Campaign to ‘Save our villages’

Since Autumn 2009, the National Housing Federation has run its Save Our Villages campaign, arguing the case for more affordable homes in rural England. It calls on councils to ensure they have a full understanding of housing need in rural areas.

The campaign has scored a wealth of local and national press coverage. It has the official backing of 46 rural councils, as well as hundreds of MPs and local councillors.

Councills backing the campaign include:

- Allerdale Borough Council
- Ashford Borough Council
- Babergh District Council
- Breckland District Council
- Broadland District Council
- Cornwall Council
- Craven District Council
- Daventry District Council
- Derbyshire Dales District Council
- Durham County Council
- East Hampshire District Council
- East Riding of Yorkshire Council
- Eden District Council
- Fenland District Council
- Forest Heath District Council
- Forest of Dean District Council
- Hambleton District Council
- Horsham District Council
- Isles of Scilly Council
- Melton Borough Council
- New Forest District Council
- North Devon District Council
- North Dorset District Council
- North Kesteven District Council
- North West Leicestershire District Council
- Northumberland Council
- Purbeck District Council
- Rother District Council
- Shropshire Council
- South Cambridgeshire District Council
- South Lakeland District Council
- South Norfolk District Council
- St. Edmundsbury Borough Council
- Tandridge District Council
- Telford and Wrekin Council
- Test Valley Borough Council
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
- Vale of White Horse District Council
- West Dorset District Council
- West Lindsey District Council
- West Oxfordshire District Council
- West Somerset District Council
- Wiltshire Council
- Winchester City Council
- Wychavon District Council

The Rural Pledge

A rural housing pledge, Affordable homes for local people, has been published by the National Housing Federation’s Rural Alliance, a group of more than 40 housing associations building and managing homes in rural areas.

The pledge states housing associations’ commitment to working with local people and providing high quality homes for the benefit of the whole community. The full pledge can be seen at www.housing.org.uk/rural.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. Promote the Rural Pledge in your area.
2. Ensure your council properly assesses rural housing need.
3. Check your local ‘Neighbourhood Plan’ includes affordable rural housing.

Want to know more?

For information about the Save Our Villages campaign, contact William Summers on 020 7067 1031 or at william.summers@housing.org.uk.

For information about the Rural Alliance, contact Sara Cunningham on 020 7067 1078 or at sara.cunningham@housing.org.uk.

More information is also available at www.housing.org.uk/rural.
We need more affordable homes in the countryside, and people living there want them too.

That’s the conclusion of research about what people think of affordable housing in rural areas, undertaken by the National Housing Federation. Opinion polls show that 7 in 10 people (70%) living in rural England say they would support more affordable homes for local people in their own village or market town, with only 21% opposed. Almost half (44%) say they would ‘strongly’ support new affordable homes.

It’s a very different story to that often heard when new homes are proposed, with vocal opposition groups at the forefront of local opinion. But with average house prices in the countryside considerably higher than in towns and cities – despite lower average wages – the need for affordable rural housing is as great as ever. More than 300,000 households in rural England are on council waiting lists for social housing.

Campaigning for affordable homes
The Federation’s Save Our Villages campaign, which gained the backing of half of all rural councils, has called for a better understanding of housing need in rural areas. It made the case that whole communities see the benefit of well-designed affordable homes, which can help sustain local shops and services. 37% of people polled also said they had seen local shops and services decline in their area over the past five years.

1ICM polling of rural residents, June 2010

THREE REASONS
WHY WE NEED MORE AFFORDABLE HOMES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

1 The countryside is no longer affordable for many local people, particularly young families, because of high house prices and low wages.

2 Affordable housing boosts rural economies by sustaining and growing local businesses.

3 Villages and market towns should thrive and prosper all year round, not just at weekends.
Rural economy needs affordable homes

Untapped potential of countryside could be worth billions, according to government report

More affordable homes in the countryside would boost the national economy and create jobs, according to rural housing campaigners.

Rural businesses contribute an estimated £200bn to the national economy each year, 19% of the nation’s total. However, low local wages and a lack of affordable homes mean people who work in the countryside are increasingly priced out of their local village and forced to commute to work.

A report to government in 2008 said that £347bn could be added to the economy if the untapped potential of the countryside was fully utilised, with the lack of affordable housing cited as a key barrier to growth in rural areas.

‘There is a huge potential for growth in the rural economy, but communities need to be supported with more affordable housing for people living and working there,’ said Adrian Maunders, who chairs the Rural Alliance of housing associations.

The National Housing Federation said new homes can help small businesses flourish and grow, providing permanent homes for local workers and their families. ‘Local residents are more likely to be regular users of village services, so it’s important they are able to stay local’, says campaigns officer William Summers.

Hundreds of village pubs and shops have been closing each year, according to figures from retail trade bodies. Additionally, rural England has lost a fifth of its Post Office network since 2000.

Planning reform needed

The Federation also said that planning reforms that enable new affordable homes can help to improve the economic, social and environmental sustainability in rural areas. It argues that whilst planning rightly protects the countryside, it has failed to meet the housing requirements of the people who live and work there.

How new affordable homes are built

1 Housing need is identified by the council
2 If new homes are recommended, the council looks for suitable land
3 An affordable housing developer is chosen by the parish or district council
4 Detailed proposals for new homes are put forward for community consultation
5 Funding is found, possibly with a subsidy from government
6 A planning application is submitted, and if permission is granted building can begin
7 The new homes are allocated based on need and local connections
8 The homes are officially opened and new residents move in

Community shop and post office in Bradfield, Berkshire

2

Defra

Report by Rural Advocate Stuart Burgess
Coming home: Clare’s story

‘It’s not just a problem for the unemployed and low income workers. I should be able to put down roots.’

Office manager Clare Dixon lived in the coastal village of Brancaster Staithe in Norfolk until she moved out of the family home 10 years ago.

With over 50% of properties in the village used as second homes, and two-bedroom houses costing upwards of £200,000, Clare quickly found herself priced out of the area.

Since then, Clare, 30, has moved to several different places, though always with the hope she would one day be able to settle back in her home village. ‘It’s where your heart is,’ said Clare. ‘It’s where you grow up and you know when you walk down the street you can say hello to everybody.’

In October 2010, Clare was invited to a rural housing event in the House of Commons to tell her story to MPs. ‘I wanted to get the point across that this is not just a problem for the unemployed and low income workers. I told them I should be able to put down roots, start a family and put into the community where I want to be’.

Clare also spoke poignantly about the changing face of the village. The village shop had recently shut down after making losses, and has moved into a Portakabin at the back of the local social club. Nobody on local wages could afford to buy a house in the village, she said.

Coming home

In 2011, Hastoe Housing Association built 10 new affordable homes in the village with the backing of the parish council. A year on from going to Westminster, Clare and her builder partner Matt were given the chance to buy into one of the shared ownership properties. They moved in to their new house just in time for Christmas.

‘I feel very lucky and quite relieved to be back home,’ says Clare. ‘Though I know plenty of other people still struggling to get a house around here, just like I was,’ she adds.

Affordable housing doesn’t mean cheap design

Fourteen high spec affordable homes have been provided by Housing Plus in the village of Swindon, South Staffordshire.

They were built exclusively for local people following a community consultation, and designed in keeping with the picturesque rural setting. The architect worked with a conservation officer on the design, modelling homes on traditional local barn conversions and the façade of the village pub.