

What Does Affordable Housing Actually Mean?

Broadly speaking "AH" (Affordable Housing) schemes aim to make homes available to those people on low incomes that cannot afford to buy or rent at market rates.

There are numerous types of "AH" schemes.

Examples are

1. Shared ownership – Part owned usually between a housing association and the tenant.
2. Starter homes- A government initiative to be built on brownfield sites.
3. Rent to buy – for purchasers with low or no deposit.
4. Social Housing- Usually owned by the Local Authority with tenants paying between 60-80% of market value.
5. Affordable Private Rental – Generally rent to be at least 20% of market rates.
6. Intermediate Rental- Primarily used by Housing Associations to rent at no more than 80% of market value.

In new build development the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that a minimum of 10% of homes built on sites of more than 10 dwellings are AH. MSDC policy/local plan requires 30% to be A.H.

Rural Exception Site

The type of A.H. that has been investigated by the Parish Council for a number of years is a Rural Exception site.

A Rural Exception site is a term used by local authority planning departments to grant planning permission on land that would not normally be able to gain planning permission.

The land is sold usually to a H.A. at close to agricultural rates not housing development rates, so significantly reducing the final property cost.

The unique thing about a Rural Exception site is in the first instance the A.H is allocated to those with a connection to the Parish.

A more detailed explanation is provided below:

In the first instance the affordable homes are allocated to those with a local connection to the Parish if they meet the local connection criteria outlined in the nominations agreement which accompanies the s106 document.

The local connection has a cascade mechanism to allow those with a local connection to apply in the first instance which is

- their only or principal home in the Parish for a continuous period of not less than 2 years.
- has or a member of whose household has a parent adult child brother or sister whose only or principal home is in the Parish and has been for a continuous period of not less than 2 years.
- is employed in the Parish on the date of the consideration of the individual's entitlement for an Affordable Housing Unit and has been continuously so employed for 2 years.
- who during the period commencing from the date on which an Affordable Housing Unit to which such individual is eligible pursuant to this sub-paragraph becomes available (for the purposes of this sub-paragraph called the "Availability Date") can provide satisfactory written evidence to the District Council of his or her former residency in the Parish for either (i) six months out of the preceding twelve months or (ii) three years out of the preceding five years and in either case such period of former residency shall end with the Availability Date.
- If there are no applicants with a local connection then the applicants from the wider district of Mid Suffolk will be able to apply using the 2 year criteria above.

Therefore, rural exception schemes are not generally impacted by developer led open market schemes as the RES will have the local connection criteria which an open market scheme does not as it is district wide. Furthermore a local needs housing survey is required for an RES which identifies the housing need and provides a much more specific housing mix. RES homes also remain in perpetuity and are unable to be staircased out to purchase.