the scheme from his window.

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Case Study: Rural Affordable Housing development in Landbeach



Summary

Walnut Close is a small development of eight affordable homes and two homes for sale on the open market. The affordable homes were all occupied by local people and offered a choice of rental or shared ownership options. The development integrates well into the village and has achieved a number of design standards.

Key statistics

No of properties:	8 affordable homes (plus 2 homes for private sale)
Property types:	5 x 2 bed houses; 3 x 3 bed houses
Tenure type (affordable homes):	5 for Social Rent 3 for Shared Ownership
Planning permission granted:	August 2010
Start on site:	January 2011
Completion:	November 2011
Project value:	£1,27 million
HCA Grant received:	£189,000

The community

Landbeach is a small, tranquil village situated three miles north of Cambridge. It lies just to the west of the A10. A population of about 840 is spread across 380 dwellings. There are a number of active community groups in the village but more formal services such as schools and shops are accessed in neighbouring villages.

Partners

Landbeach Parish Council; Hundred Houses Society; Icen Homes; Hill Residential; Cambridgeshire County Council; South Cambridgeshire District Council; Homes and Communities Agency; Cambridgeshire ACRE.

Project history

A potential site for affordable housing was made available by Cambridgeshire County Council. The land was deemed surplus to requirements by the County Farms Estate. The original farmhouse was in use as temporary social housing. However the building was in a poor state of repair and refurbishment was uneconomic.



Photo 1 - derelict farmland at Landbeach

Cambridgeshire ACRE undertook a Housing Needs Survey in 2009. This revealed strong support for the idea of a small affordable homes development (64% in favour and only 8% opposed). It also identified eighteen local households in need of affordable housing. The Housing Needs Survey played a key role in helping Icen to attract a private developer partner by proving the need for both affordable and private housing.

Part of the site was assessed to be within the village boundary and part outside of it. This enabled the scheme to include two private market houses on the land within the village boundary. The precise shape of the village boundary can be critical to identifying an exception site. Sites need to be outside the boundary to avoid attracting residential value but, ideally, adjacent to the boundary to minimise any potential impact. Boundaries are normally defined in the local plan proposals map.

A number of factors combined to ensure the scheme was economically viable:

- sale of two homes on the open market;
- award of HCA grant;
- shift from 'social' to 'affordable' rent;
- revenue generated from shared ownership sales.

This favourable mix also enabled improvements to the design quality.

The community, through the Parish Council, had an important role to play in shaping the scheme design. The initial application was refused. However, a second revised application with support from the Parish Council was approved in August 2010.

An increased focus on community engagement and design improvements were key success criteria. The scheme introduced a 'farmyard style' design reflecting the site's former use.



Photo 2 - Walnut Close built in farmyard style



Photo 3 - 4 Walnut Close (shared ownership property)



Photo 4 - 8 Walnut Close (shared ownership property)

After a successful launch in November 2011 the properties were occupied by local people in early 2012. In fact, all eight affordable homes were occupied by people with a local connection to Landbeach.

Celebrating success

The official unveiling of Walnut Close by Andie Harper, a BBC Radio Cambridgeshire presenter, marked the culmination of a huge partnership effort. Within months of this event the housing scheme had been fully occupied. However, this only marks the start of the scheme's contribution to Landbeach.

If the design awards and standards already achieved are an indication, Walnut Close will be helping to sustain the Landbeach community for

many years to come. The homes were constructed to Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes with 10% renewables. All the homes incorporate photovoltaic panels on their roofs. The scheme was also built to Secured by Design standards and achieved 'Silver' in the Building for Life standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods. It has scored beyond compliance level in the Considerate Contractors scheme.

Voice from the community

"We are very pleased to have achieved more affordable housing for the village and are delighted to see this scheme come to fruition."

Melanie Hale, Chairman, Landbeach Parish Council

"This development is just what is needed to keep villages such as Landbeach alive and sustainable." *Andie Harper, BBC Radio Cambridgeshire presenter*

"I am very proud to be part of the team that has helped push forward these plans as it will allow so many people with a Landbeach connection to realise their dream of living in a home within the village." *James Hockney, South Cambridgeshire District Council's local member for Landbeach*

"All of this work has been done by voluntary organisations working together with the Homes & Communities Agency, local authorities and parish councils to bring about community benefit." *Chris Jackson, Chief Executive of Hundred Houses*



Photo 5 - Andie Harper cutting the ribbon at the official unveiling of Walnut Close



Photo 6 - Good sized gardens at Walnut Close will allow space for families to grow and play

Key learning points

Cutting corners reduces quality not timescales: Building affordable homes in rural communities can take a long time. However tempting it is to cut corners, fully engaging the community in all stages of the process is critical to a successful and high-quality outcome.

Realistic expectations from all partners drive economic viability: Rural exception sites by definition attract a relatively low land value. Therefore it is important that all partners have realistic expectations about the scheme. Rural exception sites deliver affordable housing for local people. They don't deliver significant 'extras' for the community or large profits for the landowner.

Private market housing can improve economic viability of scheme: the granting of planning permission for two 4 bed houses as part of the scheme played a key role in making the development economically viable.

Build to meet 'need' not 'wishes': Exception sites are developed to specifically address proven local need. Failure to stick to this principle risks failure to achieve 100% occupancy from local people. Walnut Close did achieve this but it was harder to fulfil with regard to the shared ownership properties. Accessing mortgage finance in the current climate can be difficult.

Acknowledgements

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Case Study: Local lettings policies and rural exception sites



The Glebe, Offord Cluny

Summary

Local lettings policies work. Local lettings policies are applied to rural exception sites to ensure that affordable homes are prioritised for local people. This case study demonstrates that the vast majority of homes built on rural exception sites are allocated to people with a local connection to the parish, or in the worst case, a neighbouring community. And these proportions increase over time as local households are even more likely to secure these properties when they are re-let. However, careful planning and consultation with the local community is required to ensure these benefits are maximised.

Introduction

This case study looks at the effectiveness of local lettings policies in enabling rural exception sites to deliver affordable homes for local people in rural communities. Lettings data has been collected from three exception sites to assess how many homes on rural exception sites are allocated to local people. The results were analysed by type, size and tenure of property as well as by initial and subsequent re-lets.

Local lettings policies

A key feature of rural exception sites is the use of a local lettings policy to ensure affordable homes are allocated to households with a strong local connection to the parish in which they are built. In Cambridgeshire and Peterborough most

affordable homes are allocated through a Choice Based Lettings System.

Under this system all Housing Register applicants are assessed and allocated to a Band according to their level of need. In Cambridgeshire, those deemed to be in greatest need are allocated to Band A with lower levels of need in Bands B, C and D respectively. Peterborough uses a similar Band 1-5 system. Households on the Housing Register 'bid' for properties as they become available and the property is allocated to the applicant on the highest Band. If applicants are on the same Band, the property is allocated to the applicant who has been on the Band for the longest period of time. This is regarded as a fair system as it ensures that affordable homes are allocated to those deemed to be in greatest need. In practice, the shortage of affordable homes means that few homes are allocated to applicants lower than Band B.



Grace Crescent, Hardwick

However, if this system has an Achilles' heel it is its application in rural communities. There is an acute shortage of affordable homes in rural communities as few have been built in recent decades and many have been sold through the Right to Buy legislation. Affordable housing in villages is often characterised by low turnover and high levels of bids. Village residents are regularly outbid by households elsewhere in the district assessed as being in a higher priority.

A local lettings policy enables people with a local connection to a parish to be prioritised over other applicants regardless of need. If there is no suitable applicant from the parish then a cascade approach prioritises applicants from adjoining parishes before applicants from elsewhere in the District are considered. This should rarely happen as rural exception sites are designed to address specific local need rather than be speculative developments. This approach benefits both families, who are able to stay close to relatives and social networks, and rural communities who benefit from retaining people with deep seated ties and commitments to their village.

The precise definition of a local connection can vary from one local planning authority to another and even from one s106 agreement to another. However, it will generally require an applicant to live in a parish (or to have lived there previously for a substantial period of time), to have family in the parish (parents, siblings or children) or to work in the village (full-time, permanent employment). Incorporating a local lettings policy within a s106 agreement will always be a requirement when planning permission is granted.

The schemes

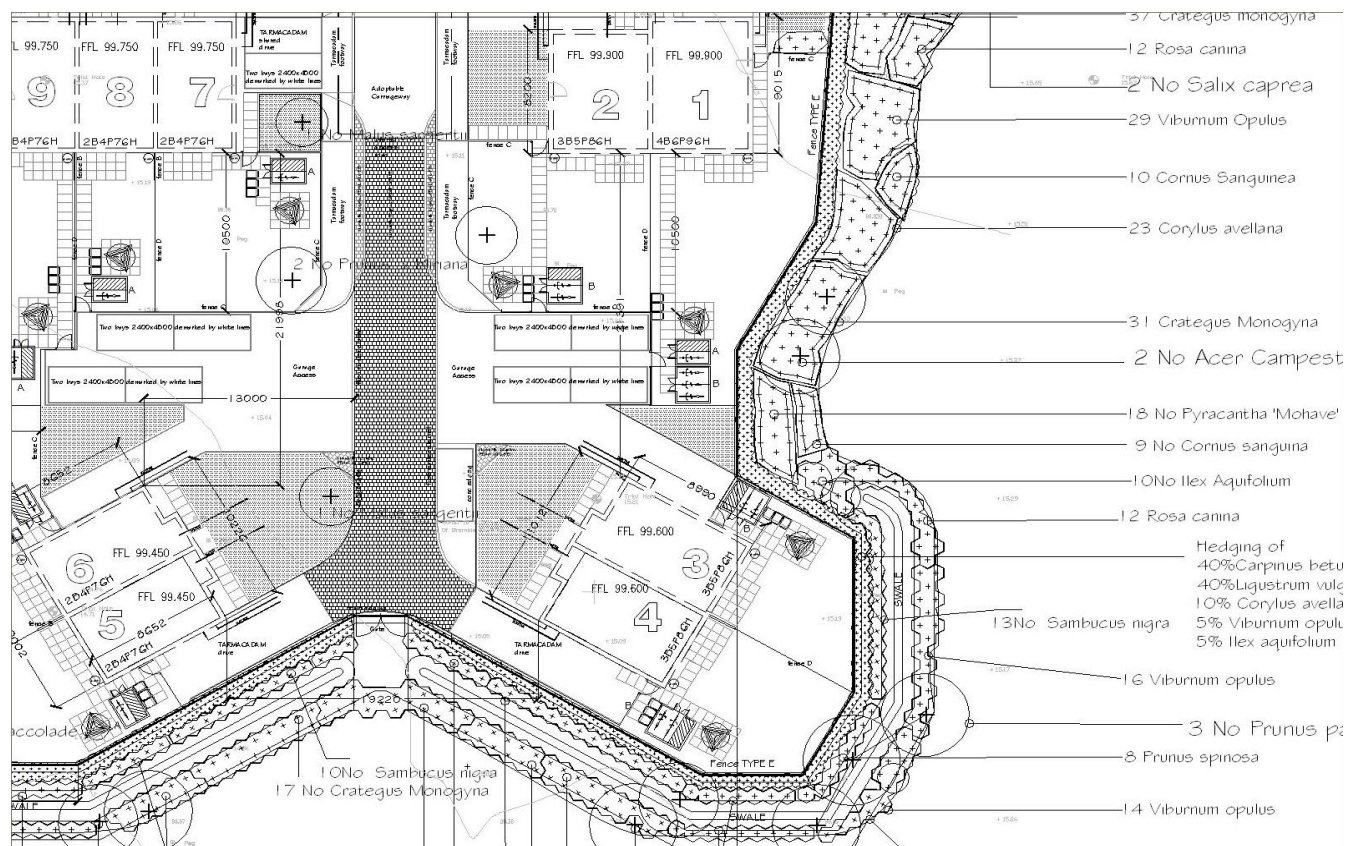
The three schemes used in this case study were selected as they are located in different districts, are managed by different Housing Associations and are of different scales. They were all first occupied in 2008/9. This provides sufficient time to have lapsed to analyse the effect of the local letting policy on re-lets.

In total, the three exception sites comprise 57 properties. There are 37 houses, 6 bungalows and 14 flats. The majority are small with only three properties larger than three bedrooms. Tenure is divided between 43 rented and 14 shared ownership properties.

The Glebe, Offord Cluny

The Glebe in Offord Cluny is the smallest of the three schemes selected, comprising nine dwellings. It was developed by Muir Group in 2008. All properties were occupied by October 2009. Offord Cluny is a small village in the Great Ouse valley, to the east of the A1 and between Huntingdon and St Neots. The village lies immediately to the north of a similar village, Offord D'Arcy. In 2008 the villages merged into a single parish with a combined Parish Council.

Case Study: Local lettings policies and rural exception sites



Site plan, The Glebe, Offord Cluny

Table 1 – Key statistics for the schemes

Scheme	The Glebe	Cornfields	Hardwick	All schemes
Parish	Offord Cluny	Burwell	Grace Crescent	
Local Authority	Huntingdonshire	East	South	
Housing Association	Muir Group	Cambridgeshire	Cambridgeshire	
		Hastoe	Hundred Houses	
			Society	
Dwellings	9	20	28	57
Bedrooms -1	-	6	10	16
2	4	10	9	23
3	4	4	7	15
4	1	-	1	2
5	-	-	1	1
Type - House	9	14	14	37
Bungalow	-	-	6	6
Flat	-	6	8	14
Tenure - Rental	7	16	20	43
Shared-ownership	2	4	8	14

This reflects the increasing integration of the villages. Between them they offer a good range of services including two churches, two pubs, a primary school and a range of other local businesses and amenities. The Glebe is situated on the eastern edge of Offord Cluny forming a small cul-de-sac off New Road. The scheme included one 4-bed house, four 3-bed houses and four 2-bed houses. All nine were let to households with a local connection to Offord Cluny. Unusually six households actually moved back into the village through family connections. Two households had an employment connection and only one household qualified through a residential connection (and they also had family in the parish). Only one dwelling has been re-let. This was also allocated to a household with a family connection to the parish.

Cornfields, Burwell

Cornfields is actually the third phase of a rural exception site developed by Hastoe Housing Association in Burwell. The original scheme, Barkways, was developed in two phases – totalling 19 dwellings in 1995 and 1997. Cornfields added a further 20 dwellings in 2008. The site lies on the south-eastern perimeter of the village, off the B1103 Newmarket Road. This most recent phase included six 1-bed flats and four 2-bed shared ownership houses. The

remainder were a mix of 2-bed and 3-bed properties for social rent.

Burwell is a relatively large village with a population of over 6,000. Burwell lies in East Cambridgeshire close to the intersection of the A142 and A14 and within commuting distance of Newmarket, Ely and Cambridge. There has been significant growth over the last 10 years with the addition of over 200 new dwellings. Burwell's scale means that it is able to sustain a broad range of services including a primary school, a variety of shops, medical facilities, financial services and pubs.

All 20 dwellings in Cornfields were let to households with a local connection to Burwell. One household was connected through family whilst the remainder lived in the parish. (One household had previously lived in the parish and still worked there) The dwellings were originally occupied in February 2008. Seven properties have subsequently been vacated and re-let. Again, all have been occupied by people living, or in one case working, in the parish. Only one shared ownership property has been re-let, which proportionately, is a lower share than experienced in the rented housing.



Cornfields, Burwell – 2008 and 2014



Case Study: Local lettings policies and rural exception sites



Grace Crescent, Hardwick

Grace Crescent is the largest of the three schemes at 28 dwellings. It was developed by Hundred Houses Society in Hardwick. The scale of the scheme is in keeping with the scale of Hardwick, a relatively large village with a population of 2,700. Hardwick's affordable housing stock is still only about half the national average. Hardwick lies to the south of the A428 midway between Cambridge and Cambourne. It still retains a shop/ post-office, pub and primary school.

The Grace Crescent scheme is characterised by a stronger focus on 1 bedroom properties. Ten of the 28 properties were 1-bed. The scheme was also the only scheme to include bungalows and

had the highest proportion of shared ownership properties (29 per cent). Most of the rented properties were initially occupied in May 2008 with the shared ownership properties a little later at varying points through the rest of the year.

"Not only are housing associations helping local people to continue to live in the same area as their friends and family, but they are helping to preserve the economic viability of rural communities by ensuring continued demand for key services such as shops, schools, post offices and pubs."

Chris Jackson, Chief Executive, Hundred Houses Society

Table 2- Local connections and turnover

Property	Number	No local connection at first let	%	Properties that have been re-let	%
Bedrooms -1	16	2	13	7	44
2	23	5	22	4	17
3	15	2	13	1	7
4	2	-	-	-	-
5	1	-	-	1	100
Type - House	37	4	11	6	16
Bungalow	6	4	67	1	17
Flat	14	1	7	6	43
Tenure - Rental	43	6	14	11	26
Shared-ownership	14	3	21	2	14
Total	57	9	16	13	23

Nineteen of the 28 properties were let to households with a local connection to Hardwick – mainly through residence. A further four were let to households with a connection to a neighbouring parish through the cascade policy. Of the five remaining all bar one had close family living in nearby villages. Four properties have subsequently been re-let. Three of these were let to households with a local connection to the parish. The only property that could not be let to a local household was a 5-bed property which had been built for a specific family. It is perhaps not

surprising there was not another local family needing such a large house when it became available again.

The Grace Crescent scheme also revealed a potential issue concerning bungalows. Four of the nine properties not let to local households were bungalows (and there were only six bungalows in the total sample). All of these were eventually let to older people looking to move closer to their children or moving from a neighbouring parish.

Case Study: Local lettings policies and rural exception sites



Site plan of Grace Crescent showing the different house designs

Key issues

Three rural exception sites is a small sample from which to draw definitive conclusions. However, the purpose of this case study is simply to highlight potential trends and issues. The following findings can all be drawn from the case study and provide useful insight for those considering developing rural exception site schemes in the future.

Local lettings policies work!

Nearly nine out of ten dwellings were let to households with a local connection to the parish. Half of the remainder were allocated through the cascade approach to households with a connection to a neighbouring parish. Others were allocated to households with connections to other nearby villages. Only one out of 67 dwellings was let to a household with no known connection to the parish or nearby communities.



Muir Group receiving their 'Highly Commended' for The Glebe in the Social Housing Development of the Year 2008 category, LABC awards

The bigger the scheme, the harder to let to local people

The only scheme assessed that did not fully let its dwellings to local people was the largest. Finding 28 households with a local connection all wanting to move at the same time can be a challenge even in a large village. However, the flipside is that larger schemes can help more families. In Grace

Crescent one household with no known connection to the area was arguably a price worth paying for the life changing opportunity afforded to 19 Hardwick families and eight other families connected to close by communities.

Local lettings benefits increase over time

Local lettings policies do not just apply to the first let, they remain in force for the life span of the dwelling. Once the initial letting has been completed properties will become available much less frequently as dictated by the rate of turnover – often low in rural communities where affordable housing is scarce. All of the properties in this case study were originally occupied in 2008/9. Thirteen had subsequently been re-let by the end of 2013. Only one of these was not occupied by a local household – an untypical 5-bed house. Hence, the success rate of local lettings policies actually increases over time.

The Welfare Reform driven push for 1 bed properties needs to be monitored

Seven out of 13 re-let dwellings (54 per cent) were 1-bed properties despite these only accounting for 22 per cent of the dwellings in the case study. This higher level of turnover is perhaps not surprising given households are more likely to outgrow a 1-bed property. No information is available concerning where these households moved to but it is unlikely that many were able to relocate within their parish given the scarcity of affordable homes.

Local tenants for shared ownership properties may be harder to find but they stay longer

From our limited evidence there appears to be a greater chance of failing to find a local tenant for shared ownership properties than rental properties. However, once in situ shared ownership tenants tend to be less likely to leave. Low turnover is not explained by the low levels of 1-bed shared ownership properties as the phenomenon is also evident across larger properties.

Understanding local need is about more than numbers

There is no such thing as a standard household and there is no such thing as a standard house. Each household has its own unique circumstances and needs. Therefore building the right number of houses is no guarantee that they will all be taken up by local people. They also need to be the right type of houses in terms of scale, tenure and form. This study highlighted a particular challenge in letting bungalows but this is likely to vary from scheme to scheme. The Housing Needs Survey should be considered the starting point for a discussion with partners rather than the final answer.

May 2014

Acknowledgements

Cambridgeshire ACRE would like to thank all partners who supported this case study: East Cambridgeshire District Council; Hastoe Housing Association; Hundred Houses Society; Huntingdonshire District Council; Muir Group; and South Cambridgeshire District Council.

The Cambridgeshire Rural Affordable Housing Partnership

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Case Study: Rural Affordable Housing development in Swavesey



Summary

Home Close is a development of 20 houses on the outskirts of the village on the north side of Fen Drayton Road.

The scheme is owned by South Cambridgeshire District Council and was built as part of the council's New Build Strategy. It was completed as the council's first exception site.

South Cambridgeshire DC worked closely with Swavesey Parish Council throughout the development of the scheme.

The site was subject to an ecology survey which resulted in a Newt habitat being constructed.

The Housing Needs Survey identified 69 households in potential need of affordable housing in Swavesey. The survey also identified support for the principle of affordable housing for local people. Fifty-seven per cent were in favour and 18 per cent opposed.

Project Information

No of properties:	20 for affordable rent
Property types:	Rental; 4 x 1 bed houses, 10 x 2 bed houses, 5 x 3 bed houses and 1 x 4 bed house
Housing needs survey completed	March 2009
Planning permission granted:	December 2014
Start on site:	August 2015
Completion:	May 2016



The community

Swavesey has a population of around 2,700. Facilities in the village include a primary and secondary school, doctors surgery, library, village hall, convenience stores and two churches.

Partners

- South Cambridgeshire District Council
- Swavesey Parish Council
- Cambridgeshire ACRE

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Case Study: Rural Affordable Housing development in Whittlesford



Summary

Newton Road is a small development of eight affordable homes on the outskirts of Whittlesford village. Its green belt location caused some issues. However, strong community engagement in the design process helped to remove barriers. The final scheme was inundated with applications from prospective tenants and all properties were let or sold to people with a local connection to the parish.

The scheme has been developed and managed, by CHS Group, a partner in the Cambridgeshire Rural Affordable Housing Partnership.



Key Partners

- CHS Group
- The Design Partnership
- Whittlesford Parish Council
- Cocksedge Building Contractors
- Landowner
- South Cambridgeshire District Council
- Cambridgeshire ACRE

The community

Whittlesford is a large village in South Cambridgeshire, about six miles due south of Cambridge. The village has direct access to the A505, and via this, the M11 and A11. Whittlesford parkway train station is a 20 minute walk from the village centre.

A community of 1,600 people live in nearly 700 homes. The village is well served with a primary school, shop-cum-post office and choice of pubs. The village also benefits from a well-used Memorial Hall and recreation ground. The parish includes Whittlesford Bridge and a small part of Heathfield village to the west of the M11.

Project history

A Housing Needs Survey was undertaken by Cambridgeshire ACRE in 2010. However, initially there was little success in finding a suitable site for a rural exception scheme.

Key statistics

No of properties:	8 affordable homes
Property types:	2 x 1 bed houses 4 x 2 bed houses 2 x 3 bed houses
Tenure type (affordable homes):	5 for Social Rent 3 for Shared Ownership
Planning permission granted:	February 2015
Start on site:	April 2015
Completion:	March 2016
Project value:	£1,170,000
Recycled Capital Grant Fund:	£170,000

Eventually, a landowner based in Suffolk offered a small site on Newton Road. The landowner had inherited the site from a former resident of the village. The site had been subject to a number of unsuccessful planning applications for market housing dating back to 1964.

The site comprised an overgrown copse with self-set trees and bushes which was backed onto by an informal play area. It was subject to fly tipping of builders rubble and grass clippings and low level anti-social behaviour issues. The site was a management burden for a landowner not based in the vicinity.



View from inside the site following clearing necessary for a site survey

The initial response from the local planning officer was not encouraging as the site is some way outside of the village envelope and within the greenbelt. However, whilst the Parish Council were resistant to market housing in the greenbelt, they did see potential in the site to deliver affordable housing for local people and were keen to hear the views of the local community.

The resulting community consultation generated a much more positive response as local people were keen to see an unkempt site better utilised for affordable housing. However, this did not overcome the greenbelt issue – rural exception schemes should only be permitted in the greenbelt where it can be demonstrated no alternative sites are available.

CHS undertook a sequential test which identified a further four 'white land' sites closer to the village. However, landowners were not prepared to sell at exception site values (well below the

rate for market housing). This did delay the project several months.



One of several earlier proposals for the scheme

Ongoing consultation at the pre-application stage resulted in substantive changes to the design. The scheme changed from a cul-de-sac layout to a linear design which better fitted the local street pattern. A softer finish to the access roadway and hedging to the rear and side boundary were also introduced.



The final scheme layout showing a continuous frontage and parking to the rear

The changes seem to have been appreciated judging by one unprompted response from a subsequent Whittlesford Housing Needs Survey undertaken in 2017,

'Our view is that the recent development in Newton Road has been very successful and enhances the appearance of the road.'

Some overground cables were moved underground and part of the footpath linking the scheme with the village centre was improved. The

need for on site public open space was addressed by improving the adjoining informal play area. Section 106 funds from the scheme were used to invest in more formal play facilities which are now maintained by the Parish Council.

The change in design did lead to a small reduction in scale which was unfortunate as the Housing Needs Survey had identified affordable housing need from 60 households with a local connection to Whittlesford.

The final scheme included a mix of 1 and 2 bedroom Social Rent properties and 2 and 3 bedroom shared ownership properties. The scheme allows for two parking spaces for each dwelling and generous gardens, all a minimum of 10 metres deep.



An example of a back garden

Materials were chosen to reflect the character of nearby dwellings. Separation distances at adopted standards together with the overall layout have minimised the impact on adjoining properties. Roof slopes were positioned to make best use of solar panel roof tiles.

Looking forward

The project has demonstrated that even in villages tightly bounded by green belt it is possible to deliver affordable housing for local people.

The Parish Council have subsequently moved onto preparing a Neighbourhood Plan so that they can address local land use issues in a more holistic manner.

CHS agreed to undertake a new Housing Needs Survey to update the evidence base on local

housing need. This survey, undertaken in February 2017, confirmed that substantial need remains. The survey found 41 households with a local connection to Whittlesford parish in need of affordable housing.

The search for another potential rural exception site continues with the support of the Parish Council.

Celebrating success

Perhaps the best indication of success is that the Parish Council remain keen to find more sites to support affordable housing for local people.

The scheme met a number of design standards. It was designed to meet Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes by using high levels of insulation, solar panels and energy efficient gas boilers. All dwellings were constructed to meet the full 16 criteria set out under the Lifetime Homes Standard. The scheme achieved Secured By Design accreditation.

Not surprisingly, given the scale of need, the properties were heavily bid for. All properties were let or sold to households with a local connection to Whittlesford parish. The shared ownership properties were all sold on a 50 per cent basis.

Key learning points

The greenbelt should not be seen as an insurmountable barrier. Good design can actually improve sites, in this case an overgrown copse, within the greenbelt. (Greenbelt policy is a strategic planning tool to control development and does not imply any intrinsic environmental quality to the area covered.) The site selection process may take longer but a sequential test, required on greenbelt sites, is a useful exercise in reviewing site options.



The scheme from the front, facing onto Whittlesford Road

Community support played a key role in bringing this scheme forward. The Parish Council recognized the village had an affordability issue and helped to engage the wider community in site discussions. The support of both the Parish Council and the local community was influential in persuading the local planning authority to accept a site that, at first glance, was not ideal.

A willing landowner is a prerequisite. Rural exception land values fall between agricultural and residential land values. The price strikes a balance between attracting landowners and ensuring schemes remain viable whilst achieving high design standards. Further efforts to incentivise landowners may help but fundamentally a landowner with realistic expectations and a degree of philanthropy will always offer the best chance of success.

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Case Study: Rural affordable housing development in Wicken

Summary

Hawes Lane is a rural exception site development off Stretham Road of 16 affordable homes, 11 affordable rent and 5 shared ownership homes.

The homes were designed in a traditional style with a mix of materials and details that are sympathetic to the character of the village and neighbouring homes. The homes were also built with air source heat pumps allowing their environmental footprint to be reduced.

The scheme has been developed and managed by Cambridge Housing Society (CHS), a partner in the Cambridgeshire Rural Affordable Housing Partnership at the time of completion.

Key statistics

No of properties:	16 including 11 for affordable rent and 5 shared ownership
Property types:	Rental: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 6 x 2 bed houses• 2 x 2 bed bungalows• 3 x 3 bed houses Shared Ownership: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 x 2 bed houses• 3 x 3 bed houses
Planning permission granted:	November 2019
Start on site:	January 2020
Completion:	May 2022
Funding received:	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority: £640,000



Photo 1 Hawes Lane Rural Exception Site

The community

Wicken is a small parish with a population of approximately 850. It is located five miles south of Ely on the edge of the fens near Soham.

Wicken has a church, village hall and a pub but there are limited local facilities outside of this. Residents have to travel to surrounding areas to access most services but the proximity of the market town of Soham helps to facilitate this.

Partners

Cambridgeshire ACRE worked with the following partners to bring forward this development: Wicken Parish Council; Cambridge Housing Society; The Design Partnership (Architect); Burmor Construction (Contractors); East Cambridgeshire District Council.

Project history

Cambridgeshire ACRE was commissioned to carry out a housing needs survey in August 2015. This was on behalf of a private developer, East Cambridgeshire District Council and Wicken Parish Council.

The survey showed there were potentially 17 households in need of affordable housing within the village. The need was largely for smaller properties, mainly 2 bedrooms, for households that were primarily families with young children and young adults seeking their independence.

As a result of this identified need, work was undertaken to identify a housing association who would be interested in developing a scheme. CHS was identified as a suitable partner and begun the process of assessing sites within the village to find one suitable the required scheme.

Once a site was identified on Hawes Lane, planning permission was submitted in summer 2019. During the process, some adjustments to the scheme were required but planning permission was granted in November 2019.

Development commenced in early 2020 but was unfortunately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, which slowed development. Despite this, in spring 2022 the development was complete and by mid-June all of the homes were occupied.



Photo 2 Entrance to the development

One feature of the scheme was to minimise carbon emissions of the homes once they were occupied. This has been achieved by installing air source heat pumps in all of the properties.

All the affordable properties had a local connection criterion applied. The allocation process was labour-intensive and took several

weeks with local connections all having to be checked. As a result, all 16 properties were handed over to people who lived in the village or surrounding areas.



Photo 3 Example of the homes built on Hawes Lane

Celebrating success

Dr Nik Johnson, Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, visited the scheme and said *"It is wonderful to see a development like this that is supporting members of its local community and to see so many young families able to actually live in the area that they have a connection to. These projects are essential, and we need to continue working with parish councils to discuss how we can access suitable land for more affordable housing in our towns and villages and encourage greater collaboration between all the organisations involved in designing and building sustainable affordable housing."*

Key learning points

Affordable homes are about more than houses for those in need: Affordable homes prioritised for people with a connection to the parish can help to sustain the community. Retaining young families in the village can be the difference between local services surviving or closing.

Public consultations are key to getting the community on board. Showcasing the scheme to the community, whether through presentations, newsletters, questionnaires or public forums, allows residents to ask questions and give their views.

It is also interesting to see features such as air source heat pumps being included in newer developments. This reduces the reliance on gas and oil that we usually see in rural areas whilst also allowing the homes to have less of a carbon footprint.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all partners involved for their work in bringing forward the homes in Hawes Lane. We especially would like to thank CHS for allowing us to visit the scheme to take photographs.

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Case Study: Rural Affordable Housing development in Willingham



Summary

Daniels End is a development on the northern edge of Willingham, accessed through a previous affordable housing development with good connections to the rest of the village.

The site was originally purchased from a private landowner. The scheme was developed by AJ Lee (Developments) and taken over by Cambridge & County Developments on behalf of the CHS Group.

The scheme had a planning agreement in place to ensure that the properties remain available for affordable rent and shared ownership in perpetuity despite Willingham being too large to be classed a Designated Rural Area.

The planning application was submitted without a Housing Needs Survey. At the time the Housing Register identified 66 households with a local connection to Willingham. The scheme mix was agreed with the Housing Development Officer at South Cambridgeshire District Council. A Housing Needs Survey was undertaken in November 2015. This confirmed that need had grown (82 households).

Project Information

No of properties:	12 including 6 for rent and 6 shared ownership
Property types:	Rental: 2 x 1 bed maisonettes; 4 x 2 bed houses Shared Ownership: 4 x 2 bed houses; 2 x 3 bed houses
Housing needs survey completed	November 2015
Planning permission granted:	January 2016
Start on site:	September 2016
Completion:	March 2017



The community

Willingham is a large village with a population of over 4,000. It has an excellent range of facilities including a primary school and medical practice together with a range of shops, pubs and recreational facilities.

Partners

- Cambridge Housing Society
- South Cambridgeshire District Council
- Cambridge and County Developments
- Willingham Parish Council
- Cambridgeshire ACRE

Contact us

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