

# THE RURAL COALITION

## *Rural Coalition Statement 2017*

### GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDIES

*The Rural Coalition is twelve national organisations who subscribe to a vision for a living and working countryside in England. The Rural Coalition has published a Statement (July 2017) setting out its four principles for policy making, its four policy priorities and its four calls for positive action by Government.*

#### INTRODUCTION

This accompanying document presents a set of case studies which are considered good practice by members of the Rural Coalition. Individual members have submitted these case studies as examples to help illustrate how the four policy priorities could be addressed.

The Rural Coalition offers itself as a partner for all Government departments and their agencies and is willing to draw upon its wealth of expertise and its access to a wide range of rural practitioners. These case studies are illustrative of the kind of good practice and local innovation that its members can source.





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## POLICY PRIORITY

A meaningful increase in the delivery of affordable housing in villages and small towns.



### Developing *affordable homes* within a small market housing site at *Sharlow, North Yorkshire*

Harrogate Borough has experienced exceptional levels of housing need for many years. This has been exacerbated by higher than average house prices across the district and low incomes, compounded by relatively low levels of housing delivery in the past. The Borough Council's Strategic Housing Market Assessment identified a shortfall of 256 affordable homes in 2016, with the need in rural areas proportionately higher than that in urban areas.

The scheme at Sharow came forward as a windfall site, not allocated in the Local Plan. In total the scheme offered eight dwellings, five of them for sale on the open market and three affordable homes. This was in accordance with the policy in the adopted Local Plan at the time, which expected 40% of homes to be affordable on all development sites.

The scheme required partnership working between the private developer (SME), a Housing Association (Home Group), Harrogate Borough Council and its Rural Housing Enabler.

The local community was involved through the usual processes for any planning application. The Rural Housing Enabler supported the affordable housing contribution through the Housing Department's formal response to the planning consultation and by working with the developer and Home Group.

Case study from the *Rural Services Network*

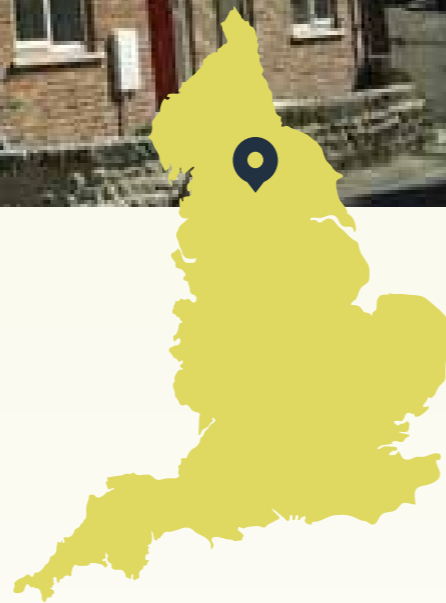


All three affordable homes are now occupied by people who meet local connection criteria that were set out in a Section 106 agreement. This stated that eligible occupiers must have a connection to the Northern Villages sub-area (a group of parishes) or, if that did not prove possible, then at least to the Borough. A local connection is defined as: 2 years residency; or 5 years close family residency; or 10 years previous residency; or local employment on at least a year's contract.

The Section 106 also ensures that these homes will remain in use to meet local needs in perpetuity. As Sharow is a village with a population less than 3,000 the homes are exempt from the Right to Acquire legislation.

The three homes are all one bedroom units, to match the particular need from single persons and couples which had been identified and in response to welfare reform changes (namely, the spare room subsidy). However, the Borough Council notes that the units are of a good size (60 square metres) and are capable of adaptation, if a household size grows.

Crucial to the success of this scheme was the adopted Local Plan policy that sought affordable housing on sites of any size. That policy has been successfully implemented since 2009. The affordable homes were built by the developer to the same standard as the open market homes, thus helping to promote social integration and mixed rural communities



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### Delivering *affordable housing* on a rural exception site at *Ilmington, Warwickshire*

Ilmington, located in the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), is a highly desirable village where house prices average almost £500,000. Private rents are similarly beyond the reach of many local people. The AONB location means it is imperative that close attention is paid to building design and materials.

Warwickshire Rural Housing Association and the local Rural Housing Enabler initiated a housing needs survey. The survey identified a need for 10 affordable and 4 market homes for people who qualified as local. The Parish Council therefore supported a search for sites.

Given Local Plan policies, a rural exception site was deemed the most appropriate delivery model. It could use Stratford-on-Avon District Council's (COM1) policy, which permits the delivery of local market homes on rural exception sites. This innovative policy pre-dated changes to national planning policy, which now allow cross-subsidy on rural exception sites.

Plans were drawn up for a development with 5 houses at affordable rent, 2 bungalows at affordable rent, 3 houses for shared ownership and 4 local market homes for sale.

A site owned by Warwickshire County Council was identified and they agreed to provide it for the affordable

Case study from the *National Housing Federation*



homes at below agricultural value. They also agreed to put half their capital receipt from the land sale for the market homes towards funding the affordable housing. The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) provided further funding, averaging £25,000 per affordable unit, and the District Council also contributed £150,000.

The Parish Council were involved at each stage, including the site search and a consultation event. Whilst the local community were overwhelmingly supportive of the principle, they raised concerns about sewage capacity and flooding. The developer and water company came up with a robust strategy to sustainably drain the site and reduce surface water run-off into the brook. A further public meeting was held in the village to explain these solutions.

The development has proved very successful and it was over-subscribed with applicants. The affordable homes were allocated to young families, single and older people. Retaining these people will help to sustain village services, such as the shop, school and pub.

The buildings reflect the local vernacular, being built from local stone and brick, and designed with chimneys, dormer timber casement windows and traditional canopy porches. The homes are heated from air source heat pumps, in the absence of local mains gas, so that heating bills are reduced. Such measures are costly, so the cross-subsidy, low cost land, HCA funding and other public subsidy were all key to this rural exception scheme.





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### Creating *affordable homes* for local needs on a rural exception site at *Kinlet, Shropshire*

A rural affordable housing scheme brought forward in the village of Kinlet, Shropshire, responded to locally identified need for such housing units. It expanded on an earlier initiative which had already delivered housing on the site in 2000.

The development was brought forward as a 'rural exception site'. In other words, a site that is not allocated for development in the Local Plan, but is permitted specifically for affordable housing for local people. An important part of the policy is that the housing stays reserved for local people in the long-term.

Shropshire Rural Housing Association had delivered the initial phase of the scheme and had a good working relationship with the landowner where the second phase of the scheme was delivered. The landowner is a landed estate which has long established ties with the local community. On the basis of this connection the landowner is motivated by philanthropic intentions and was willing to provide land for a social purpose at a modest ground rate.

Shropshire Rural Housing Association approached the landowner and achieved agreement to plan and deliver the second phase of the site, for six semi-detached houses and two detached bungalows, all provided for affordable rent in

the village. Additionally, Shropshire Council operates a policy by which it will offer a proportion of funding for community-led developments that are exclusively for affordable housing. It provided a subsidy to the Housing Association and Parish Council. This funding amounted to £13,000 per plot. Some funding was also forthcoming from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) for this scheme.

Collaboration between all the parties was key to the success of this scheme and community engagement was an important component. The Housing Association and Parish Council worked closely to reach agreement concerning how the homes would be allocated. Their agreement ensured that priority could be given to those with strong local connections.

The housing brought forward through this scheme is now occupied by households with village connections, who range from families with young children to retired adults, and who illustrate the range of local needs for affordable housing.

The scheme has helped the village to retain its diversity and its vibrancy. It is important that younger people, in particular, are provided with an opportunity to live within the communities they have grown up in.



Case study from the *Campaign to Protect Rural England*



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### Designing homes to a high standard at *Budleigh Salterton, Devon*

The average age of those living in the coastal town of Budleigh Salterton is higher than in any other UK town. Conversely, there is a shortage of working age people for jobs in some service industries, an issue which could be eased if more suitable housing was available. The local Housing Register held by East Devon District Council showed that there was a need for an additional 162 affordable homes to meet locally identified needs.

In 2009 Budleigh Salterton Town Council wrote to landowner, Clinton Devon Estates, asking if they could help find a suitable development site for housing. A two and a half acre site was identified that lay partially within the town's development boundary and which was proximate to a primary school and various amenities. However, for some years this site had been leased to the Town Council as allotments, for which there was a waiting list.

The Estate appointed an architect and designer to produce some masterplan options for the site, and at the same time engaged Cornerstone Housing Association to advise on affordable housing. Three options were put to the town's community and the responses were positive, with more than 80% saying they were in favour of the proposal to develop.

The preferred plan retained allotments, placing them at the heart of the development. Indeed, increased the number of

allotment plots from 56 to 87, as well as providing sheds and a water supply for each group of plots.

The development plan was for 48 new homes, with a mix of detached, semi-detached and terraced dwellings. 19 of these (or 40%) were affordable homes, either for rent or for shared ownership through Cornerstone.

The homes were built by a local family building firm in a joint venture with Clinton Devon Estates. Their design echoes the Arts and Crafts style that is a notable feature of the town. Construction standards have exceeded level three of the Code for Sustainable Homes, with energy and water efficiency that is better than current regulations.

One of the first elements of the scheme to be completed was the new allotments and the Town Council's waiting list for plots has now been considerably reduced.

The sympathetic design of these homes and the associated community benefits, such as the additional allotments provided, have made this a positive development in a location that lies within the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



Case study from the *Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors*





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### Using *community-led development* to meet affordable housing needs at *Hemyock, Devon*

This rural affordable housing scheme involved multiple partners and served to deliver much needed affordable housing to the village of Hemyock in Devon. A high level of housing need had been identified within the village.

The project was delivered by the Upper Culm Community Land Trust, which was formed in 2011 with the aim of providing affordable housing in Hemyock for local people who were in housing need. The group acquired a plot of land in the village in 2012, provided to them by a developer.

With the support of the local community a planning application was submitted to the local planning authority, Mid Devon District Council, who granted permission in February 2013. Grant funding was obtained from the Homes and Communities Agency soon after and construction began at the site in May 2013.

The Upper Culm Community Land Trust worked in partnership with Hastoe Housing Association and the development was completed ten months later. It is notable for being the first example of a completed scheme that was both funded by a community-led development grant and was built on community-owned land.

Ten of the twelve properties were allocated to people from the core parishes of Hemyock and Clayhidon, whilst the other two properties were allocated to families from nearby parishes.

The homes are also of a high quality design. They meet level four on the Code for Sustainable Homes and are built from construction materials that were selected to match the local vernacular.



Case study from the *Campaign to Protect Rural England*



### Supporting *Community Land Trusts* in *Dorset, Devon and Somerset*

Increasingly rural communities are seeking to address a shortage of affordable homes to meet local needs through community-led approaches to development.

Between 2006 and 2008 Wessex Community Assets carried out action research into the development and testing of new financial mechanisms for community asset investment. The result was a model Community Benefit Society, which has since become a standard used by Community Land Trusts (CLTs) across Dorset, Devon and Somerset, as well as elsewhere.

In 2010 further action research was undertaken, this time to establish a CLT support project. This became the Wessex Community Land Trust Project (WCLTP), which provides comprehensive support to CLT groups at various stages of project development. This support covers governance, business planning, legal documentation, finances and land acquisition. The WCLTP operates in a way which now makes it financially self-sustaining.

CLT projects supported by WCLTP have led to the development of more than 100 new affordable homes and there are over a 100 other homes in the pipeline. All of them are built by housing associations that partner with local CLTs and all are built on community-owned land. A number of these projects have won rural housing awards.

Case study from the *Town and Country Planning Association*



Examples of projects that were supported by WCLTP include:

**Toller Porcorum CLT in West Dorset**, where 6 affordable homes have been built with Aster Group, as well as a new village post office, in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;

**Corry Valley CLT in East Devon**, where 6 affordable homes have been built with Yarlinton Housing Group in a village that also has a community-owned shop;

**Norton sub Hamdon CLT in South Somerset**, where 10 affordable homes have been built with Yarlinton Housing Group, followed by a shop and post office.

Research by Wessex Community Land Trust has found that, whereas development proposals often generate opposition, CLTs can channel people's attachment to their community into advocacy for needed housing developments.

Moreover, CLTs are seen as trusted vehicles for the disposal of land by landowners. Sites can be made available that would not otherwise be and often on better financial terms than other development approaches could obtain.

Technical support – in this case provided by WCLTP – has been integral to the success of these schemes. So too has the partnership with housing associations who reduce project risks to which CLTs would otherwise be exposed.





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### *Building rural homes that are affordable to run in Christow, Devon*

Housing affordability is hot topic in many areas, but this issue is not limited to the purchase price of the home. With more than one in ten English households estimated to be living in fuel poverty, there is a critical need to reduce the operating costs of housing. By building to high standards of energy efficiency it is possible to keep bills down for residents, whilst also reducing domestic energy consumption and cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

Christow is the principal village in the Teign Valley and is about eight miles south-west of Exeter. It is the location for the Stafford Close project, which was developed by the Christow Community Land Trust, working in partnership with Teign Housing (a registered social housing provider), the Dartmoor National Park Authority and Teignbridge District Council.

The land for the homes was given by Teignbridge District Council for the token sum of £1. The National Park Authority provided support to the Community Land Trust to help it through the planning process.

The scheme at Christow has led to the development of eighteen dwellings within a nationally protected landscape built to exacting Passivhaus standards (where heat loss is so low that they hardly require any additional home heating).

It is believed to be the first scheme of its kind that is in a UK National Park.

Fourteen of the dwellings were let as affordable rented housing for local people, and the remaining four dwellings were sold to local people at a reduced market value.

The efficient design and materials used in these houses has meant that residents can enjoy energy bills as low as £50 per year, alongside a healthy living environment in which clean air is circulated throughout the property.

Whilst Passivhaus standards are now relatively common in many other European countries, there have been few homes built to this standard in the UK. This is especially true for homes with an affordable price tag.

This project was driven by the needs of the local community at Christow, but it offers an innovative model for the delivery of energy efficient and affordable homes at the national level. In 2017 it was crowned joint winner of the Excellence in Planning Delivery category at the RTPI South West Awards for Planning Excellence.

*Case study from the Royal Town Planning Institute*



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### *Planning for development on small rural sites in Gedling, Nottinghamshire*

Gedling is a Borough in Nottinghamshire which covers the eastern suburbs of Nottingham and a number of rural villages. In 2014 Gedling Borough Council, together with Nottingham City and Broxtowe Borough Councils published their Aligned Core Strategies, setting out their vision and planning approach for the period to 2028. Gedling Borough Council is now translating that into a Local Plan, which provides more detailed land use planning policies.

They have identified a need for 7,250 new homes to be built in Gedling by 2028. The Aligned Core Strategies defined an approach to guide the distribution of these homes. The majority of the development is planned to happen in urban areas and on sites in need of regeneration, which includes three large strategic sites.

Much of the development that is planned for rural areas will be focussed on three settlements which have been identified as key locations for growth. However, it was recognised that there is a need to plan for modest levels of development in other villages, so as to cater for local needs. The Gedling Local Plan will therefore contain policies for housing delivery on twenty-four allocated sites, eight of which are small rural sites.

The policies have been justified by the Council's extensive

evidence base. A local housing needs assessment document was prepared, to pool information about the number, type, size and tenure of new homes that are needed in the villages. This was balanced against work to identify sites, testing their availability and suitability for development.

The Council also ensured that community engagement, with parish councils and residents, formed part of the process, running workshop sessions, not least about site selection.

The Borough's planning team have been pro-active in helping to bring forward these smaller sites for development. It has, for example:

**Assessed** the risk of individual sites not proceeding and taken steps to address that;

**Created** a developers' forum where delivery issues can be discussed with representatives from the local development industry; and

**Held** early discussions with site developers to try and address difficulties prior to a planning application.

The Gedling Local Plan will be unusual in having so many small sites contributing to its planned supply of new housing. The Borough's approach is equally showing the value of working collaboratively with developers and engaging with its village communities.

*Case study from the Town and Country Planning Association*





## POLICY PRIORITY

Proper recognition of rural service delivery challenges and services designed to meet rural needs



### Improving *transport access* with Call Connect in West Lindsey, Lincolnshire

West Lindsey District Council recognised that people faced challenges accessing local transport and getting to key locations or services. In 2015 it allocated £300,000 from reserve funds to make improvements and tackle issues with rural transport. In a large rural district gaps in transport and connectivity are often a barrier to mobility and access.

Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) has formal responsibility for transport and manages a range of initiatives that, alongside private sector provision, give good coverage across the county. An example is the Call Connect service, which covers some parts of West Lindsey.

Research was commissioned to help understand local transport issues and to identify areas for improvement. This was seen as key to making best use of limited resources.

Working closely with LCC and voluntary sector partners, the District established a comprehensive Rural Transport Programme, with initiatives that could be delivered locally or by partnership working. The focus is on working with communities to find solutions, recognising the challenges for traditional style transport services.

#### **The programme includes:**

**Expanding** the rural Call Connect bus service;

**Supporting** community car schemes to establish and grow;

**Funding** community based solutions and ideas; and

**Promoting** transport options customised to individual communities.

Call Connect is a rural bus service, provided by LCC, which users can book in advance. District and County Councils are now preparing to expand it to areas of West Lindsey not previously served. A new bus will be purchased, providing transport for at least 35 villages. This service is open to anyone and focuses on connecting to key services, such as health centres, hospitals and leisure centres. It will trial closer working with the voluntary sector.

The wider three-year Rural Transport Programme was launched in May 2017. It seeks to: increase awareness of transport options; increase use of existing services; enhance coverage in rural areas; improve access to key services, such as GP surgeries; and grow collaboration between local authorities, transport providers and the voluntary sector.

The overall approach is about partnership and co-production. Developing community-based solutions it enables local transport providers, voluntary sector organisations and parishes to work together and to create a vested interest in success. The programme demonstrates a willingness to be innovative and enterprising despite current financial challenges.



Case study from the Rural Services Network



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### Improving *health and wellbeing* by early intervention in the East Riding of Yorkshire

Humber & Wolds Rural Community Council (H&WRCC) has a strong record of health and wellbeing service delivery. The ACRE Network member has recently been active as a key partner of the joint NHS-County Council Better Care Fund, where it has delivered two strands of work in the East Riding of Yorkshire. These are:

**An initiative to develop, implement and evaluate a social prescribing project**, enabling primary care services to refer patients to a range of local, non-clinical services offered by the voluntary and community sector; and

**The EASYCare project, an assessment tool for people aged over 75**, to identify at an early stage whether they were experiencing any health issues or concerns.

The EASYCare project began approximately six months prior to the social prescribing project. It soon became evident that the two projects had links and could be blended together. This would create an early intervention model to assess systematically people aged over 75 and to provide a (mainly) community-based response.

By October 2016 project funding through the Better Care Fund had concluded. Project monitoring and evaluation had demonstrated their value and so the project teams, with H&WRCC, began work on the new approach and future funding options. The local Clinical Commissioning Group and East Riding of Yorkshire Council were kept closely

involved. A 'blended' early intervention model has now been designed. This identifies, responds to and measures health and wellbeing outcomes for individuals. The partnership has managed to influence the thinking of health and social care providers and, as a result, is now negotiating future funding. This includes:

**The East Riding Better Care Programme Board**, who have considered rural issues, asset-based community development and the role of the voluntary and community sector in service delivery;

**The East Riding CCG Governing Body**, who are now the recipients of a report about unlocking funding for the model;

**The area's incoming community services contractor**, who received a presentation which led to their support for the programme for an initial 9 month period, recognising its potential for incorporation into the community services 5 year contract;

**Stakeholders** who recognised at a workshop that the early intervention model should "sit at the front door" of local adult social services. This led to a bid being submitted to a Government programme to fund a Community Development Coordinator.

This is a good example of multi-agency working, where the partners have been able to influence and shape a new service delivery model from a strategic perspective.



Case study from Action with Communities in Rural England





## POLICY PRIORITY

Proper recognition of rural service delivery challenges and services designed to meet rural needs



### Supporting the wellbeing of *older residents* in *Forest Row, West Sussex*

Recent surveys by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) show that around 15% of England's 10,000 parish councils are involved in supporting health and welfare, and as many councils again would like to. This has come about because of the loss of services and facilities in rural areas, with parishes often stepping up to fill the gap.

Analysis by the West Sussex Association of Local Councils identified local NHS spending pressures, GP shortages, pharmacy closures and reduced access to dental services. In rural areas this was exacerbated by the low population and poor public transport availability.

Dozens of parish councils in West Sussex provide space, often in village halls, to support wellbeing hubs that give health advice. Boxgrove has installed a room suitable for clinical use by a GP; in effect an outreach surgery. Selsey is planning to equip a dental surgery in its hall for an NHS dentist to treat residents.

Forest Row Parish Council (which has a population of 5,000) has been running several social groups for the wellbeing of their community over the last five years, including:

*A seniors club, set up to address loneliness and isolation amongst elderly residents, with a programme of events that has speakers, activities and visits;*

*A luncheon club, held three times a week at the community centre owned by the Parish Council. Meals are cooked by an employed cook and some volunteers. 30 people attend each session and extra meals are distributed to housebound residents;*

*A dedicated parking space for a hearing bus, with Parish Council staff trained to fit batteries and tubes when the bus is not available; and*

*A medical car service, with volunteers driving patients to their medical appointments.*

The Parish Council contributes towards the subsidy for these services from its annual precept on the local Council Tax.

There have been a wide range of direct and indirect benefits. The isolation and loneliness that many older residents feel especially in a rural area has been reduced, contributing to their mental wellbeing. Evidence shows that this enables people to remain in their own homes for longer, reducing pressure on adult care services budgets. Older residents also benefit from better nutrition, transport to medical appointments and access to the hearing bus, which has made it easier for them to service hearing aids.

Furthermore, the meals-on-wheels service enables the community to keep an eye on its most vulnerable members. A driver recently discovered an older resident collapsed on the floor of her home and was able to get swift treatment. She made a full recovery.

*Photo Credit: National Association of Local Councils*

*Case study from the National Association of Local Councils*



## POLICY PRIORITY

Long-term support for social action, to help communities become more resilient



### Tackling *fuel poverty* with *warm hubs* in *Northumberland*

Northumberland is one of the most sparsely populated counties in England. More than a fifth of residents are aged 65 or over, 15,000 report a limiting long-term illness and 17,550 are income deprived. Rural isolation can be a significant barrier to tackling fuel poverty and reaching those most in need. The Warm Hubs initiative has tried to overcome this barrier.

Community Action Northumberland has a long history of working with rural communities and has contact with a network of community anchors, such as parish councils and village halls.

Venues across the area have been engaged as Warm Hubs or community places where residents, especially those who are vulnerable or lonely, can be assured of finding a safe, warm and friendly environment in which to enjoy the company of others and share food.

Each venue joining the scheme decides what it wants to provide, operating within some broad guidelines established by the pilot project. These offers are currently being developed into a pledge. Venues undergo an assessment to ensure that the service they offer meets a minimum standard. This entitles them to be called a Warm Hub and to use the logo.

One community centre delivers three course meals to more than 30 residents every week and has recently extended its service, delivering meals to residents who can't get to the centre. Another village hall held its first event in December

*Case study from Action with Communities in Rural England*



2016, where energy efficiency and smart meter information was distributed. Information was also available about the NHS and Citizens Advice. Other Warm Hubs have run events offering advice on switching energy providers, free energy monitors and the dangers of carbon monoxide.

#### **Specific outcomes from this initiative include:**

**Raising awareness:** *over 2,000 residents who visit the hubs are more aware of energy efficiency issues and energy saving good practice;*

**Money saving:** *residents report they are saving money on their home energy bills;*

**Increased social inclusion:** *Warm Hubs are becoming places where people at risk of social isolation are gathering to meet, socialise, and share food;*

**Improved community buildings:** *funds to make buildings more energy efficient have been secured based on the outcomes of energy audits;*

**Funding leverage:** *applications supported by Community Action Northumberland as a result of Warm Hub activities are expected to exceed £750,000.*

Village halls and other community buildings provide a natural access point through which to reach local communities. This project provides a template and the resources for local communities to set up a Warm Hub. It is a model that can easily be rolled out to other areas, where there are local volunteers to run a hub and there is an identified need.



## POLICY PRIORITY

Long-term support for social action, to help communities become more resilient



### Addressing *rural isolation* in *Pilling*, Lancashire

Isolation and loneliness can have a negative impact on physical and mental health problems among people of all ages and backgrounds, including older people, parents, carers, children and young people. The causes of this may include a lack of transport, being out-of-work, childcare commitments and being housebound.

There are, however, other people in rural communities with the time, experience and expertise who can help tackle isolation by working together.

In 2014 Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre worked with two communities in rural Lancashire to explore what could be achieved by bringing people together to address isolation. In both of the communities the church was the catalyst for this partnership.

Pilling is situated on the southern corner of Morecambe Bay, in an agricultural landscape and with a population of about 2,000 in the area. It has problems associated with a lack of public transport, the isolation and loneliness of many older residents and difficulty in accessing healthcare. The nearest GP surgery is five miles away.

A public meeting was called which brought together local residents, charities, the churches, parish councillors and district councillors. This led to the formation of an Action

Group of volunteers called Community Life in Pilling or CLIP.

It started work on addressing the most pressing and straightforward concerns, which were identified as publicising the availability of an existing community minibus scheme, planning for some new community events and establishing a community telephone information line. One community event was the Neighbourhood Challenge Week in which residents visit one other person to create links. The information line is a mobile phone that is held by different volunteers on a weekly basis.

This project has increased awareness of the problem of isolation across the whole community and has improved community cohesion through its encouragement to people to work together. Fundamentally, it has been reducing the isolation felt by some of the local residents.

The resources made available to local groups by Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre contains practical information and encouragement for those in rural communities to work together to tackle isolation and loneliness. Above all else, they advocate long-term partnership working.

Case study from  
**Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre**



## POLICY PRIORITY

Long-term support for social action, to help communities become more resilient



### Saving a *village pub* through community ownership in *Belthorn*, Lancashire

The Dog Inn was built more than 300 years ago and over the centuries has served the village of Belthorn. It can boast stunning views over moorland towards the Ribble Estuary and the Fylde coast.

In February 2015 the pub was put up for sale by auction and a highly motivated group of villagers came forward with the idea of buying it and taking it over. Although listed as an Asset of Community Value they were unsuccessful in agreeing a deal with the company that owned the pub, at that time, and the pub was sold prior to auction to a local developer.

Undaunted, the local steering group, with the backing of everyone in the village, negotiated a deal with the new owners and a Community Benefit Society was established with the aim of raising £180,000. Just two months later the money had been raised through a community share offer and contracts were exchanged. In September 2015, The Dog Inn officially became Lancashire's first community-owned free house.

A high-quality refurbishment was carried out, mainly by a team of local volunteers, and the Grade 2 listed pub reopened during November 2015.

The community at Belthorn was supported with advice by

Co-operative and Mutual Solutions (CMS) and the Plunkett Foundation.

Both organisations could offer their experience from assisting other communities to save pubs from closure by following a community ownership model.

The Dog Inn is now a sustainable community business, which provides employment and work experience for several local people. Its latest initiative will give fifteen young people the opportunity to run a pop-up restaurant on three nights of the week.

The pub is once more the centre of village life, offering a wide range of events, including quiz nights, Craft and Chat sessions, Tai Chi and an informal get-together for young mums called Brews and Babies. There is a defibrillator, free Wi-Fi, a community room, a community garden with allotments and a small shop and cafe staffed by dedicated volunteers.

By listening to the needs of its community The Dog Inn pub is now much more than a drinking establishment. As Dave Hollings, the Chair of the Community Benefit Society puts it, "Community ownership of The Dog Inn has enabled the pub to once again be the beating heart of our community".

Case study from  
**The Plunkett Foundation**



Photo Credit: Anthony Ferran (anthonyferran.co.uk)



## POLICY PRIORITY

Long-term support for social action, to help communities become more resilient



### *Finding a community transport solution in Tewin, Hertfordshire*

The need for community transport in Tewin, a village of 2,000 people near Welwyn Garden City, was brought to the attention of ACRE Network member, CDA Herts, at a village halls network meeting in April 2016. Changes to the bus subsidy regime had drastically reduced the bus service to and from the village, affecting the lives of people, especially older people. CDA Herts recognised that rural transport faced challenges, ranging from fluctuating fuel costs to reviews of subsidised public provision. This made community-run initiatives increasingly important.

CDA Herts established meetings of village residents and a community transport steering group was formed, which CDA Herts agreed to chair. An immediate action was to award the group a CDA Herts Innovation Grant of £500. East Hertfordshire District Council agreed to match this sum, which enabled the hiring of a minibus plus driver from the County Council's community transport service.

The minibus service was piloted on Saturday mornings, taking Tewin residents to Welwyn North, Welwyn Garden City and Hertford. Originally scheduled to last for seven weeks, the service was extended into late February, thanks to a grant from Tewin Parish Council. A donation from The Friends of Tewin further boosted the funds. Passengers have been happy to pay to use this service. Out of the fares income generated, so far, a contribution of £200 has been put towards the scheme's development.

The community minibus is enabling Tewin residents to access shops, health services and libraries, as well as making social and recreational journeys. The minibus also provides a vital link to other transport connections. All these activities are integral to maintaining independence, reducing loneliness or isolation and improving health and wellbeing.

CDA Herts conducted a project feedback survey in late 2016. A total of 210 individual journeys had then been made and the 52 survey responses showed widespread support for the project.

Having discussed matters with the County Council, the steering group has agreed to continue running the service as long as funds will allow. The District Council has confirmed its willingness to financially support the project through 2017/18 and a funding application has been submitted which would give the project stability over the next twelve months.

The service will be extended to two routes operated on a fortnightly rotation, for which a contribution fare of £4 return will be charged to help sustainability. Additional days, times and locations will be considered if funding and vehicle availability can be confirmed.



*Case study from  
Action with Communities  
in Rural England*



## POLICY PRIORITY

Long-term support for social action, to help communities become more resilient



### *Staying the course to re-open a village shop in Exbourne, Devon*

In December 2001, the village shop and post office in the parish of Exbourne with Jacobstowe, in rural west Devon, closed and was sold off as a private dwelling. This meant that villagers would have to make a journey of at least five miles to reach the nearest town for shops and services. For those without their own transport, on low incomes or in poor health this was a significant issue. Additionally, because the village had no other building open every day to residents, residents lost an opportunity to meet and socialise informally. Social isolation and loneliness became a very real risk to some residents.

Following the closure of the shop and post office, the community quickly set up a temporary shop and post office facility in the village hall and they started to plan for a more permanent solution. However, this took longer than expected to bring about.

Finding suitable and permanent premises proved impossible and so a local architect, Steve Blakeman, had an innovative idea – an underground shop. Whilst this unorthodox solution may have introduced some financial, legal and bureaucratic challenges, it also inspired residents to move things forward. The importance of retaining services and safeguarding the quality of village life was keenly recognised, and the initiative had support from the vast majority of local people. Over £300,000 was raised from a range of sources and eventually, with a loan from Co-operative & Community Finance, the new building was completed.

The Plunkett Foundation supported this community group for almost 11 years before, in 2012, they were able to open their purpose-built community shop and café. The advice given covered community engagement, registering a legal structure, raising the finance and business planning. The shop also benefited from a grant and loan package that was administered by the Plunkett Foundation and Co-operative & Community Finance.

The Burrow Shop and Café has become a meeting place for many of the older people in the area. Prescriptions are dropped off each week from the three local health centres, saving unnecessary journeys and waiting times for patients. Young farmers' wives, many of whom live in outlying villages, meet in the café on a weekly basis. During term-time local mothers, having dropped off older children at the primary school, meet in the Burrow with their babies, where they can chat with contemporaries and overcome any feelings of rural isolation.

There is now a defibrillator at the building, plus free Wi-Fi and a computer with Internet access. Activities include regular and seasonal events to promote local food, a wool spinning group, a monthly book club and Crafty Wednesday for 8 – 11 year olds.

Given the time spent by this community to re-open its shop and the challenges they overcame, the Burrow Community Shop and Café has been an inspiration and has led to many other communities persevering and seeing their ideas through to completion.

*Photo Credit: Nikki Kearley (Shop Manager)*

*Case study from  
The Plunkett Foundation*





## POLICY PRIORITY

Business support and infrastructure which reaches rural areas, so the rural economy can grow and create quality jobs



### *Diversifying with business units at Wickham Hall, Hertfordshire*

The centre of Wickham Hall farmyard consists of a group of three listed 17th century buildings, a timber and plaster farmhouse and a pair of thatched timber-framed barns.

The larger of the barns had been built without proper foundations and was slowly tipping over. The owner's father had tried unsuccessfully to obtain planning permission for a change to commercial use. The planning authority was unwilling to grant permission, despite government advice to farmers to diversify and find other income sources.

The current owner's agent rose to the challenge with proposals for an enabling development. The aim was to generate funding to rebuild the barn and preserve the group of buildings.

The project would deliver a mixed residential and commercial development, using the existing buildings and adding some new build housing, all of which would generate enough income to preserve the 17th century curtilage. This was granted permission.

To ensure the permission remained extant, the owner took the decision, during the recession of 2008, to start by rebuilding and converting the thatched barns, stilted granary and single story cart shed to commercial units. The remainder could progress at a later stage.

The development was undertaken at considerable financial

risk, as there were no tenants lined up to occupy the buildings. But, given a good relationship with their builders, the owners were able to let all the buildings in remarkably short order despite the recession.

The tenants were not the office-based businesses the owners had expected, but were retail and leisure businesses. Occupants run a gym, a florist, a beautician, an online jeweller, a watch retailer, a high-end furniture outlet, a cafe/restaurant, a wellness centre and a company specialising in interactive communication and entertainment systems.

The Harveys, as owners, have brought the town to the country and their life is no longer as peaceful as it once was. However, they have found new commercial uses for otherwise redundant vernacular buildings. The development met the aim of diversifying the farming business, providing income in uncertain agricultural times. It has also given the Harveys credibility with lenders and other businesses, enabling them to move into other activities.

The scheme has created a high specification work environment for those wanting to move their businesses to the countryside, coupled with landscaping, wildlife sympathetic features and a shower in every unit to encourage staff to cycle or run to work.

The owners now hope to tackle phase two with a further farm building conversion and new build commercial space. There are major site challenges to address, but what is not seen as a challenge is letting the space. They are well located and foresee no problems with that.

*Case study from the Country Land and Business Association*



## POLICY PRIORITY

Business support and infrastructure which reaches rural areas, so the rural economy can grow and create quality jobs



### *Finding a superfast broadband solution by the Ranston Estate, Wessex*

In 2010 the Ranston Estate had an internet download speed of 0.5 megabits per second (Mb/s) and, being 7.5 kms from an exchange, it was at the bottom of the list for improved internet. The owners decided to take matters into their own hands. Many rural locations have the same problem and once they had solved their own problem it was evident they could roll it out.

Whilst there is the option of connectivity using satellite, with its shortcomings in term of capacity and latency, most properties rely on the ageing and variable copper network of BT Openreach. BT typically upgrades that network with fibre to their cabinets, but this only benefits households lucky enough to be within 1.2 kms of the cabinet. Superfast and Ultrafast connectivity needs a high-quality medium for transmission, such as wireless or fibre without compromises. To create, as the Ranston Estate did, what is effectively a private internet network for the end customers, from a London source, requires scale and the support of landowners for masts and fibre access.

Wessex Internet started as an Estate Scheme and then grew with the support of an anchor tenant – a local private school. This underwrote a portion of the high cost of a fixed fibre line to a central communications room. Neighbouring estates subscribed to a connection either by fixed point wireless or a buried fibre optic cable. Each new bit of the network required contributions to the construction cost from end users, kept to a minimum by Ranston Farms

undertaking all the works in house.

The network now has 250 kms of laid fibre, 140 wireless antennae and 2,000 customers. Wessex Internet is a joint venture, where Ranston Farms undertakes customer installation and maintains the network, while the technology, order processing and IT support have been provided by M12 Solutions. Ranston Estate funds, builds and owns the fibre network itself, which it then makes available to the joint venture.

Wessex Internet has transformed the ability for thousands of people in deep rural locations in Dorset, Hampshire, Somerset and Wiltshire to use the internet and work from home. Government has said that every £1 spent on internet infrastructure is worth £20 to local economies. Based on telecoms industry construction prices this network has produced an estimated £50 million of economic benefit. Landowners also find it easier to let their houses and business units, and at a higher rent.

The scheme has proved efficient and cost-effective. With good vantage points, fixed point wireless antennae delivers up to 50 Mb/s to properties within line of sight over a distance of 10 kms. This reduces the cost of bringing the service to remote areas. On estates, landowners may also contribute to the funding of the infrastructure (antenna and backhaul) that would be unviable for individual properties, thus giving tenants connectivity at low cost.

*Case study from the Country Land and Business Association*





## POLICY PRIORITY

Business support and infrastructure which reaches rural areas, so the rural economy can grow and create quality jobs



### Helping people turn *business ideas* into reality with *Germinate Enterprise*

In most rural communities there are people who would like to set up their own small business or social enterprise, but who lack the confidence and practical skills needed to choose an idea and work out whether it is viable. Germinate Enterprise is a resource that groups can use to help their community flourish through job creation, retaining young and working age residents and by tackling rural poverty.

Given the growing availability of high speed broadband, the need for many farmers to diversify, and the availability of business skills in many communities, the initiative seeks to capitalise on an opportunity to reach out and offer a resource of real benefit.

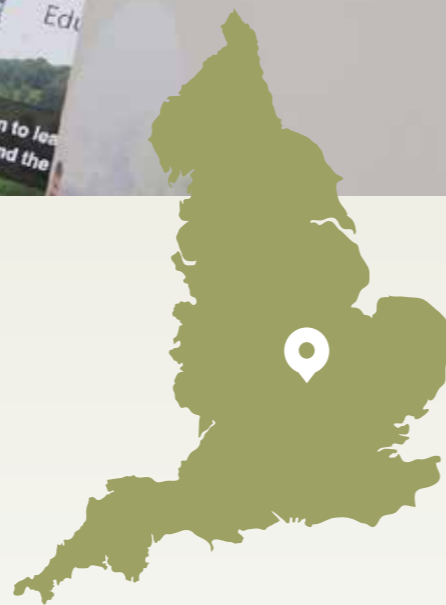
Germinate Enterprise is a simple but profound rural business start-up course, suitable for those from any educational background. It comprises six two-hour sessions, which help participants to consider whether to start an enterprise or become self-employed, what the right business is for them to start and whether their idea is viable.

It was written by successful small business serial entrepreneurs: people familiar with starting businesses from limited resources. There is material for an optional monthly follow up gathering called Beer Mat Mentoring. These require little resource and are enjoyable gatherings for both aspiring and experienced business people, which can help tackle the isolation entrepreneurs often feel.

Running a programme doesn't require any great experience of enterprise. The workbook contains all the course content and exercises, and there is a session plan and facilitator guide. The role of the facilitator is to guide participants through the course, introducing each section as explained in the session plan. Moreover, there is no licence fee required to deliver the course, so long as it is provided by a not-for-profit organisation.

Germinate Enterprise is a straightforward, well planned, practical course that has direct positive impacts on the participants. Several businesses have started after each course run. So far these have been in Northamptonshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire, though they could be run anywhere. One participant remarked: "I love the fact this course is for regular people." Another said: "This course really helped me think logically through the step-by-step of setting up a business for the first time."

Ultimately the initiative also aims to tackle wider goals such as hidden rural poverty, the retention of young and working age people in villages, farm diversification and boosting other existing businesses (through the multiplier effect).



Case study from  
*Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre*



## POLICY PRIORITY

Business support and infrastructure which reaches rural areas, so the rural economy can grow and create quality jobs



### Supporting *economic growth* with a *Neighbourhood Plan* in *Uppingham, Rutland*

The land use planning system deeply affects community life and so, for many parish and town councils, their involvement with it is a key activity. Parish and town councils seek to shape local development plans, comment on planning applications and produce design statements, neighbourhood plans and neighbourhood development orders.

Indeed, parish and town councils are at the heart of and driving forward the neighbourhood planning revolution and making it a success. Around 90% of all communities developing a plan are being led by this most local level of democracy.

Uppingham is a small market town in Rutland, with a population of around 5,000. The town has a heritage high street of mainly independent retailers and a small industrial estate.

Uppingham Neighbourhood Plan built upon two earlier documents in the area, the Parish Plan and 'Uppingham 2025, 36 ideas for the future'. The Neighbourhood Plan was prepared by a business-led task group, which became a sub-committee of the Town Council. It went to referendum in July 2014 and achieved a 92% yes vote. More recently the Town Council has formed a Neighbourhood Plan Committee that will look at updating the Plan.

Issues addressed within the Uppingham Neighbourhood Plan were:

**Plans to work with the Local Enterprise Partnership to upgrade an industrial estate;**

**The allocation of 3 additional hectares of land for employment use;**

**Support for balanced development of the town, including a new green space;**

**The allocation of a 6 hectare site for new homes, plus 4 hectares for future homes;**

**The provision of space for a community hub, for a library and sports pitches;**

**Protection for the town's heritage and curtilage;**

**Plans for new footpaths and cycleways, with better access for the disabled;**

**Local priorities to make best use of income from the Community Infrastructure Levy.**

Although production of this Neighbourhood Plan faced some challenges, there were many positive outcomes. The business community proved very pro-active and led the process. Relationships were forged with developers and there is now regular liaison. The Town Council has strengthened its relationship with the local planning authority. Plus, despite concerns that the process might divide the community, it actually brought people together.

Uppingham Town Council is now a recognised Neighbourhood Planning Champion.

Photo Credit: National Association of Local Councils

Case study from the  
*National Association of Local Councils*





# THE RURAL COALITION

## *Members of the Rural Coalition*



*Action with Communities in Rural England*

*Campaign to Protect Rural England*

*Country Land and Business Association*

*Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre*

*National Association of Local Councils*

*National Farmers Union*

*National Housing Federation*

*Plunkett Foundation*

*Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors*

*Royal Town Planning Institute*

*Rural Services Network*

*Town and Country Planning Association*

**Rural Coalition President:**

*Rt Revd Dr Alan Smith, Bishop of St Albans*

**Rural Coalition Chair:**

*Margaret Clark CBE*

**WEBSITE:**

[www.ruralcoalition.org.uk](http://www.ruralcoalition.org.uk)