Wales: Rural Housing Enablers

REPORT ON THE CURRENT AND FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS

By - HUGHES – ISHERWOOD REGENERATION CONSULTANTS

OCTOBER 2006
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1. Introduction:  
The Commission – its Scope, Purpose and Nature

1.1 This report provides a review of the current progress of the 4 ‘pilot’ Rural Housing Enablers (RHEs) in post in Wales, the context in which they work, and the scope for developing the RHE service further across Wales.

1.2 The Clients’ vision is one of a Wales–wide network of independent Rural Housing Enablers (RHEs) operating in a cohesive manner. They envisaged that this would require a structure – supported by a secure funding regime - that respected independence and local diversity, but would also promote collaboration and eliminate duplication of effort. The Core Brief for the consultants was to help develop a model framework for the realisation of that vision, but in the context of a wider appraisal of the RHE work in the UK and the pilots in Wales, opinion gathering and case studies.

1.3 In order to address this Brief it was agreed that the selected consultants - Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants (HIRC) - would seek information and views from the interested parties and examine the scope for:

- a national network of Rural Housing Enablers serving rural communities across institutional boundaries (administrative, organisational and cultural)
- a formal structure which both supported that intent and also allowed a reasonable measure of independence for local RHE services
- creation of a composite best practice model for all Welsh RHE services
- a model which would secure consistency for RHE Services in Wales (without duplication of effort) and secure baseline funding
- producing sustainable and ‘balanced’ communities with, for example, reduced environmental damage from commuting in rural areas
- ensuring a spatial planning approach consistent with the Wales Spatial Plan; and have regard to –

- the socio-cultural, linguistic sensitivities of rural Wales, and
- the need to develop a model which was ‘bespoke’ to / for Wales.

1.4 It was agreed that the Report should also examine:
- administrative context – especially re WAG’s definition of ‘rural’
- RHE Services’ proper contribution to dealing with wider housing issues
- comparable models - in the UK (especially in England), and beyond
- case studies on the current RHEs and their associated management structures
- connectivity with higher-level Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) policies, and
- scope for highly collaborative working within and beyond Wales.

1.5 In addition, the Clients specifically asked HIRC – on the basis of their experience and expertise - to provide ‘ideas’ which might directly or indirectly enhance the potential contribution of the RHE Service in resolving housing issues in Wales.
1.6 The time constraints and cost constraints required a focus on:

- correspondence with a wide range of local and national stakeholders, asking for responses structured to extract a SWOT analysis of the current and potential RHE service in Wales, views on the future potential of the service, and any cross-border issues, etc., augmented by semi-structured telephone interviews, face to face interviews, and a highly selective set of site visits, and desk-based researches;

- case studies of the 4 RHEs already established in Wales (with considerable assistance from the 4 current RHEs); and

- shorter summaries of RHE and a few other initiatives of relevance and interest – re rural housing, rural regeneration and dealing with linguistic/cultural sensitivities – from the rest of the UK and abroad.
2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

E1. The Commission – its Scope, Purpose and Nature
The Clients had a very clear vision. The consultants’ task was therefore to explore this in detail with those who have complementary experience to that of the RHEs in Wales and to whom the vision might form the basis of a bid for substantive funding to expand the service.

E2. This Executive Summary
This Executive Summary aims to distil the main messages of this study.

E3. Rural Housing Challenges / Issues – General
Rural Wales is becoming one of the least affordable rural housing areas in the UK, according to one academic housing economist. The average house-price to income ratio is 4:1. The decline in the supply of low-cost housing, not least through the right-to-buy, coupled with consistently low incomes in rural areas (and 35% of households in Wales are in rural areas compared to 19% in England and tend to have less than average incomes) means that many people who need it cannot afford a house in a rural area. Even with the assistance that is available, and even in the face of a relatively friendly policy environment, there are blockages in the system ranging from outright hostility and ‘nimbyism’, through lack of co-ordination between housing and planning departments, to the sheer time it takes to engage a community and steer a contentious proposal through to delivery. Attention to rural community concerns is particularly relevant in Wales because of their cultural and linguistic demands, expressed through housing choice as much as through other aspects of Welsh life. And to help deal with the complex and sophisticated issues raised by such a problem, there is a strong feeling that Rural Housing Enablers may have a vital contribution to make. More might be better, and sooner might be better still given the complexities and scale of the need.

E4. Rural Housing Solutions and RHE Experience to Date
The Rural Housing Enabler movement has a longer history and is more extensive in England (c.40 posts at present). Its essence has been picked up by Ireland and Scotland, also. There is considerably more experience of RHEs’ effectiveness in those countries, and a number of studies have looked at their performance in detail. All have recognised their worth, most in glowing terms. If emulation were a sufficient argument, there should be no hesitation in expanding the service in Wales. Even so, there are some suggestions on the table of how even the English RHE’s performance could be improved – by clearer administrative and management structures, and greater co-ordination between strategic housing policy bodies, and greater certainty over funding (mostly public funding) for the long term. Experience in other countries – in England, Scotland, Ireland, and France – is also instructive about the additional policy, investment and regulatory measures (related to housing and planning) which can be applied to conserve and bolster a distinctive intrinsic culture under pressure of continual in-migration. These too are things to ponder as Wales forges its own solution.

E5. Current Progress on Rural Housing Issues in Wales
Sustainable development is evidently an important legal duty and commitment for the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and Wales generally, judging by the many statements from Welsh Ministers and plentiful official advice on how to build ‘sustainable communities’, well-designed and ecologically acceptable buildings, and including the latest review of research into the role of the housing system in rural Wales, which identifies lack of affordable housing as a key issue. Any bid to WAG to expand the RHE service has ample policy pegs on which to rest, and an array of
powers (set out in the Welsh Affordable Housing Toolkit) begging to be used at the local level. A wide range of housing types is recognised to be required to deal with Welsh circumstances, some due to relatively lower incomes and a relatively greater concentration on primary industries in Wales, and others because of continuing immigration — much of it from across the border with England. Aside from the high-level political and resource aspects of these issues which are WAG’s and LAs to consider carefully — these emerging housing needs can, in the deep rural areas, best be addressed by local housing needs surveys within the local communities, at which RHEs are adept.

E6. Context for the Way Ahead in Wales — Information and Responses

The RHE service in Wales is recognised to be making reasonable progress, albeit not being able to show many units ‘on the ground’ as yet, partly because of the fledgling nature of the RHE service in Wales, and all the RHEs being embroiled in the early survey and site identification stages of the process. The consensus seems to be that the Welsh RHEs are worthwhile, and have established a ‘development pipeline’ but — as in England — resource, organisational, and skills issues need to be addressed in order to ensure the ‘bricks and mortar’ progress. The detailed strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities will provide a recipe by which an expanded and quickly effective service can be developed for Wales as a whole. Judging from the responses received to our questions such a service needs to be of such a size that it should have a critical mass, and sufficiently secure in funding that Wales could be confident that it will make a substantial contribution in terms of units delivered on the ground, where needed as evidenced by research and trends. In fact, language and culture aside, these could be the key elements that make such a service indisputably Welsh — and seen to be so, as a country that has a large rural area and distinctive cultural inheritance, and addresses it wholeheartedly through a well resourced, well trained, well integrated task force of people backed by key players committed to making things work even in difficult circumstances.

E7. Interim Reflections

Despite such an aspiration, planning for the future must recognise practicalities and the reality of inevitable constraints. Chapter 7 provides a rather daunting list of devilish details revealed by our research which must nevertheless be taken into account in devising a workable scheme for RHEs. None of them are fatal, in our view. Political will and professional skill can overcome them. In doing so, it can re-assert the Welshness of the solution. Incidentally, the question of what is ‘rural’ in Wales is relatively straightforward, the answer being in the gift of WAG statisticians, which can easily be bolstered by a simple pragmatic local analysis to help focus an individual RHEs work on the ‘more rural’ areas in their patch.

E8. A Recipe for the Future RHE Service in Wales

We have no doubt a case can be made for expanding and strengthening the RHE Service in Wales, to give full coverage across Wales, outside of the ‘large towns’. But options need to considered, from ‘do nothing’, through maintaining the status quo to a scheme that in our view would better meet Welsh aspirations. We have provided indicative costings for the various options, which range from the current cost of c.£0.2m pa to < £1 M pa for the best option (Option 4/5A) that would see RHEs operating across rural Wales with a good level of central support (e.g. finance / planning, and regeneration expertise, plus a chair/champion and board); or, c.£1.5M to replicate the English system. We have noted a few potential sources of funding: but we were not asked to negotiate a funding deal. The acceptability of the Options is therefore a matter for discussion at high level between the WLGA, WFHA and WAG.

At the same time as pursuing the RHE model, our reading, discussions, and previous experience in promoting regeneration in urban and rural areas leads us to think that the rural development agenda, even that being pursued by housing associations, should be broadened to tackle rural ‘sustainable communities’ in the round in Wales. One route would be to integrate RHE efforts into developing other aspects of village life as is being attempted in France – looking at their economic, social and cultural needs as well as their housing needs. Can redundant agricultural and other buildings be converted with provision for Welsh cultural activities as part of a drive to revitalise some Welsh villages? Can rural affordable housing be part of a mixed use, mixed tenure schemes in a village involving shops, cafes and other businesses? Can more private sector investment be levered in to help fund such schemes? Can more be done to protect and encourage the use of the Welsh language as a key by-product, through greater use of assessments and legal agreements attached to development permissions? What does a sustainable Welsh building look - and sound - like? What is the scope for temporary buildings to meet local people’s rural housing requirements? Do community land trusts have a part to play in accessing low cost land that can be kept in perpetuity for affordable housing? Can RHEs’ experience, knowledge and personal skills be developed and harnessed so that in future years they become both skilled housing enablers and also to some extent rural regeneration change agents?

E10. Final Conclusions and Recommendations

There is a case for considerable expansion of the Rural Housing Enabling service across most of Wales to provide more affordable housing within or on the edge of the established smaller settlements in the next few years. All the current planning, housing and rural development policies support such an initiative; all the evidence that we have gathered from other experience supports it; authoritative figures that have been examining rural housing issues in depth extol the virtues and effectiveness of RHEs; and in our experience effective and efficient regeneration is increasingly a matter of broad-based and locally driven partnerships dependent on competent, dedicated, and well supported staff. The Client Steering Group sees our Option 4 as the best way forward (a new National RHE Network with 12/13 RHEs plus a 2 person ‘Central Support Unit, a Chair/Champion and a Board). We would urge the key interests who would need to agree a funding package for this – the WLGA, WFHA, and WAG - to go a small step further and add a part-time, specialist Regeneration Advisor (as set out in Option 5A) as we believe that the service needs a strong injection of already-honed regeneration skills and experience to effect swifter (than the English) progress in delivering affordable housing units and wider rural regeneration. That extra skill would help to ensure that a new National RHE Network in Wales was fully ‘fit for purpose’.
3. Rural Housing Challenges / Issues - General

3.1 Rural housing issues have long been a sensitive issue, politically, in Wales.

3.2 This is simply because Wales is predominantly/geographically a rural country and the deep rural ‘heartlands’ are still seen as a bastion of the Welsh language and culture. This is not in itself unusual: much the same could be said in relation to a much bigger country like France, as well as the other outer areas of the UK.

3.3 There is a widespread perception that more housing is needed for the less well-off in rural Wales, and that the sell-off of former Council-owned stock has reduced the volume of social (affordable) housing available to levels which demand a response and alternative provision. The same perception also holds sway across rural England.

3.4 In recent years, the issue has taken on a whole new dimension as rapid inflation in house prices set in, and despite nervousness about possible market correction in the ‘property cycle’, it appears to be continuing, quite strongly. The consequences are that the gap between average incomes and average house prices is - at the time of writing this report – at a 4:1 level in Wales. An analysis of currently emerging / available data demonstrates that Wales has become “the least affordable ‘region’ in Great Britain outside of London and the broader south” (cf. Prof. Steve Wilcox (2006), Presentation on ‘Affordability in Wales - and the intermediate housing market’ to a CIH Housing Conference, Llandrindod Wells, Sept. 4th, 2006).

3.5 In the UK, recently, a £50K/annum salary has been needed of a single person (or £75K/annum of a two person household) in order to command a mortgage offer of £180 K – the average price house. This far exceeds average incomes: and mortgage companies are now looking to expand the income multiple to ‘x4’ or more.

3.6 It is simply much harder than it was a decade and more ago for a single person to buy a house – triggering all manner of alternative approaches, family assistance, financial offers, and housing deals. Households (or virtual households of friends) find it hard to afford a house and worry about ‘getting on the housing ladder’ in the UK. To compound the pressure, house price inflation is now seen as a quick road to riches, and potentially a better investment than a pension. The rate of repossessions of (heavily) mortgaged property is beginning to increase, also, at the time of writing this report, as people over-stretch themselves re mortgage payments.

3.7 A larger proportion of households now require some form of assistance in order to acquire a house, triggering many ‘low-cost’ (market housing) and other ‘intermediate’ housing options. Social housing availability is an issue in many areas and there is increasingly a call for using ‘rural exceptions (planning) policy’ to enable ‘affordable’ (usually social rented) housing to be developed - on land in rural areas which would not otherwise be released - for those at the lower end of the income scale.

3.8 Private renting is an option for some. But the private sector rental market supply and the demand for rented accommodation, do not match up well - especially in rural areas. In more attractive rural and coastal areas – such as much of Wales, as in the Lake District – second homes and holiday lettings adds an extra complexity to housing markets.

3.9 Everyone appears to recognise that the trick is to identify the true housing ‘needs’ and address them constructively without creating unexpected negative or damaging side-effects, and with as much quality as possible factored in. But experience suggests
that putting that into practice is both challenging and associated with controversy - as very different sets of interests come into play and have to be balanced.

3.10 In the UK, the task of rational analysis and balancing of interests tends to fall to the land-use planning system – which then takes most of the flak for disappointing one or other ‘interests’ in the outcome. In Wales, the Welsh language is also a ‘material consideration’ for planning purposes, and a powerful concern for many. Opinions on local planning services, therefore, necessarily differ very markedly from person to person and from issue to issue.

3.11 In rural situations, experience in England suggests that intermediaries in the form of ‘Rural Housing Enablers’ can help tackle complex issues which affect low income households in rural areas – with a wide a range of institutional complexities as background - in a reasonably analytical and pragmatic manner. They help to make progress in securing more affordable/social housing units in rural areas, and often defuse considerable tensions, with the result that there are now a large number of RHEs, working across the whole of England. In England, that process is sustained by generous central government support and the readiness of landowners to provide land philanthropically, where satisfied that no one else will benefit from their profit foregone.

3.12 Wales is usually regarded as being ‘twice as rural’ as its neighbour but at the moment it has only got 4 RHEs. They have only been in post a short time and cover a limited area of rural Wales, and are set fair to make a real impact. Their contribution is played against a background of growing concern about hidden homelessness in rural (and urban) areas, and the need for affordable and low-cost housing across Wales.

3.13 There is clear potential for developing out of that initial ‘pilot’ experience a more extensive and bespoke service for Wales as a whole, which meets Wales’ unique set of circumstances, issues and opportunities, and which is broadly in line with the current policy and emerging thinking of the Welsh Assembly Government (which is encouraging full use of existing powers and also has the option of making new law if they prove to be insufficient – having recently won back, for the first time in 600 years, certain law-making powers for Wales).

3.14 The Clients for this study, and HIRC, are clear that – in the above context - there is need for this study to explore:

- recent hard data on housing and rural deprivation in Wales
- respect for higher-level Welsh policies (WAGs and more local ones)
- the specific housing problems of rural areas in Wales
- the unique cultural and linguistic sensitivities in Wales
- delivery mechanisms for the full spectrum of housing
- scope for new partnerships and collaborative approaches
- how best to work across institutional and administrative boundaries
- the scope for improved co-operation between local housing and planning units
- how best to align solutions with positive and sustainable rural regeneration
- delivery on the ground, in the right place, to meet true need
- delivery of all new schemes - to best practice modern standards
- creating a bespoke RHE service for Wales, of which Wales can be proud, and
- effective engagement with local communities to get local ownership for local solutions to local housing needs.
4. Rural Housing Solutions and RHE Experience to Date

4.1 Experience Elsewhere
This section of the report looks at experience elsewhere in the UK, Eire and France.

4.2 England’s Experience

4.2.1 In England there are currently about 40 Rural Housing Enablers, some of which have been in existence since the early 1990’s following the ACRE publication ‘Enabling Rural Social Housing’ (1993), and which have been studied in some detail on a number of occasions – see ANNEX A for detailed abstracts.

4.2.2 The themes that emerge from the various research exercises that have been undertaken are fairly common, namely:
• RHEs provide a useful service, or even “a crucial role” according to one report, in developing community cohesion and promoting the idea of affordable housing, overcoming local difficulties;
• that they can shorten the overall time taken to bring a development to completion by early attention to sensitivities that might otherwise scupper a scheme;
• that to be effective they need to be seen to be independent of the various interest groups to which they need to relate – Housing Associations or Local Authorities;
• that although they have been set the task of contributing to the development of strategies for rural housing, and even of advising local authorities on the extent to which they are complying with rural housing policy imperatives, their expertise is most effectively felt at the local level;
• that, possibly as a consequence, they tend to suffer from isolation, from the lack of a network of like minded colleagues, from lack of administrative support, and from lack of recognition in terms of status, salary, and training;
• for full effectiveness they should have access to ‘central’ experts (planning/finance);
• their attempts to find finance for their own activities is a waste of their time and a responsibility best assumed by a strategic body with links to grant-giving agencies;
• they need to be embedded within a clearer strategic structure (the Three Dragons report provides a detailed suggestion of one such structure aligned with the regional governance arrangements in England); and
• that the service should be expanded and long-term funding put on a firmer footing.

4.2.3 In addition Lord Richard Best and Professor Mark Shucksmith, the authors of the Report of the Rural Housing Policy Forum, were asked whether they wished to add anything to their conclusions, and although neither did, both are very supportive of this current research and the motivation underpinning it, namely to develop an effective affordable housing delivery service in Wales.

Margaret Clark (Deputy Chief Executive of the Commission for Rural Communities) an author of a Countryside Agency report on RHE experience England, made the following points –
• the DEFRA Rural Community Social Programme that until recently helped fund RHEs is now managed by Government Offices for the Regions
• the scale of the RHE programme in England (40 posts, equal to the number of Rural Community Councils which for the most part act as their hosts) was the result of local interest and need rather than a national policy on coverage
• local independence of RHEs is important but needs to be balanced against the advantages of a recognized network – with the West Midlands region with its connections to Wales’ RHEs providing an encouraging model
that connectivity could be improved through better use of IT (for example RHE web-site and ‘chat room’), arrangements to provide mentoring, and co-ordinated training

- RHE posts were in themselves good training grounds for personal skill development, but could lead to ‘churn’ as post-holders seek higher pay and more job security, and

- rural housing proposals needed to emerge from and be consistent with LA housing strategies, to which RHEs could be making more of a contribution from their local knowledge and monitoring activities, with the LA's contributing to RHE costs.

Asked to comment on our outline proposals in relation to a national RHE service in Wales the CRC supported the following ideas –

- national championing of affordable rural housing at a political level, which would be beneficial to raise its profile

- the adoption of a common Housing Needs Assessment Form that would allow easier collation of local information for strategic policy development

- the establishment of a central unit providing expertise on planning, regeneration, finance that could be called upon by RHEs in the field, and providing the latter with some administrative support freeing them to do the essential work in involving communities and doing deals with landowners, and

- the development of a recognizably ‘Welsh’ RHE service could be achieved by universal coverage, greater certainty of long term funding, and more consistent input into rural policy-making relevant to affordable sustainable housing (points developed later in this report).

4.2.4 ANNEX A includes more detail on the recent review of the English RHE service.

4.2.5 Lancashire is interesting, even though it is a notional rather than an actual ‘Case Study’, because it is based on the Countryside Agency’s idea of what an RHE for a county might look like if it were to be established. It would amount to a single post costing about £50,000 of which salary and overheads would amount to about 50%; management expenses would be set at 10%, with office support amounting to 20% - but no extra person is specified. It would be financed by 50% Countryside Agency contributions, local authority contributions of about £5,000, housing association contributions of about £2,000, with very minor contributions from survey fees and publication receipts. No private sector funding is envisaged. In the model an extensive amount of reporting is specified (annual, half-annual and quarterly programme and information reports), along with quite a variety of other intermediate ‘influencing’ outputs. No information is given on hard outputs, although mention is made of targets needing to be met. At first sight it appears to be top-heavy on administration that needs to be undertaken by the RHE himself/herself, and weak on support. In the event, only Pendle and Ribble Valley established such RHEs. (More detail in ANNEX A).

4.2.6 Lincolnshire is included because of the prominence it gained in the Rural Affairs Commission where it was identified as an example of Best Practice for the quality of its marketing report that, in effect, secured its continued existence. It is also notable for its apparent success in delivering close to 200 units of affordable housing on the ground. Despite that it struggles to retain sponsorship. It is an example of the parlous state of RHE’s despite their evident success, and the lengths they have to go to in order to convince others of their worth. (More detail in ANNEX A).

4.2.7 Views were sought from English local authorities and RHEs bordering Wales on possible cross-border considerations. Responses were limited, not least because there
appears to have been little systematic study of housing markets that straddle the border, although it is recognised that some do, and warrant more careful attention. One respondent from South Shropshire however (see ANNEX A) did point out the need for much greater co-ordination of rural housing plans, and a concern that an RHE operating independently of a local authority (and in particular operating without very close liaison with the planning department) could be something of a loose cannon.

4.2.8 Another, from Chester City, recognises the importance of cross-border links, and is keen to understand them better – and has cogent things to say about the contribution that can be made by an RHE (see ANNEX A). But there is little hard information on the links between Wrexham, say, and the Chester/Liverpool area on rural affordable housing as such, although we know there is quite a lot of cross-boundary work between the planning departments in the NE Wales / Cheshire area.

4.2.9 The West Dorset RHE is also known to be innovative in its approach to rural housing issues – working with the Tudor Trust. There is some interesting practice emerging on Community Land Trusts (some in Wales, but mostly in England) (see ANNEX A). But, we found that opinions varied on their speediness and effectiveness.

4.2.10 One organisation closely involved in the production of rural housing in England is Business in the Community. It is closely linked to the Prince of Wales, who has taken a personal interest in the economic life and living conditions of rural areas in general including, most recently, the deep rural areas of Romania (see ANNEX A).

4.2.11 English Partnerships, on another tack, is also set to expand shared ownership schemes in England. English Partnerships (EP) now has a budget of £100M for the first 2 years – and aims to give a chance of shared ownership to 15,000 households, mostly in the South East, by 2010. The first move by EP has been to announce that it will invite developers to submit bids to a competitive process. All schemes would have to meet EP criteria on design/environmental standards (cf EP Press Release July 06).

4.2.12 Many English National Parks meanwhile have adopted strong planning policies on local housing needs quite recently – most recently in the Yorkshire Dales Local Plan adopted in April 2006, but also in respect of the North Yorkshire Moors Local Plan (adopted 2003) and the Lake District NPA Structure Plan (adopted in April 2006). More detail on these is set out in ANNEX A. They bear close study as potential models for application throughout Wales’ National Parks, AsONB and other ‘deep rural’ areas. We understand that the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park attempted to emulate the English approach, but the evidence base was considered to be less robust than was needed to support such an approach in Wales and so the planning inspector rejected the policy. We understand also that Ceredigion has recently done interesting work on Community Impact in the context of their local plan work. Time constraints prevented us from delving more deeply into these examples, but we feel that this particular issue would bear further detailed examination and possibly stronger high-level encouragement and support for LA planning departments exploring these approaches as, on the face of it at least, Wales is missing out on the use of a very valuable tool.

4.2.13 English LAs, prompted by the Countryside Commission, have also experimented a great deal with small scale rural regeneration schemes – through village appraisals, parish maps, planning for real, village design statements, etc. Some of these ideas have also been applied in Wales.
4.3 Scotland and Ireland’s Experience

4.3.1 The Western Isles of Scotland are also facing challenges in addressing rural affordability issues, and is responding in a number of ways to that challenge. (More detail in ANNEX A). Wider afield, the Republic of Ireland has distinctive linguistic and cultural issues to consider – not dissimilar to Wales’ - as it addresses rural housing problems in some parts of Eire, through language impact assessments which help to create an evidence base to justify reserving some new units for Gaelic-speakers.

4.4 States of Guernsey’s Experience

4.4.1 The States of Guernsey have an interesting and robust set of housing policies, addressing availability, affordability and quality of housing, which also clearly favours local residents - and which manages very tightly local residency qualification, all in-migration, and overall population levels. (More detail in ANNEX A).

4.5 France’s Experience

4.5.1 The situation re housing in rural France is very dependent on a lead by the State and highly structured work by a large number of disparate organisations (sporting lengthy acronyms), offers an interesting contrast with the small scale, partnership-based and pragmatic approach pursued in the British Isles. ANNEX A provides a short account taken from a variety of sources on the French experience, illustrating the greater emphasis given to their attempt to revitalise villages ‘in the round’ by seeking to re-use obsolete agricultural buildings for enterprise, social or cultural purposes, as well as for housing. The problem in much of mainland France is an over-supply of such redundant buildings, rather than an over-demand for accommodation – yet the need to revitalise the rural areas is common.

4.5.2 However, France’s experience also holds a warning re rural housing problems on the island of Corsica (population circa 260,000) – where tensions between affluent incomers from the French mainland and Corsican locals on low incomes with a different cultural background and traditions who find it increasingly hard to buy homes and land to build on - is reported to be a big issue. A recent article in the Guardian refers to “a siege mentality”, concern about “colonisation by holiday home”, and militant separatists’ attacking “summer houses”. (cf. Guardian newspaper article – ‘Welcome to your new holiday home. Please be aware of the danger of bombs.’ 28.8.06).

4.6 Lessons

4.6.1 There are doubtless many more lessons to be learned and studies which could be made if time permitted.

4.6.2 A more advanced Welsh National RHE Network could usefully delve into the more promising leads in its own researches. But the range of approaches we highlight here - bespoke to various countries / regions / localities and their cultural sensitivities – demonstrate a good range. They also show that where rural affordability and cultural tensions combine, addressing rural housing affordability issues is a priority for all.
5. The Policy Context - Rural Housing and Planning Issues in Wales

5.1.1 The Strategic Agenda of the Welsh Assembly Government and its National Housing Strategy

The WAG’s Strategic Agenda - ‘Wales – a Better Country’ (2003) reflects (inter alia) on Wales’ "strong community identity and self-help", strengthening Wales’ cultural identity and helping to create a bilingual country, health issues as a factor in all policy areas, commitment to race equality, building the Welsh economy, social justice, tackling poverty, the environment/biodiversity, etc. It also indicated an appetite for legislative change to deal with certain specific rural and other housing issues. There is also a ‘National Housing Strategy: Better Homes for People in Wales’ (2001) which commits Wales to the development of sustainable, mixed communities, and which heralded a step change in the scale of investment in the existing housing stock. It aims to achieve the Welsh Housing Quality Standard by 2012. The process of reviewing and updating that Strategy has already commenced - with the WAG commissioning a range of studies on, for example, homelessness and the true impact of low-cost housing initiatives in Wales.

5.1.2 Housing and Planning Policy Interface

These two subjects interact in complicated ways. The relevant concerns with respect to rural housing affordability issues / services – in HIRC’s view - are:

- delivering sustainable development
- spatial planning and regional, sub-regional and local housing markets
- ensuring a full spectrum of housing choice in rural areas in Wales
- facing up to the scale of need and identifying it accurately, repeatedly
- planning policy – on affordable housing the role of ‘rural exception sites’
- the relationship with wider economic / regeneration needs
- recent research and guidance
- environmental and design issues.

5.1.3 Delivering Sustainable Development

The UK is committed to delivering Sustainable Development and regards itself as being in the forefront of action to deliver progress on some of the critical environmental issues of the time – especially re global warming / climate change which is fast moving into the forefront of political concerns. The current First Minister for Wales has said “Sustainable development is not an option that will go away - it is the only way forward". That quote prefaces the current ‘Sustainable Development Scheme for Wales – Starting to Live Differently’.

5.1.4 Current Housing Standards Used in Wales

The house-building standards used in Wales, currently, are: BRE ‘Ecohomes’, Secured by Design’, ‘Lifetime Homes’ and ‘Rethinking Construction’.

5.1.5 The Wales Spatial Plan

In Wales, spatial planning has involved all the 22 unitary authorities and led to the creation of a distinctive Wales Spatial Plan – ‘People, Places, Futures’ (Nov 2004) required for Wales, under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, 2004.
5.1.6 The Six Sub-National ‘Areas’ of Wales

The Wales Spatial Plan identifies six ‘Areas of Wales’, centred on ‘Areas of Socio-Economic Hubs’, and sets out for each policy recipes for each:

- North West Wales – Eryri and Môn
- North East Wales – Border and Coast
- Central Wales
- South East – The Capital Network
- Swansea Bay – Waterfront and Western Valleys
- Pembrokeshire – The Haven.

5.1.7 Building Sustainable Communities in Wales

It identifies two major issues re ‘Building Sustainable Communities’ in Wales – (i) deprivation, and (ii) demographic change. It includes text on ‘Affordable Housing’ – rehearsing the WAG’s vision - and aims to promote a sustainable economy.

5.1.8 Respecting Distinctiveness

The Wales Spatial Plan (WSP) identifies a “strong sense of place” in Welsh communities. And it seeks to maintain Wales’ distinctiveness in terms of its historic environment, its building styles, and the “the special place of the Welsh language in our national identity.”

5.1.9 Demographics

The WSP finds evidence of an “aging population” : but, despite that is says “....there is not expected to be much change in the overall dependency rate over the short to medium term ( up to 15 years): rising numbers of elderly people are likely to be offset by declining numbers of children...and the proportion of people of working age is likely to be broadly stable.” And it points out that many of the in-migrants – contrary to popular perception - are from younger age groups.

5.1.10 Cross-Border Spatial Planning Issues

Much of the in-migration into Wales comes from neighbouring English Regions. There is much commuting to work across the border in both directions, and macro-scale planning policies on either side can easily impact across the Wales-England border. The Welsh Assembly Government and Government Offices for the adjoining Regions in England liaise regularly on cross-border spatial planning issues, the issues, their implications and how best to manage the pressures.

5.1.11 Ensuring a Spectrum of Housing Choice in Rural Areas

In Wales, the emphasis is on mixed tenure housing and the spectrum is seen as including: market housing, low-cost market housing, affordable housing (social rented housing and intermediate housing), agricultural and forestry dwellings, residential mobile homes, and Gypsy sites.
5.1.12 Housing Need and Housing Needs Surveys (HNSs)

Wales’ Unitary authorities (the County Councils) and their partners produce assessments of housing needs and demands in their areas to inform policy and action. The RHEs can conduct local HNSs for rural Community Councils. A clear process is set out by WAG for these HNSs.

5.1.13 Planning Policy on Affordable Housing and the role of Rural Exception Sites

Many adjustments have been made recently (in 2006) through a sequence of new publications giving policy and other guidance on the interface between planning and housing policy, including: a review of the housing chapter of Planning Policy Wales; reviews of TAN 1 and 2; the Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) Guide; funding for Rural Housing Enablers and the development of Community Land Trusts, and also the publication of ‘The Affordable Housing Toolkit’, and a recent Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statement (MIPPS) ‘Housing’ (June 2006).

5.1.14 Rural Exceptions Sites - and Key Interest Groups

The use of special measures like rural exception sites is encouraged in current policy. New development in rural locations is often controversial. The interest groups which seem to be most prominent in debating rural exception sites, going by what we have been told, would appear to be: the landowners; wealthier residents/incomers/retirees; very keen sustainability activists; and Welsh-language supporters. The RHEs’ work in identifying rural exception sites – with good community working and liaison with planners and others – can help to generate a consensus.

5.1.15 Economic Development and Wider Regeneration

There is a National Economic Development Strategy (‘A Winning Wales’), 2001, which aspires to increase the standard of living in Wales so that within a generation it matches that of the UK as a whole, by focussing on increasing employment and raising value-added per job and earnings. More recently WAG’s vision has been set out further in the consultation document - ‘Wales: A Vibrant Economy’ (November 2005). It notes that 100,000 extra jobs have emerged since 1999. It emphasises partnership approaches – citing the ‘Heads of the Valleys Development Strategy’ (a 15 year regeneration strategy to tackle the root causes of economic inactivity).

5.1.16 Recent Housing Research and Guidance

WAG’s recent research report ‘The Role of the Housing System in Rural Wales’, (2006) reviews all the available research and issues re rural Wales very thoroughly and reports that the “main rural housing issue raised by the national stakeholder representatives was the lack of affordable housing”.

5.1.17 The Affordable Housing Toolkit

The WAG vision for housing in Wales, remains – “that everyone should have the opportunity to live in good quality affordable housing: and to be able to choose where they live and whether buying or renting is best for them and their families.” The Toolkit includes an arsenal of schemes and initiatives including - Homebuy, Homefinder, Buy to Let, Transferable Discount and Home Release Schemes, Shared Ownership, Right to Buy and Right to Acquire. It urges the gathering in of subsidy via – Section 106 Agreements, the Forestry Commission land initiative, Land acquired by the WAG and its Sponsored Bodies, Disposal of Land and Property by
Local Authorities, Housing Association Reserves, Community Land Trusts and The Resale Covenant Scheme. It emphasises the role and scope of Compulsory Purchase of Land to develop affordable housing, and the WAG’s strategic land assembly powers. It encourages Designing Good Quality Sustainable Housing, ‘Creating Sustainable Places’, mentions the Carbon Trust's independent Design Service, the work of the Energy Savings Trust, and the Planning Officers Society for Wales ‘Model Design Guide for Wales : Residential Development’. The emphasis is on how good design can protect the environment and enhance its quality, help to attract business and investment, promote social inclusion and improve the quality of life.

It is clear that WAG officials expect these ‘tools’ – a wide-ranging set of initiatives and powers - to be used.

The Toolkit also has a section reserved specifically on Rural Housing Enablers, defines their role in Wales, and says: “the Assembly Government has agreed to provide funding towards a project which will develop a framework for the establishment of a national network of Rural Housing Enablers serving rural communities across institutional boundaries.” And that “Assembly Government ministers will give further consideration to the issues when this project reports in the summer of 2006”.

5.1.18 Environmental and Design Issues

The value of good design is once again becoming recognised and environmental and design issues are coming to the fore in governmental policy documents.

5.1.19 A Recent CIH Policy Statement

Professional organisations also help to move national policy onwards. The Chartered Institute of Housing – Wales ( in partnership with the Rural Housing Authorities Network (RHAN) and the Rural Housing Associations Group (RHAG) and the RHEs in Wales) has recently produced a short policy document entitled ‘Action on Rural Housing & Communities in Wales’ (2006) which calls for action on affordable housing and homelessness. It is concerned about ( inter alia):

• the loss of young, skilled people, and the consequential effect on the Welsh language and culture
• the growing affordability gap for 20-39 year olds ( the ‘Young, Working and Still Homeless’), and
• growing homelessness in rural areas - with evidence that the homeless in rural areas receive worse services that their urban counterparts.

The CIH and its partners espouse four cornerstones:

• Cornerstone 1: securing high level political support ( including, inter alia, supporting and co-ordinating a RHE network across all areas of rural Wales)
• Cornerstone 2: addressing specific housing priorities ( including, inter alia, ‘rural proofing’ of major initiatives and programmes)
• Cornerstone 3: making joined-up action a reality ( including, inter alia, producing ‘village design statements’)
• Cornerstone 4 : mobilising the resources ( including, inter alia, a ‘spend to save’ approach to investing in rural housing).

NB. This is a summary distilled from a much fuller account of the policy context, to be found in ANNEX B.
6. RHE Work in Wales – Information and Responses

6.1 Context for the RHE 'Pilots' in Wales.

6.1.1 Wales has four RHEs at the moment, covering rural areas in all four corners of Wales, and overlapping with all three of the National Parks in Wales. Unlike England, the Welsh equivalent of the Countryside Agency - the Countryside Council for Wales – is not directly involved at present and has been focussed mainly on the potential indirect impacts of RHE work on landscape quality and biodiversity. The impetus for RHEs in Wales has come from the Welsh Housing Associations, actively backed by a few Welsh County Councils with, latterly, some support from WAG. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLAG) and the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations (WFHAs) are also very supportive.

6.1.2 The hosting Housing Associations (Cymdeithas Tai Eryri, Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd, Gwerin HA, and Pembrokeshire HA) see them as:

- working in partnership with local communities to identify local needs and to find ways and means of providing homes to meet that need
- acting independently as honest brokers, bringing interested parties together to collaborate
- overcoming institutional and administrative barriers, and
- co-operating with each other but separately accountable to their local steering groups;

and agree that the current 'flagship' project for the Welsh RHEs efforts specifically is the Crickhowell project - with planning permission for 24 affordable houses on a rural exception site.

6.2 The Four RHE Case Studies (Wales)

6.2.1 The main points of fact HIRC derived from early discussion with the four RHEs directly on their work and positions are as follows.

1. They have only been in post / in place in Wales for a short time.
2. Good progress has been made so far re engaging with Community Councils and conducting local housing needs assessments (LHNSs).
3. The RHE are united in a desire for Wales to have an RHE service at least as good as the one in England, but properly tailored to Wales’s needs.
4. They are all on uncertain short-term contracts (not a good basis for building the continuity and long-term trust needed to make good progress).
5. The need to secure reliable funding over several years at a time takes up much time for some (but not all) : one RHEs seems to have no worries about funding, but another is continually under pressure to ‘sell the service’ to maintain funding from a wide variety of ‘pots’. (The average RHE cost - salary and on costs - is c £50K per annum now, shared between 4/5/6/7 funders.)
6. They are independent in theory – but pretty closely linked to HAs and LAs.
7. There is no proper training and no professional ‘career structure’ for RHEs.
8. RHEs obtain and process a vast amount of local information, from LHNSs and interaction with Community Councils, which can make a significant contribution to local development plan-making re rural communities – a big saving to County Councils (as local planning authorities) on research.
9. RHEs face considerable challenges - working with a wide range of actors with widely divergent views and interests in rural areas, so as to make progress. They feel that more realism is needed from funders and others about the
speed with which schemes can be delivered (as RHEs in England typically took 4-11 years to deliver finished schemes on the ground).

10. Reasonable progress has been made so far in identifying useable sites - purely as a product of RHE input / efforts.

11. The current focus is on local housing needs analysis, the process of engaging local communities, informing land-use planning and related housing policies, and producing a list of developable sites (creating a ‘development pipeline’).

6.2.2 HIRC established a more clinical framework to encapsulate progress in each RHE area. The information in these was offered by the four existing RHEs, and edited by HIRC, and checked with the Steering Group. The four Welsh CASE STUDIES are included in ANNEX C.

6.2.3 The four RHEs in Wales came into post in August 2003, September 2004, January 2005 and August 2005. Only one has completed a planned full three year term so far. Given the timescale from RHE in post to RHE producing units on the ground where needed, in England - 4 to 11 years - the Welsh RHEs – all established for between 1 year and 3 years only - are making good progress, and seem set fair to make a similar impact in Wales. Their progress is terms of basic outputs so far is summarised below.

**SUMMARY TABLE OF OUTPUTS (WALES)**

Combined Cost - £185.5k (Average cost all-in per RHE = £46.4k)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordable Housing (delivered)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sites under consideration (26)</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Planning Permission</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Needs Surveys completed = 52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline planning permission</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Surveys in Progress = 12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Applications (10)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Surveys Planned (06-08)= c.85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Position in August 2006 – re work of 7.5 years FTE of Welsh RHE time input.

6.2.4 Views Sought

HIRC invited comment on the RHE service in Wales, its current performance and its future development, from:

- the local authorities (LAs) and housing associations (HAs) already involved
- the community councils already involved with RHE work
- the extensively rural LAs which might next be involved
- other major Welsh housing and other organisations.

Views on cross-border considerations were sought from those above and also:

- English LAs - just across the Border.

The views of WAG officials on RHE related matters of relevance were also sought and noted.
All concerned were asked to provide views on:

- current effectiveness of the RHE initiatives
- opportunities and aspirations re the RHE initiative
- ideas for developing the service over the next 5 years
- views on any cross-border issues, and
- views on taking forward rural housing issues in areas with cultural and linguistic sensitivities.

6.2.5 Views Received from Interested Parties - Distilled

A full presentation of responses is included at ANNEX D. HIRC has derived from that the following key information – using a SWOT analysis framework.

**STRENGTHS**

The Welsh RHE Service:

- helps in developing collaborative partnerships (under Steering Groups) with housing associations, planning authorities, and the voluntary sector
- is generally seen as being ‘independent’ from LAs and HAs
- provides housing needs surveys and site identification (particularly of ‘rural exception sites’)
- provides effective publicity and political lobbying and creates a general awareness of housing issues
- helps substantiate local development plan decision on the allocation of sites for affordable housing
- saves money for local councils
- has a good calibre of staff (who also are Welsh-speaking, which is much valued in the areas where Welsh is much spoken)
- works – in the context of current local authority powers and processes; and
- is much mentioned in WAG publications, and seems to have the support of Welsh Assembly Ministers and their officials.

**WEAKNESSES**

These are perceived to be:

- insufficient numbers of RHEs in post – no proper Welsh RHE Network
- lack of long term continuity : individual RHEs on short term contracts
- that RHEs are not always perceived as being independent – the current model being too reliant on HAs as provider and host
that RHEs are working in the context of changing housing and planning policies with limited opportunity to influence change

that RHEs can create unrealistic expectations that development on sites might follow from their work - but this might not in the event happen and they need to be clear about the hurdles to be overcome

that RHEs' roles are sometimes misunderstood by the public; and

that RHEs lack administrative support.

THREATS

These are thought to be:

- no continuity of funding
- the impatience of funders - in relation to long term projects
- the reputation of the service being affected by ‘over-expectation’
- ‘nimbyism’ - and concern that house values will be adversely affected by new developments and the behaviour of occupants (incomers)
- policies which are too cautious and obsessed with ‘process’, rather than generating ‘outputs’ (building plots); and
- concern that ‘local’ people may not be those housed in the new affordable rural housing schemes, in practice.

OPPORTUNITIES

These are:

- the need for a flexible network of RHEs throughout Wales and on a permanent basis
- the need for a ‘central support unit’ - as part of the broader strategic work of WAG and the LAs
- need for more funding from LAs, HAs, NPAs, and WAG
- scope to move towards a better service in relation to the Wales Spatial Plan
- scope to work with the private sector more positively and creatively to deliver the units needed and rural regeneration more generally
- scope for more ‘joined-up’ working with and between local authorities and, National Park Authorities – and more collaborative working across many LAs
• the need for a Welsh RHE Network for information exchange and the dissemination of best practice, and to build awareness of cross-border housing markets
• the scope for better marketing of the RHE role
• the prospect of more Community Land Trusts
• the need for a ‘rural housing champion’ and/or a ‘Commission’; and
• the WAG commitment to the use of RHEs – as set out in the ‘Toolkit’, TAN 2, etc.

6.2.6 Dealing with Linguistic and Cultural Sensitivities

We invited views also from all the organisations in Wales on the key point learned re addressing rural housing / rural affordability and related issues in areas where cultural and linguistic sensitivities also need to be taken into account. 8 expressed a view and the full account on their views is in ANNEX D, also.

Here are the essential features:

• no favourable discrimination on the basis of language is possible under current law in Wales - but there is an emphasis on providing homes to meet the needs of local people
• language is rarely considered as a factor in the development of new housing schemes – but should be part of local housing needs research
• there is a need for clearer guidelines on when the Welsh language can be an influence on development and development plans.

6.2.7 Overall Analysis of Views on the Current RHE Service in Wales

No one has claimed that an RHE Service is not required: quite the contrary.

The perceived strengths of the RHEs is that they are making a difference, by providing evidence for affordable housing plans from their local knowledge, by engaging communities positively, as much by their personal qualities and skills as for their professional knowledge of housing and planning, by providing a co-ordinating role for disparate organisations yet maintaining a valued independence of even their paymasters.

They contribute to the development of partnership working in Wales – no mean feat – and it is recognised by Ministers as valuable.

But much of this is ‘process’ work. They are too recently appointed and arguably too weak to have yet made a real difference ‘on the ground’ by producing a significant number of affordable housing units – although a ‘development pipeline’ has been established. Their weakness derives from a lack of guaranteed long-term funding – not only capital funds sufficient to establish a rolling programme of affordable housing units, but their own salaries and even inadequate administrative support - with the danger that they can be seen as raising unrealistic expectations.
There are not enough of them to make an impact on Wales’ rural housing targets, or even to establish an effective network to ensure that their local knowledge is fed into strategic plans – much of their effort is focused on individual initiatives. It is not clear that they are fully backed by all local authorities yet their identification with Housing Associations is not necessarily seen as an advantage – not everyone wanting an affordable house in a rural area wants it to be owned by a RSL – and, in fact, they could widen their remit to deal more with wider planning issues as well as housing.

But they are insecure. Lack of funding is the greatest threat, despite the fairly minor contributions required from individual organisations to finance an RHE operation - £50,000 per post spread over 4, 5, 6, or 7 organisations hardly seems onerous.

The RHEs themselves, equipped with personal and professional skills (although receiving little or no training), and adept at developing partnerships must be tempted to seek more secure appointments in an increasingly partnership-based world. Even if greater assurances over longer term funding were introduced in such a way that the independence of the RHEs was not threatened, a bigger scale of activities would need to beware of dissipating effectiveness based on local identity and knowledge.

There are numerous opportunities for the RHE approach to develop – for example by encouraging innovative methods such as community land trusts, self build schemes, devising job-related as well as housing schemes in order to re-use obsolete but architecturally valuable agricultural and other buildings, introducing common Section 106 Agreements, to get the private sector involved, to explore other sources of funding, and to introduce a properly supportive national structure to achieve affordable and sustainable rural regeneration and housing.

With imagination and political will, a solid well resourced and trained RHE service could be an exciting and above all appropriate Welsh solution to a particular Welsh issue, and could help to reinforce efforts to conserve the Welsh language and culture. That, somewhat paraphrased perhaps, is what the respondents appear to be saying.

6.2.8 Additional points from HIRC

1. The four RHEs come from a variety of backgrounds, are well informed, motivated and clear about the need to be self-starters. We concluded that staff quality was not an issue, but training, developing and using that resource effectively to deliver a wider ambition for RHE services in Wales might be.

2. The current funding picture is diverse, with many organisations pitching in. We found no evidence that the diversity of funders or the slightly varying set-ups behind each of the four RHEs, or the input or not of an element of WAG funding, had any real effect on the perceived independence of the RHE or the quality of their work. So, we conclude that the source of the funding is less important than the fact of it and reasonable certainty about its continuity.

3. Hitherto, the small to medium sized local housing associations which set up the RHEs in Wales originally, have hosted or arranged hosting of the RHE function while endeavouring to ensure that the RHE is perceived to be ‘independent’ of the HA (and the unitary County Councils of Wales). However, we found no evidence that the physical location of an RHE within an HA or in an independent office had any great bearing on the perception of them, or their effectiveness, in practice.
4. The RHEs undertake many surveys - which inform local planning work and supply vital intelligence to inform local housing strategies as well as informing discussions with potential developers and other interested parties. Identifying those communities which do not need extra housing is also a valuable piece of intelligence.

5. We found that those we interviewed referred often to the public’s suspicion of various public sector organisations in Wales, and discomfort with the roles performed by them. RHEs are seen as being clear of this suspicion, by and large, and need to remain neutral.
7. Context for the Way Ahead in Wales

7.1 Practicalities and Constraints

7.1.1 The Key Constraints on developing the RHE Service in Wales into a full national model with strong impact, HIRC considers, are:

- the rather tight budgets and too many 'priorities' of LAs, NPAs and HAs
- the likelihood that several large HAs might feel exposed to contributing to more than one RHE post – a situation not designed to spark enthusiasm
- the danger that RHEs’ utility as a political buffer between the demands of local communities and pressures on other organisations will be seen as a great convenience and more valuable than what they achieve re units built
- the reality that RHEs take upwards of 3 years to deliver housing units on the ground – so the product may be insufficiently immediate in terms of 'pay-back'
- concern about what to do where Community Councils refuse surveys – but County Councils see a need for one, which is the case in one or two areas in Wales
- the relative lack of stronger ‘regeneration scheme delivery' skills and experience within the RHE cadre and limited access to others with those skills as needed/when it matters
- the need to have planning and housing officers, within LAs especially, who are well attuned to RHE’s work and able to put it to good use
- the lack of a national-level (politically acceptable) champion for rural housing
- the lack of a strong national overview strategy and programme, monitoring and support to drive progress and lever in higher-level skills and resources to effect progress - if/as/when/where if it is needed
- not quite enough focus on identifying land availability (in the shorter term) pragmatically (ie. by reference to local knowledge and skill in negotiating the release of sites out-with the more stately Joint Land Availability Studies)
- not enough experience in squaring proposals with the planning and other policy hierarchies and 'working around' the inevitable challenges to releasing land for new development
- varying degrees of preparedness, boldness and interest across Wales within County Councils re policy-making and ‘joined up’ collaborative working with a range of sectors and actors, including RHEs, and
- insufficient focus and urgency re delivering a wider rural regeneration in rural Wales with real quality of output and outcome on the ground and a strong Welsh cultural dimension.

7.1.2 These are points to consider carefully in designing a new model, but we do no consider any of these to undermine the aim of developing a better RHE Service - a full ‘National RHE Network’ - for Wales.

7.1.3 And, on the other side of the debate on the best way forward:

- there is a view that ‘RHEs work!’ The English experience demonstrates that powerfully, and the Welsh RHEs show promise of similar levels of delivery – in areas where delivery is truly needed, over time, given a bit of patience
major investment is being made in a range of initiatives to regenerate Wales, boost its economy and to address its public services, and in that context it is likely that the cost of up-scaling the RHE service to a full national model would be relatively small for the WAG budget (even if the WAG were to take on a large share of the funding responsibility, as DEFRA has in England)

resources for supporting the RHEs' running/revenue costs have hitherto been found by each organisation locally involved finding a few thousand pounds to add to a pot of funding, and the WAG providing a few also (drawn from the Social Housing Management Budget, which WAG officials consider the most appropriate 'head' for this activity, pro temp, at least)

that Social Housing Programme is a very large, but not inexhaustible (c £90M per annum) budget with capacity, we think, to encompass more RHE generated expenditure on 'bricks and mortar' development

although the ‘Comprehensive Spending Review 2007’ only applies to Whitehall Departments, any uplift in their resources will be proportionately felt in Wales also as the Barnett formula kicks in: and the WAG would be free to spend any extra monies derived from that process on its own policies and priorities, as it sees them, in Wales

compared to the size of the problem and the political grief of non-progress on affordable housing issues in rural Wales, the investment needed to effectively support and effect better progress - by supporting the running/revenue costs of the existing and more RHEs and a few add-ons - would be minimal.

7.1.4 So, the only real constraint at this time – as HIRC sees it - is:

whether or not the LAs and HAs will 'prioritise' new and/or further investment in RHEs to the extent they are would have to do so to make substantial progress.

The informal responses so far suggest that, in practice, they would - if given some encouragement and incentive to do so. It is always in the WAG’s power to encourage that through policy, persuasion, regulation and financial incentive.

7.2 Defining what is ‘Rural’ in Wales

7.2.1 We take the view that the important thing here is to establish what WAG regards as rural – bearing in mind (i) the facts, statistically, and (ii) Wales’ interests, specifically. The definition of what is ‘rural’ may be very important for establishing a baseline for developing, monitoring and reviewing macro-level policy within and beyond the UK, qualifying for EU grant-aid, and informing national and sub-national spatial planning.

7.2.2 So, we approached the WAG’s Statistical Unit for advice. They referred us to their method of assessing what is ‘truly rural’ objectively, statistically. A summary note of that advice, agreed with the Statistical Unit, is appended in ANNEX E. That suggests that -

○ much/most of the surface area of Wales is ‘rural’

○ 35 % of the population of Wales lives in very rural areas and the rest in ‘large towns’ (concentrated in South Wales).
7.2.3 In England, there has been much debate about what settlement size (3,000 or 10,000 population) to use as a threshold for distinguishing between urban and rural settlements re RHE work, and for other purposes. But the 10,000 limit is being quietly dropped as Regional Development Agencies pursue more initiatives in the Market Towns to support a ‘rural renaissance’ in areas such as Cumbria.

7.2.4 The WAG Statistical Unit has a method of analysis which makes the distinctions that they are regard as being critical in Wales – between ‘large towns’ (by Welsh standards) and the rest/rural Wales, clinically and objectively. (They eschew ‘feel and touch’ definitions of what is urban or rural.) Their advice is available, we understand, to assist anyone who needs objective data on the geographic locations and extent of ‘large towns’ in Wales.

7.2.5 We would advise - re the RHE Service in Wales:

- acceptance of the WAG Statistical Unit’s definition;
- accepting that in many areas of Wales the ‘urban edge’ is often difficult to pin down on the ground, but usually sharply defined in development plans – and properly so - to aid policy-making and implementation; and
- developing a ‘Guideline’ for LAs/HAs/Wales – which makes it clear that outside of the large towns of South Wales (Cardiff, Newport, Swansea, and some of the South Wales Valley Towns area) all areas are potentially ‘rural’ and available for the RHE to explore, but guiding them to:
  - give high priority to the ‘deep rural areas’ (which will entail identifying and excluding a few ‘middling sized’ towns which have little or no connection with rural industries), to be agreed with –
    - the strategic and funding partners
    - double-checked against Wales Spatial Plan policies;
  - agree with the LA’s ‘affordable housing officers’ and HAs which ‘less rural’ areas might be excluded from the RHE’s ‘working patch’.

DEFINING A RURAL SETTLEMENT IN WALES - NORTH EAST WALES BORDER AND COAST (WSP AREA) as an EXAMPLE

NOT A PRIORITY - LARGE TOWNS - None in North East Wales.

LOW PRIORITY

MEDIUM SIZED TOWNS - eg Centre of Wrexham (which contains the greater part of the County’s Population of c.130,200 / Dwellings c. 55,500)

SMALL - MEDIUM SIZED TOWNS - eg Colwyn Bay (Dwellings c. 13,000)

MEDIUM PRIORITY

Outer urban/rural edges of the settlements named above, possibly, and SMALL TOWNS - eg Mold (Dwellings c. 4,100).

HIGH PRIORITY

VERY SMALL TOWNS - eg Holywell (Dwellings c. 2465)
VILLAGE - eg Caerwys (Dwellings c.370)
SMALL VILLAGE - eg Nannerch (Dwellings c.105)
HAMLET - eg Padeswood (Dwellings c. 25)
7.3 The Ever-Shifting Context

7.3.1 House prices to income ratios in Wales (4:1) now lag behind only those in the South of England.

7.3.2 What HIRC would describe as ‘the Oxfordshire effect’ is now beginning to hit rural Wales - especially in Monmouthshire, Pembrokeshire, the prettier areas of the North Wales coast and North East Wales, and the Mid Wales Border - in smaller market towns and villages, within easy commuting distance of larger and fashionable towns with good learning, career, retail and leisure opportunities. Such areas demonstrate high and rising house prices, being a favoured location for middle-class commuters, the only / nearest grocery shop often being that at the nearest petrol filling station, with no other local shops but a few specialist small businesses (eg. wedding gown shops, cycle repair shops, bureau de change, a potter, a real ale gastro-pub also selling local fishing licences, etc) with car dependency high, despite grant-aided buses being available.

7.3.3 This is a welcome sign of prosperity on the one hand, and brings in some benefits (eg often investment in better facilities, new skills, building conservation, etc.) but it usually means much less housing choice for the resident locals on lower incomes (and their offspring). This will present an ever mounting challenge for Wales in terms of both meeting local housing need and maintaining a distinctive Welsh culture - two separate but strongly connected issues in Wales.

7.4 A Bilingual Country: the Linguistic and Cultural Issues

7.4.1 The Welsh language has some status in Wales, and the WAG is committed to Wales becoming a bi-lingual country. This follows centuries during which the Welsh language and culture came under increasing pressure – with very severe pressures on the language being experienced in the latter half of the twentieth century. There are now signs – in the new Millennium - of a small upswing in the use of Welsh by younger people especially, and increasing numbers of speakers in the urban areas of Wales (eg in Cardiff and the coastal towns in Conwy), but the Welsh speakers in such areas remain in a minority.

7.4.2 There remains great public expectation, among prominent Welsh-speakers, of the WAG in terms of its potential role in defending, promoting and reinvigorating the Welsh language and Welsh culture and securing a gradual re-growth in the use of Welsh. Access to housing – who owns it, who can afford to buy it, what language they speak and whether or not they learn Welsh and/or support the native language and culture - has long been a very sensitive issue in rural Wales. In-migration renders it more so. This is an important related issue for this Study – which must be addressed.

7.4.3 WAG officials are known to have discussed the socio-linguistic issues in detail with concerned local authorities over recent years. The common perception is that there is no really substantial political enthusiasm currently for attempting the more defensive approaches favoured in the States of Guernsey and Ireland (re the Gaeltacht) with all the knock-on effects on asset-values, the wealth of local people, and other tight controls that it implies. Secondly, the case for establishing other new
and stronger legal controls seems to WAG to be ‘not yet made’. Local authorities have powers to do anything they deem fit to promote and secure the “well-being” of their areas. The full ‘Toolkit’, if vigorously used by LAs, should enable these new challenges to be ‘managed’, fairly effectively, seems to be the line taken. And WAG seems (from the cases and evidence set out in the ‘Toolkit’) to be comfortable with the use of very testing ‘local residency requirements’ (10 years or more) for new affordable housing schemes.

7.4.4 A consortium of organisations (including local authorities, the Welsh Language Board, the Home Builders Federation, and the WAG) has recently collectively appraised planning policy in relation to the Welsh language. The Report - ‘Planning and the Welsh Language: the Way Ahead’, informed by a Study awarded to the Bartlett School of Planning (UCL) led by Dr Mark Tewdwr-Jones, was recently published (Dec. 2005). It advocates a two-stage Language Impact Assessment methodology - to be applied in the western areas of Wales. More detail on that may be found in ANNEX G. A decision by the parties on what action to take in relation to the recommendations of this study is still awaited, and is not expected soon.

7.5 New Law-making Powers for Wales

7.5.1 Recently, the WAG celebrated the fact that – after a gap of 600 years – Wales is once again able to make its own laws (subject to a few provisos). It seems unlikely that new powers will be enacted by the WAG until and unless current powers are clearly shown to be insufficient. However, if the current powers – when used – should fail to withstand challenge, then the WAG would need to consider creating new and stronger powers, more immediately.

7.6 WAG Funding for Social Housing Schemes in Wales

7.6.1 The ‘Social Justice and Regeneration’ head currently (2006-07) commands a budget of c. £375M pa from WAG in Wales. The total budget for capital ‘bricks and mortar’ spend on social housing in Wales is an important consideration. The current ‘Social Housing’ budget is £86.4M (c £90M /annum): c.£10M goes into ‘extra care housing’, c.£4M into ‘drug and substance abuse’ and c. £72 M into ‘main programmes’ of which some is top-sliced for highly specialized forms of housing, and the bulk is then available for local authorities to bid for. The LAs submit bids to WAG, and are encouraged in so doing to work with partner consortia on those bids. Pre-set administrative forms ensure that the bids are of equal quality when submitted, and WAG provides guidelines on filling the forms to further ensure a level playing field. The main thrust of the assessment criteria is ‘deliverability’. And WAG check this carefully – bringing in a range of WAG specialists to inform the process – double-checking information down to planning permission levels of detail, if necessary, and iteratively addressing bids until the best bids are identified for funding within the overall levels of resource available. Careful progress monitoring by WAG and the LAs can sometimes enable additional resource to be vired into the programme to make progress. The budget is likely to remain at about the same level for the next few years. RHE generated schemes are not now identified as such, but could be in the future. Given the scale of the budget, the easiest way to access the funds – WAG officials advised - is simply for LAs to put bids in. Further ring-fencing within that budget would appear not to be needed and/or helpful to RHE generated schemes. Detailed advice on all this including the zoning arrangements as between LAs and HAs in Wales was provided to LAs on 7.7.06, in respect of the Programme for 2008-09, for which bids were invited by 6.10.06. (cf. WAG Letter to LAs: Social Housing Grant Programme – Invitation to Bid for 2008 / 2009; and, Introduction of a Programme Management Guide’ – July 2006.)
7.7 Other Emerging Housing Issues in Wales

7.7.1 We are aware that the WAG has commissioned further research – of the Rural Housing Observatory on Homelessness in Wales, and of Cambridge University on Low Cost Housing Initiatives in Wales. The Clients for this Study will need to factor in the messages coming out of such researches when they are fully published later in 2006-2007.

7.7.2 It is clear that affordability, homelessness and housing standards issues are the three big housing concerns in Wales at the moment, for WAG and others. The number of households defined as homeless will always be a major concern for housing policy-makers and programmers.

7.7.3 A recent study entitled ‘The Stigma of Rural Homelessness in Wales (Rural homelessness: building a better picture)’ studied rural homeless people in Carmarthenshire, Powys and Ceredigion. It found that although less visible than in urban areas, there was a problem of rural homelessness, predominantly among younger people, and more usually men than women. Family breakdown and relationship breakdown was most often the reported cause. There were often issues with drugs, mental health and alcohol, also.

7.7.4 A third of those interviewed were local but a majority (61%) had migrated into rural areas - often to access an existing network of friends and family in the area. It concludes that homelessness affects rural counties just as it does urban areas, and that - “prevention and continual support appear to be the most appropriate services to offer in these areas.” It urges “varied interventions, particularly between young people and their parents” and suggests that this “could perhaps prevent many leaving home”. (cf. Wallich Clifford Community, 2006).

7.8 The Next Phase for the RHE Service in Wales

7.8.1 There is a need to reflect on all these issues - before advising on the future development of the RHE service in Wales – plus:

- the responses (summarised above)
- the CASE STUDIES (all Annexed)
- emerging issues, data, and policy of relevance
- the desirability of sustaining progress and continuity on RHE schemes already commenced
- an assessment of the utility of developing the RHE Service as opposed to other alternative approaches
- an assessment of the political will and general interest in developing the RHE service further, plus
- realism about the likely scale of resources and capacity to developing the RHE Service further in Wales, with pace.
8. A Recipe for the Future RHE Service in Wales

8.1 Taking the Service Forward in Wales

8.1.1 Having weighed up all the evidence so far, HIRC consider that, notwithstanding the scattered nature of the pilots and the uncertainty and relative paucity of funding re the pilots done to date, a case can be made for expanding and strengthening the RHE Service in Wales, to give full coverage across Wales, outside of the ‘large towns’ (as defined by WAG).

This rests not merely on the strong results produced in England. There are also clear benefits to be seen from the work done to date in Wales by the four ‘pilot’ schemes: the completion of local housing needs surveys for 52 communities, with 12 in progress, and c.85 planned to be carried out over the next 2 years. Real need for housing - or not - will become clear to all those communities, which is a considerable benefit in its own right. A few affordable housing units have already been provided, although the RHEs have only been in post for a short time relative to development timescales. And 26 small sites - for potentially c. 127 units – have been identified, so far, through the RHEs’ work.

So, there is evidence of achievement to date and of positive beneficial results in terms of communities and local authorities knowing which localities really require new affordable housing units, and feeding that into planning documents and LAs local housing strategies and bids for spending on social housing.

The impact of the RHEs work is mainly distributive/redistributive of the available Welsh budget for building social housing. So, its impact on the available c. £90M / annum WAG / LA budget set-aside for building new social housing should not generate an unmanageably large extra number of units to be built. [NB. The overall budget for Social Justice and Regeneration is £374.5M 06/07, £394M 07/08, £394M 08/09. May 2006 - ‘Firm Foundations’].

An expanded RHE Service for Wales could become (i) a more powerful force for rural regeneration, and (ii) more ‘bespoke to Wales’ if encouraged to:

• inspire and help all the partners to adopt multi-disciplinary approaches to “improve villages in the round” (more like the mainland ‘French approach’) in order to create ‘sustainable communities’; and

• forge creative solutions which also help to bolster the Welsh language and culture (the unique ‘Welsh issue’) eg. through appropriate multi-use adaptation of redundant buildings in rural areas to include language centres and affordable housing and other community uses as well as an element of market housing to cross-subsidise.

8.1.2 Our broad conclusion of the study is that there is scope to take the RHE Service forward in Wales to create a National RHE Network – which would be more effective in delivering the full suite of WAG policies if it embraced the two points noted above.
8.1.3 We believe that the expanded service would deliver more new affordable housing units, in small scale developments of good quality, across rural Wales and at a rate which would be manageable within the current levels of the Social Housing Budget for Wales. We think that is so even if current RHE numbers are trebled, and their output in terms of units on site increased – through the injection of regeneration skills and training – to higher levels.

8.1.4 Funding for the ‘extra’ dimensions suggested in para 8.1.1 would need to come from a wide variety of other pots, and the private sector.

8.2 A Better RHE Service in Wales – the Options

THE AIM

To provide an RHE Service which covers the whole of ‘rural Wales’ as currently defined by WAG, as soon as possible, in a manner bespoke to Wales.

THE JUSTIFICATION

1. The need to deliver ‘sustainable communities’ (defined by WAG as ‘active, inclusive and safe; well-run; environmentally sensitive; well designed and built; well connected; thriving; well served; and fair for everyone).

2. The need to augment resources to improve Welsh villages ‘in the round’, and in a manner which is sensitive to its unique culture and desire to be a bilingual nation.

3. The need to resource the work needed to undertake LHMA (very intensive work) without using scarce ‘professional planner’ resource to do so.

4. The need to deliver development on more rural exception sites. WAG’s Affordable Housing Toolkit says re ‘Rural Exception Sites’ (para 3.20) “The Assembly Government wishes to promote greater use of this policy. Local authorities and where they exist, rural housing enablers, should work with local communities to undertake community housing needs assessments and identify rural exceptions sites.”

5. In Wales, 35% of the population lives in rural areas (compared with 19% or so in England) according to the rural areas classification system applied to both. The whole of rural England is covered by a successful RHE network. It is time for Wales to catch up, and adapt the method to its own ends.

THE OPTIONS

The Options 1 - 5, are set out below in turn, with a focus on the measures required, to costs, pros and cons and desirability. They represent progressive levels of investment. There is also scope for bit of ‘mix and match’ of elements in different Options. The Costing Framework is in ANNEX J. In summary, they may be listed as follows.
OPTION 1 – Allow the Current 4 RHE ‘pilots’ to Run Out and End in 2008

MEASURES REQUIRED

• Set a firm end-date for grant-aid from WAG (currently contributing c£50K/annum overall).

• Leave LAs/HAs to pick up the slack if they really want to.

COSTS

• Total cost of the 4 RHEs is now running at c. £185.5K per annum - and that would reduce to nil cost by 2009.

PROS

• Justifiable if RHE are not seen as having a worthwhile or cost-effective role to play over the longer term. ( NB. But none of the current funders are saying that, and the consultees do not say that, either).

• Small saving to the public purse in the short term.

CONS

• Diminished progress on identifying true need and proper roll-out of more affordable housing in rural Wales.

• Risk to Wales’ and WAG’s reputation – given recent favourable references to RHEs in publications, and the clear evidence – from England – that they work even in areas where house-prices are high and rising.

• Social / cultural tensions in rural Wales exacerbated, with unpredictable consequences – frustration about lack of affordable housing in villages for locals, little scope to deal with rural homelessness, etc. creating reactions ( which would need much ‘managing’ by politicians and officials).

• LAs/HAs would struggle to cope with the raft of recent (June 2006) guidance published by the WAG, and would not meet its expectations re delivery.

• This option would probably generate a chorus of criticism.

DESIRABILITY

• Very Low / Discount.
OPTION 2 – Maintain Status Quo only – Expanding Slowly

MEASURES REQUIRED

- No additional measures, save commitment to supporting all 4 current RHEs for a 5-6 year period (min) – two 3 year cycles of funding - from April 2007.

- Possible addition of some admin support (say up to 1 day a week on average max) to lighten RHEs load at busy periods, and free up a bit of their time for higher-level activity.

- Allowing slow, organic growth in the number of RHEs – as at present – building up slowly, organically, towards a loose RHE confederation.

COSTS

- Grant-aid (from WAG) secured for all 4 RHEs (and any additional new RHEs) to the same level, to be seen to be fair to all, thus making it easier to negotiate progress for new RHEs in other LAs.

- Possibly providing also a fixed grant to help pay for admin support staff for each of the 4 RHEs. Minor extra cost.

PROS

- Keeps things steady: more continuity re initiatives on the ground and relationships forged by existing RHEs, but heads off risk of losing the 4 ‘pilot’ RHEs and might help retain good staff.

- Might tempt a few more LAs/HAs to set up further RHEs schemes in their patches – in a manner largely independent of central government – which would (for some) be more palatable and in keeping with the original HA movement’s ethos (ie. bottom up, not top-down, and with a bit of ‘local anarchy’).

CONS

- Would still look inexplicably weak as compared to the RHE service in England, and could lead to increasing frustration in many rural areas of Wales re rural housing issues, and a perceived inadequacy of response to it.

- Still open to too much variability in approach – and ‘reinvention of the wheel’ re process and solutions. Little opportunity to network, mentor, inject regeneration expertise and/or flex resource.

- Difficult to develop best practice to suit Wales from patchy experience. No effective overview, or monitoring, or a devise to bust through obstacles.

DESIRABILITY

- Low / Slow.
OPTION 3 – The ‘Welsh Bespoke Model’ - Basic

MEASURES REQUIRED

- A new Central Unit: 2 Posts only – a Lead Officer F/T, and Admin Support P/T (from April 2007) to drive progress.

- Targetting of the LAs with the largest rural areas not yet covered: (i) Vale of Glamorgan, (ii) Ceredigion, (iii) Anglesey/Arfon, (iv) Carmarthenshire, (v) Flintshire/Wrexham, and (vi) rest of Powys - to have an RHE each immediately (Starting in post - a.s.a.p. in 2007-08 = 6 extra RHEs).

- Some administrative back-up (part-time limited hours, say 1 day a week on average max per RHE) thus freeing up RHE time.

COSTS

- The Central Unit: 1 middle manager (G7), 0.5 - 1 fte support/admin person) and premises/on costs: largely WAG funded (?).

- 6 new RHEs – salaries part-funded by WAG. Assume generous incentivising grant-aid offer from WAG – probably tapering off in later years. ...with LAs picking up more of the cost as affordable rural housing ‘units’ are delivered.

- 4 existing RHEs retained – salaries grant-aided on the same basis – running from 2007-08 onwards, and 10 part-time admin officers (1 day/week/RHE).

- any additional running costs – LAs/HAs to absorb.

PROS

- Swift progress, right across Wales, given strong financial inducements by WAG. And, should be readily affordable for all - if negotiated at very high level by WAG/WLGA/WFHA.

- Easy to set up, should make a strong impact quickly in the most rural counties of Wales – with clear benefit re units as/where needed in 3-4 years (by 2010).

- Retains expertise of current RHEs and builds a Welsh Network around them.

CONS

- Incomplete coverage of Wales, less swift progress in some areas inevitable.

- Need to work hard to brief LAs/HAs unfamiliar with the concept to ‘go for it’.

DESIRABILITY

- High / for Good Progress (over and above the existing arrangements).
**OPTION 4 – The ‘Welsh Bespoke Model’ – More Developed**

**MEASURES REQUIRED (Over and above Option 3)**

- Persuade the more urban authorities to come into the scheme – and appoint another 2 or 3 RHEs to cover – flexibly - the South Wales Valleys areas: some RHE cover would then be available across the whole of rural Wales.

- Formal set up: a Welsh National RHE Network, a Chair/Champion and Board.

**COSTS**

- Number of RHEs – 4 existing RHEs and 6 from the Phase One expansion, plus another 3 new RHEs to work flexibly across the rest of the South Wales authorities = c.13 RHEs altogether (and assume a WAG incentivising grant-aid support as set out in Option 3).

- Extra over and above Option 3: Cost of a Chair-Champion (part-time 2-3 days a month - small payment = c. £8K / annum).

- A 11-12 person max Board (minimal T&S expenses only - say a £20 K budget).

**PROS**

- Provides coverage of the whole of rural Wales, but still allows the LAs / HAs / others to feel in control – and a real National RHE Network for Wales.

- Logical next step after Option 3 (as Phase One) – allowing a bit of extra time to agree the best arrangements with the more urban authorities in South Wales.

- Minor additional cost over and above Option 3 – but with much greater capacity to voice the issues, deal with obstacles, hatch deals at the national and county levels and across boundaries, with the aim of freeing up more sites and resources for development much sooner – if the correct skills and experience are acquired for the Chair, Board and Lead Co-ordinating Officer.

- Could be closely aligned with the Wales Spatial Plan: c. 2 RHEs per WSP Area.

**CONS**

- Not as obviously comprehensive and powerful as Option 5B (Top of the Range – English style): and less scope for WAG input and lead than in Option 5B.

- Would need a gifted bilingual communicator with high respect and trust across Wales for the Chair role – not easy to find.

**DESIRABILITY**

- High / A Very Good Option.
OPTION 5 – Replicate the English Model in Wales (more or less) on a proportionate scale: ‘The Welsh Bespoke Model’ – More Elaborately Developed

MEASURES REQUIRED (Over and above Option 4)

OPTION 5A –

Step 1: an upgrade from Option 4, adding a part-time specialist regeneration advisor to assist the whole service across, as / where / when needed.

OPTION 5B –

Step 2: Go further and create a superstructure to match that in England:

- A very powerful strong Central (Directing) Unit. Could range widely in scope from a mini-NDPB Rural Housing Commission (c.10 persons) unit, to a new unit in the Countryside Council for Wales (HQ, Bangor), or a new WAG unit, or an independent unit operating anywhere in Wales (all the latter with a minimum 3-person unit – a Lead officer, an admin support officer, as in Options 3 / 4, and probably more).

- Appoint a paid and powerful ‘RHE Project Management and Monitoring Board’ with senior representatives from all the sectors, as well as the ‘Chair’ to manage and promote rural housing issues within and beyond the WAG in Wales. Reps from 2 LAs (N/S), 2 HAs (N/S), 1 NPA, 1 private house-builder rep, a CC Clerk (and possibly CCW and CPRW?), a ‘rural issues’ academic, and a WAG official?

- Full coverage of Wales with RHEs – giving all an equal access to resource: which could range up to 22 (1 per LA max). NB. We think this frankly unnecessary, as feedback from LAs suggests that would be too much resource relative to the scope for development schemes to follow-up the needs assessment – unless WAG intends to invest much more resource in building social housing schemes across Wales. Hence: we would assume the same 13 RHEs as in Option 4, plus 2 or 3 more perhaps – and the same incentivising WAG grant-aid budget is assumed.

- Ensure close alignment with the Wales Spatial Plan, as in Option 4. RHEs to be encouraged to participate and work flexibly within the 6 ‘Area Fora’ working groups for (i) North West Wales – Eryri and Môn, (ii) North East Wales – Border and Coast, (iii) Central Wales, (iv) South East – The Capital Network, (v) Swansea Bay – Waterfront and Western Valleys, and (vi) Pembrokeshire – The Haven.

COSTS

- Option 5A: specialist regeneration advisor (allow for a £30k part-timer, or secondee, a temporary loan - or, failing that, a consultant).

- Option 5B: Costs of a (paid) Board (say £40k /annum) – plus potentially a whole new mini-NDPB (expensive).
PROS

- Option 5A – minimal extra cost / very desirable.
- Option 5B: a very strong Central Unit - run as a freestanding unit, a special WAG project, or alternatively, as a unit under CCW’s wide remit / ‘experimental powers’ – easy to set up, and capable of being highly directive.
- Option 5B - Very full coverage / matches England’s set-up in seriousness and depth, but with the delivery mechanisms chosen to suit Wales. Recognises the reality that the challenge is likely to be with us for many years to come, and gears up to deal with that. Strong visibility /collaborative action.
- All 22 LAs could have similar level of RHE resource.
- The effort could be geared to deliver a large volume of affordable housing 3-4 years over and above what would be delivered otherwise to meet WAG targets.
- A degree of mutual mentoring and flexibility in the use of the RHE resource within each of the 6 WSP ‘Areas’ would be resource efficient.

CONS

- Option 5B - potentially very considerable extra cost - possibly overkill. [ NB. In HIRC’s view - probably not worth the candle.]
- Legislation would be needed for a mini-Commission / new NDPB ( a slow process / big delay). Too slow and cumbersome ( and not recommended).
- Would probably need to be (i) a WAG in-house unit to be set up really quickly, (ii) centrally driven in practice to justify the move and ensure it was established fully and up and running to a timetable. ( No other national level institution has expressed a strong interest in running such a vehicle.)
- Might trigger nervousness that the unit outputs would become the driving force, forcing units into areas where they were not needed ( potentially to the detriment of local sense of control, and raising fears about the impact on Welsh language and culture) – requiring much prior–reassurance.

DESIRABILITY

Option 5A : High / A Very Good Option.

Option 5B : High ( if an independent or arms length central unit is created) but : Less High ( if legislation is required to set it up).
8.3 A Way Forward – Key Elements

A. OVERALL STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT

Seen purely from the perspective of making progress on housing issues, Option 4 is a very good option and the minimum advised: it would provide the greater political weight needed to effect swift progress in expanding the RHE cover across Wales. But we see great merit in aiming to add a regeneration adviser (Option 5A) in order to secure wider rural regeneration benefits, more units on the ground and faster progress overall.

The key elements as we see them are -

- a 2 person ‘Central Support Unit’ (with a Specialist Regeneration Advisor - part-time and/or readily accessible) –
  - located anywhere in Wales where it is welcome - but probably under WLGA’s umbrella, nominally at least, given the LAs strategic housing role.

- ‘National RHE Network CHAIR / CHAMPION’ to be appointed to –
  - champion the concept of affordable rural housing nationally
  - win interest from private sector builder-developers in investing more
  - discuss and secure funding requirements for the National RHE Network
  - discuss affordable rural housing in Wales with Ministers and their senior officials and advisors – feeding in information and ideas
  - talk to communities resistant to affordable rural housing developments about their ‘issues’ (with a view to helping to defuse them)
  - chair the quarterly meetings of the National RHE Network
  - inspire the general performance of the National RHE Network.

- a ‘National RHE Network (Co-ordinating) Director’ (expert in local area regeneration and policy implementation and review) to –
  - produce a broad ‘National Affordable Housing Action Plan’ / programme
  - liaise with officials in interested organisations, in Wales, nationally and in the rest of the UK – receiving and feeding in ideas on housing, planning and regeneration
  - monitor progress (‘light-touch’) on broad delivery goals / targets for Wales
  - ensure dissemination of best practice and full use of available powers
  - input personal professional experience to dispel problems and grasp opportunities – where RHEs clearly need that support
  - provide other expert advise, coaching and support for the RHEs
  - monitor overall progress
  - encourage efficient RHE training mentoring, and sharing of experience
  - ensure RHE career structure, professional standards, terms and conditions
  - arrange a Biennial RHE Progress Conference
  - help RHEs to plan cyclical review of their Local Needs Assessments.

- the ‘National Affordable Housing Action Plan’ to –
  - sharpen the focus of work on Affordable Rural Housing
  - provide a mechanism for swift alignment of RHE performance with any new powers, initiatives, and best practice identified.

[ NB. A variant on this would be to agree with WAG that this be one strand in a more powerful reviewed Welsh National Housing Strategy and/or a ‘Welsh National Housing Action Plan - for the Provision of Affordable. Intermediate, and Low-Cost Homes for Wales’.]
• if ‘Option 4/5A/5B be selected - a ‘National RHE Board’ (c. 12) to:
  ○ receive and comment upon progress reports from the Chair and Director
  ○ assist with the recognition, and tackling, of problems and opportunities
  ○ identify and overcome any barriers to effective, collaborative, action
  ○ Option 5B – very centralised – assumes a more expensive, paid Board.

• within each of the six ‘Areas of Wales’ - all RHEs to plug into the Existing 6 No. ‘RHE Area Fora’ to –
  ○ help bring together the ‘Senior RHE’ / other RHEs and their key allies
  ○ ensure close-working, collaboratively, between RHEs and planners, and housing specialists, across LA/HA boundaries, within the sub-national ‘Areas’ recognised by the Wales Spatial Plan
  ○ discuss alignment of agendas, funding of schemes, issues, etc
  ○ agree on ways of leveraging extra public/private action and resource into the key need/opportunity communities and sites
  ○ flag up – for the National RHE Network – issues to address
  ○ receive briefings – especially on best practice and emerging ideas.

• Each RHE could also continue to report to and liaise with a local RHE Steering Group.

The elements are set out in map form in ANNEX H (re RHE coverage of Wales – to give an average of 2 RHEs per WSP Area) and in diagrammatic form in ANNEX I (re general organisational hierarchy).

B. HOSTING – a Central Support Unit

There are a number of options. A clear view emerged from WAG officials that the WLGA would be the appropriate umbrella body for this Unit - given the strategic housing role of local authorities. However, HIRC consider that the WFHA, or an individual large County, or a large Housing Association, or a WAG office, could equally well serve as backroom base for hosting the ‘Central Support Unit’. In short, we think the Unit should be hosted by the keenest of the potential hosts – where it will be most welcomed - wherever that might be in Wales.

C. MONITORING FRAMEWORK

(1) The logical monitoring arrangements would flow from the production of a single issue or multi-strand National Action Plan, for the next 10-15 years. (A period of c. 15 years is usually regarded in UK Government circles as a workable time horizon for a major strategic policy initiative at the scale of a devolved administration and/or major region).

(2) The Monitoring Framework should be well related to the suggested National Action Plan and concentrate, in respect of both low cost and affordable homes, on –

  (i) measurable ‘hard’ outputs (i.e. the number of units in the Priority 1 (very high urgency of need), Priority 2 (high urgency of need) and Priority 3 (general urgency of need) areas of Wales, and the proportions of new units – preferably 100% - which meet current modern ‘standards’ (such as the BREEAM / Eco-homes, Lifetime Homes, and ACPO’s Secured by Design standards);
(ii) firm evidence of ‘intermediate’ outputs (i.e. studies completed, in progress, commissioned, and still to do; proofs of evidence submitted to planning/public inquires (any type); major written submissions made to inform LAs and other organisations; presentations made at public or private meetings);

(iii) short descriptive notes on ‘softer’ outputs (i.e. other work done and influence exerted over events – where this is closely related to delivering the National Action Plan’s key aims and objectives and its agreed sub-regional components); and

(iv) an overall evaluation of the contribution of these outputs towards delivering the KEY OUTCOMES sought - with the latter likely to be expressed in terms of (a) a better quality of life achieved in rural areas of Wales, with more opportunity for people on lower incomes to develop their own lives and to improve the lives of their dependants and children, and (b) fewer local people – long resident in Wales - having to leave their ‘cynefin’ in order to become housed to a reasonable standard (i.e. reduced out-migration).

D. FUNDING

Funding for a National RHE Network

To be clear:

(i) funding is needed to support the creation of a National RHE Network to act as ‘facilitator – intermediaries’ across the whole of rural Wales, so that RHEs can be used really effectively to assist and speed the process of delivering more affordable housing in rural areas, in the right place / for the right reasons / reasonably quickly; and

(ii) the funding consequences of their work with LAs/HAs in terms of housing ‘unit outputs’ (years down the line) will need to come from the available – current, future, planned (and windfall) budgets for housing in Wales (public and private sector);

(iii) so, the main impact of the National RHE Network will be:

○ to affect the distribution of the available public and private resource for affordable rural housing and related schemes – helping to guide more of it into the more rural communities where it is really needed and welcomed (a re-distributional effect); and

○ potentially to attract more private investment into Wales, from private sector builder-developers in Wales and the UK more generally, in order to fulfil the demand for affordable housing in rural Wales (a resource-generating effect) – but this is dependant on an injection of regeneration skills into the RHE processes in Wales.

8.4 Likely Acceptability

8.4.1 HIRC judges – from the consultation responses and various conversations with interested people and organisations in Wales - that these proposals would meet the aspirations of many for the RHE Service in Wales, both:
among those local authorities and housing organisations already involved in RHE work, and

(ii) those who may be contemplating becoming involved in RHE work.

8.4.2 Discussions held informally with WAG advisers and officials suggest that the Assembly Ministers and the WAG generally are very concerned about and wish to address issues of affordability – via both low cost housing for first-time buyers and affordable /social housing for lower income families, with an emphasis on the former. It is seen as a priority for both local authorities and housing providers.

8.4.3 The Steering Group for this study (WLGA, WFHA, the Welsh Association of National Parks Authorities, Gwerin HA, Pembrokeshire HA, Cymdeithas Tai Eryri and Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd) support the broad conclusions and are keen to see an expansion of RHE numbers. They support Option 4 as a way forward.

8.5 Perennial Sensitivities

8.5.1 ‘Delivery, Delivery, Delivery’. A National RHE Network would have to produce real ‘bricks and mortar’ results, and in the correct areas - where evidence and trends support that approach – to justify the cost. This is why HIRC consider that an injection of specialist ‘regeneration delivery skills’ would be vital to ensure timely delivery of new units onto key sites – where needed. An additional potential benefit would be that – on the delivery of the housing units – the LAs, HAs and WAG could all more readily capitalise part of the costs of running the National RHE Network.

8.5.2 ‘Bi-lingualism – Iaith Pawb’. (‘Everyone’s language’ – WAG’s policy.) Given the character of rural Wales, a National RHE Network would need to set a very good example both in the substance and the style of its work - working bilingually, encouraging staff to learn and use Welsh, and demonstrating sensitivity by ensuring that units are delivered where they are required on the basis of clear evidence and trends, quickly, but without sacrificing quality standards – so as to be sustainable, and to maintain strong Welsh communities, and in order to secure WAG’s commitment to a more bilingual Wales.

8.6 Meeting the Costs of the Recommended Option (Option 5A)

8.6.1 We have concluded that the key to progress on RHEs is to suggest ways of both ‘upping the status’, ‘considerably upping the performance’ across Wales as a whole and ‘working (much) smarter’ overall.

8.6.2 No one we spoke to anticipated an immediate large increase in funds to address low cost and affordable / social housing. Moreover, ‘low cost, first-time buyer housing’ is clearly seen as a high political priority – which requires a bit of promotion and not necessarily much by way of WAG expenditure / subsidy.

8.6.3 The Comprehensive Funding Review of 2007 affects Whitehall Departments only, and does not directly affect devolved administrations, but any consequential uplift in spending for the Whitehall Departments would lead to a proportional increase in the budgets for the devolved administrations (because of the way in which the ‘Barnett formula’ works). It would be entirely up to the WAG as to how that extra uplift, should it emerge, might be spent. More guidance is likely also as WAG develops its view on the overall scale of resource WAG can contribute to making further progress on special
initiatives. Its budgets and priorities will be clearer after the Welsh Assembly Elections in May 2007.

8.6.4 The scope for capitalising any WAG grant-aid – if ‘running cost/revenue’ budgets are tight - should be fully appraised and exploited.

8.6.5 Other sources of funds which should be fully investigated – with a view to reducing the rate of a potential levy on LAs/NPAs and HAs and the WLGA / WFHA / WANPA (c. 50 organisations) would be:
- EU Objective 1 funding (under the ‘Building Sustainable Communities’ theme)
- national training (building up capacity) funds
- pooled S106 A monies from LAs
- Corporate Social Responsibility grants from large private companies
- grants from large philanthropic trusts, and
- a JVC with selected private developers.

8.6.6 It will be vital also to ensure active (cost neutral) collaboration on research, policy making, housing, planning and regeneration practice – in order to make swift and sure inroads into the ‘problem’ of affordability in rural Wales.

8.6.7 We have attempted some preliminary gauging of the perceived affordability of the Recommended Option (5A) and ways to negotiate a way forward between the main players.

The LOCAL AUTHORITY officials we spoke where all grappling with their strategic housing role. Those not yet involved in RHE work, as well as those that are, seem to accept that LA part-funding is both required and desirable, in terms of ‘ownership’ and leverage. The sums generally expected of LAs towards RHEs at present (£5-10K), we were assured informally, were minor relative to the scale of LA budgets and should be affordable given the high desirability of progress on this key issue. And the WLGA is clearly the organisation to represent LAs in a high-level deal-making processes.

The HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS involved with RHEs, though convinced they are useful, worry about funding liability. About 24 HAs are listed by WAG: half work in more than one LA area, the others are more local in focus. The smaller HAs, it seems, will be particularly nervous of taking on new costs: and their Boards – we were told – might well resist release of funds to third parties. The way around this is for the HAs to be represented by the WFHAs in a high-level deal-making process – in order to agree an appropriate ‘levy’. Also, part-capitalisation of costs- as units are delivered - would help.

The WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT officials we spoke to were confident that WAG could be persuaded to fund a ‘modest’ increase in funding. It was clear to several we spoke to that – as a tool - “RHE’s work”. The informal responses received suggest that there might be scope for WAG budgets to part-fund a modest new initiative on affordable rural homes if it promised to be cost-effective, with clear deliverables, bespoke to Wales, and strongly supported politically and financially by the local authorities. A small central support unit would probably be acceptable. And an emphasis on ‘collaborative working’ across administrative boundaries – covering sub-regional units – would be much welcomed as a feature of any new proposals. The South East Wales Housing Forum was cited as an example of a sub-regional approach where collaborative work and a spirit of ‘working together’ – and it had attracted grant-aid from WAG. The WLGA would be the appropriate lead given the LAs housing strategy role. The appropriate ‘head ‘ for WAG funding was an issue – given the capital bias of the Social Housing Grant Budget, and the limited revenue (Social Housing
Management Grant) budget, and the lack of an equivalent body to the English Commission to act as a conduit/head. One way around this, we think, would be to explore the use of the CCW’s very wide and open-ended ‘experimental powers’, inherited from the now defunct Countryside Commission, as a potential ‘head’.

8.6.8 We understand that the recommendation for a new system (Option 5A) implies a considerable STEP CHANGE – to create an effective and properly structured National RHE Network for Wales. We were not asked to negotiate a funding deal at this stage. The acceptability of the Options is therefore a matter now for discussion at high level between the WLGA, the WFHA and WAG. The WLGA would, nominally at least, probably need to be the lead party - given LAs responsibility for the local housing strategies which now largely guide the work of HAs.

8.6.9 While we appreciate that a STEP CHANGE will be challenging to achieve we believe it to be the best way forward in Wales – given the importance and urgency of addressing the rural housing affordability problem – and it is our view as consultants with recent experience of working at a very senior level in the civil service, local authorities and housing associations - that Option 4 is the best (with Option 5A to be aimed for to give greater performance edge re wider rural regeneration) - and that it ought to be affordable.
9. Related Ideas for Tackling Rural Housing Issues in Wales

9.1 Exploring Complementary Ideas for the Future

9.1.1 We were specifically asked by the Clients to provide ‘ideas’ - on the basis of our experience in developing policy for central government, non-departmental bodies and local authorities etc. on land-use planning, landscape, housing and regeneration issues, in addition to our findings for this study - for addressing some of the trickier challenges faced in delivering more affordable rural housing for local people in Wales.

9.2 Commitment to Sustainable Development – and to Deal with Climate Change

9.2.1 Limited ‘rounding off’ of and limited ‘filling in’ of existing villages has been an increasingly acceptable method of increasing the supply of rural housing while at the same time ensuring orderly redevelopment. However, to this relatively clear in concept but complicated in practice method is added another pressure – that of achieving sustainable development, which has become a political imperative in Wales. All planning, regeneration and housing policies emphasise it as a primary objective.

9.2.2 The reasons are all too evident:
- a planning challenge potentially on a scale at least on a par with World War 2 reconstruction as a result of climate change;
- land uses and crops which could soon change very considerably, even in rural areas, as a result of acute need for a wide range of new conservation measures;
- an increase in risk of flooding requiring a more precautionary approach to be applied particularly to new building near the coast and on or near flood plains;
- new housing design, and household management, which will need to satisfy new and testing ‘eco-standards’ (with older developments substantially retro-fitted).

9.2.3 Planners may well respond in future land-use planning cycles by gradually changing the spatial distribution of new housing and other development – foregoing low-lying land and favouring higher altitude sites and settlements. Housing units will need to be produced to much higher modern eco-standards, throughout. Rural affordable housing will be subject to the same strictures. There will be difficult issues to deal with on transport systems, transport emissions and their relationship with rural functions and society, and more emphasis on IT.

9.2.4 By such means, planning practice in Wales – if it reacts positively and soon to the challenges now foreseen by eminent scientists - could become an exemplar of environmentally sensitive and practical forward-thinking.

9.3 Ensuring Better Housing / Planning Policy Integration

9.3.1 More detailed analyses of housing and labour markets are needed to understand pressures on land use and accommodation. These need to run across administrative boundaries, as well as exploring larger natural geographic areas (eg the uplands, river valleys, coastal strips), in our view - both across local authority boundaries within Wales and across the England-Wales border (where there appears to be considerable migration and commuting which imposes pressures on rural communities in Wales). Currently, such integrated and ecologically-sensitive approaches across administrative barriers appear to be rare, although some are planned for the future.
9.3.2 The UK’s land-use planning systems are intrinsically very sensitive to traditional rural concerns. However, within Wales, we were told on a number of occasions that it is not the job of the planning service within LAs and/or within WAG to promote rural housing, and that rural affordability and Welsh cultural issues are quite separate issues too readily confused. The subtleties of aligning land use planning policy and decision-making, and rural regeneration which respects wider socio-economic-cultural aspirations, may need to be revisited and refreshed in Wales. An apparent lack of integration between administrative ‘silos’ is an issue to be addressed by encouragement, guidance, internal and much cross-agency training. The experience of RHEs could usefully inform training on addressing rural housing problems and the scope for Welsh public services to deal effectively with the inter-meshed issues.

9.4 Strengthening Economic Measures to Bolster Rural Incomes

9.4.1 A stronger local economy would help to defuse many housing pressures. Building SME businesses - which use IT, and sell skills honed in Wales, and relevant to its culture and geography continues to be a challenge. The WAG is already focussing on this. Special incentives for SMEs in rural Wales, to help them grow, would help to increase local incomes, and also to increase housing choice.

9.4.2 While it is entirely understandable that rural housing associations should concentrate on housing provision, in our view their effectiveness in achieving their housing objectives in the longer term could be increased by contributing to local partnerships taking a holistic approach to village regeneration – for example by tackling economic measures, or converting obsolete agricultural and/or other buildings for economic, social or cultural or housing purposes, or introducing new training or other educational and vocational opportunities into village life.

9.5 Embracing Bolder Housing and Planning Measures for Conserving the Native Language and Dealing with Linguistic and Cultural Issues

9.5.1 Current planning policy in relation to the Welsh Language, as set out in PPW and TAN 20, has the mildest of impacts on planning practice in Wales, even in the areas where language concerns are a major issue. It seems to be largely a ‘toothless tiger’ at the moment.

9.5.2 The recent Statutory Code of Practice on Racial Equality and Housing – Wales (cf CRE, 2005), shows good awareness of the challenges faced by BEM ethnic minorities ( particularly the Asian perspective) in Wales, but it barely touches on ‘intrinsic minority’ issues, namely the challenges faced by native Welsh-speakers who are now a minority in Wales, who also face an unequal world. Policies on affordable rural housing which seek to “help keep a viable language community alive” could nevertheless lead to unlawful indirect discrimination if applied unreasonably, the CRE points out ( Example 9 - Ibid, page 20), under current law in force in Wales. The laws and practice in other EU countries ( eg Republic of Ireland), however, seem to enable a more direct approach to supporting the native language and culture, re housing.

9.5.3 Environmental Impact Assessments (which already cover cultural issues in theory) could be used to cover language and culture impacts for all significant developments in rural Wales. A recent report suggests a modified/express form of that (linguistic impact assessment) for west Wales. We consider such techniques to be worthy of serious study and consideration. A relatively simple aim would be to use EIAs/LIAs to assess any likely reduction in the percentage of Welsh speakers as a result of a proposed development and using such information to inform LPA decision-making and related bargaining with developers ( re S106As / planning gain) to
introduce strong mitigation measures. To effect that, more training on S106A bargaining may well be necessary in Wales – if the current system of ‘planning gain’ endures. Certainly, in England, the planners are tough negotiators, and the system is used to extract a multitude of on-site and wider local benefits ( cf. Frank Knight – PGS Final Report, September 2006).

9.5.4 The mitigation could include refurbishing buildings to supply mixed uses - more affordable housing units for local people and also ( potentially, with a bit of tweaking of planning law in Wales) contributing to local cultural centres in converted or purpose built units - perhaps boosting language learning programmes and offering more exciting and sophisticated events and classes for learners in local communities. Advice could be sought from the Welsh Language Board and its key contacts on the most desirable measures in a particular locality. Such activity would also create some spin-off employment – using the language to prime the economy, as done in Catalonia.

9.5.5 This approach would act as a unique Welsh tax on development and would represent an extra development cost. Unfortunately, we are not in a position to judge what effect this might have on activity.

9.5.6 Such measures would have to be acceptable in planning law ( and/or the law modified slightly in Wales to render them acceptable), and set out in independently monitored, legally binding agreements.

9.5.7 Such a system is already in use in the UK – to secure the management and monitoring of impacts and mitigation measures in respect of rare wildlife species and protected habitats, including the provision of alternative habitat ( not necessarily of the same species), the provision of hides, wildlife interpretation centres, site management and specialist monitoring regimes, etc. The latter system is known to work very well.

9.6 Clarifying the Affordable Housing Definitions

9.6.1 The definition of affordable housing is now very wide - embracing many different types of arrangement. This is confusing for the general public in rural areas and professional analysts alike, and could lead to misleading information about what type of ‘affordable’ housing is really being offered. We think this greyness of definition is unfair to local communities and unhelpful. So, we would suggest classifying affordable housing by type ( AF Type I, 2, or 3 ) much as sheltered housing is categorised.

9.7 Using Temporary Housing Solutions to Stem Out-migration

9.7.1 Rather than see people ‘born and bred’ in Wales having to leave rural Wales for lack of housing despite having a job, we consider that LAs will and should exercise their local discretion in planning and other matters re the use of a range of temporary solutions, if more permanent units are not available.

9.7.2 There may be scope to develop that a little, in terms of housing quality and quantity, for example, by:

- providing stronger financial incentives to farmers and other owners of redundant or empty old farm and industrial buildings close to villages to convert them into private rented accommodation (tied to RSLs as property managers, and with stiff local residency pre-conditions) enabling them to be used for a period of say 10 or 15 years minimum, before the owners are allowed to use them or sell them as holiday units, ‘bunk barns’ and holiday flats;
• providing more incentive to expand existing properties to take in semi-dependant relatives (e.g., 'student/granny-flats') – especially where that releases a family housing unit in a rural area for social renting or intermediate housing schemes;
• allowing a few rural sites, suitably sited and landscaped, to be used for semi-permanent residential caravans, and more permanent good quality 'chalets' - on the basis of individual and/or small scale permissions - as long as they very well hidden (behind trees, walls, buildings, in old farm premises, orchards, etc.); and
• accessing private sector accommodation such as residential-sized holiday lets, etc. to be used – for a while and with minimal modification - as 'permanent accommodation'.

9.7.3 Perhaps more creativity and cash is needed to ensure good design, landscaping and housing quality upgrade re these less conventional temporary approaches. There is probably scope also for RHEs to develop a role in helping some communities to access such alternatives – especially where they are stepping stones to developing more ambitious self-build / homesteading schemes and other means to secure permanent low-cost housing in villages.

9.8 Levering More Second Homes into Full-time Use

9.8.1 Anecdotal evidence suggests that paying full Council Tax on second homes, plus other rising costs of utilities and transport, etc. may be triggering the sale of second homes to the benefit of those looking to live and buy houses in rural areas. Additional short term tax breaks / incentives (e.g. lower capital gains tax) in order to encourage the disposal of second homes specifically to benefit locals who will use them as permanent residences, may be worth considering.

9.9 Expanding the Most Popular Special Initiatives to Assist ‘First-time’ Buyers

9.9.1 Expansion of the current special initiative schemes, already a generous spectrum – if affordable to the public purse – would undoubtedly help a few people, and could be targeted upon specific beneficiaries. This would apply especially to the generous and already popular ‘Homebuyer’ scheme, which allows up to 50% grant in all rural areas of Wales, towards the cost of a house.

9.10 Focussing on Good Design and Landscaping

9.10.1 Within Wales, the Design Council is just getting into its work, and the local authorities are alive to the challenges.

9.10.2 Taking Gwynedd as an example - Gwynedd County Council (the old County and the new unitary alike) have both published good guidance on sensitive design of houses for Snowdonia and its environs (the most sensitive landscape in Wales, visually). Currently, Gwynedd Design Guide on building in the Countryside /Affordable Housing etc provides good succinct advice. There will need to be continual refinement of such advice by all LAs in Wales as the scale of affordable housing provision increases - informed by continual review of best practice in design and the use of materials, the quality over time of finishes, etc, and good awareness of the full life of buildings and the lives of their occupants.

9.10.3 ‘Green architecture' will become normal architecture in the years ahead – so Wales needs to move faster to embrace it - for new buildings and sensitive retro-fitting of older buildings. Lord Rogers’ design for the Welsh Assembly 'Senedd' building is clearly and inspiration for the whole of Wales where new building is concerned.
9.10.4 Also, CCW commissioned research on ‘Ideal Homes for Rural Wales’ in 1993, which provides valuable pointers on these issues re housing (cf. Chapman Warren, 1993).

9.10.5 There is a strong inheritance of model villages in the Welsh landscape – a product of the great estates and the early industrial entrepreneurs in Wales. Perhaps there is scope also to develop now a new ‘competition’ in Wales to create low-cost / affordable, ‘green’, well-designed, modular units which use Welsh materials, and fit well into the Welsh landscape - in small model settlements and/or village extensions.
10. Final Conclusions and Recommendations

10.1 Broad Conclusions

10.1.1 Considering all the material presented in this study on the current arrangements, and wider researches to inform advice on the future of the RHE Service in Wales, it seems that we should set out these broad conclusions:

- the delivery of low-cost, intermediate and affordable housing is clearly set to become even an more important social and political issue given the current 4:1 ratio of house prices to incomes in Wales

- the responses to our consultation are overwhelmingly positive from within Wales in their perception of RHEs

- the Welsh RHE ‘pilots’ are fairly recent and have yet to show much by way of concrete progress ‘on the ground’ (beyond many initial local needs assessments, much influence on wider planning policy-making and sites lined up for more detailed consideration) but they have succeeded in establishing a ‘development pipeline’ to deliver rural affordable housing units

- experience from other areas of the UK demonstrates good progress by RHEs in England over time in addressing the issues, influencing local policy development and delivering a large number of affordable housing units ‘on the ground’

- some interesting practice is seen in England, and other countries like France – which also invest in different types of ‘animateurs - facilitators’ - RHEs and suchlike - to deal with rural housing issues

- the French emphasis on improving villages ‘in the round’ is also of relevance to Wales

- the Welsh policy framework is highly supportive of progress on rural housing and planning issues, and affordable housing, and RHEs and the recent wave of advice points to this matter being high on the political agenda

- the WAG is committed to evidence-based approaches to issues and prepared to align powers with policy, if need be

- a very wide array of tools and powers is readily available, and being promoted by WAG, and it is hoped that they will be used confidently and boldly by authorities and agencies in Wales to deliver more affordable housing in rural areas, and to deal with related issues – and we do not believe that additional legislation is required to make progress on improving the RHE service and the context in which they work

- this creates a strong context for making a case for a National RHE Network, now, given that any submission should be reasonably well received

- the Welsh RHE Case Studies reveal some variation in practice, funding and other approaches by the 4 RHE ‘pilot’ schemes in Wales, but HIRC do not consider these differences to be very significant, and would regard some variation in local arrangements as healthy in Wales
• funding for the current RHEs is too uncertain – and if that leads to any current RHE pilots in Wales being abandoned, public officialdom would be considered in a very poor light by local communities who have been engaged with the RHE on various studies - so (as a minimum) the current RHE initiatives must be retained through to the building of units on the ground, wherever true need has been identified in the ‘pilot’ areas

• better overall arrangements are clearly needed – if a Welsh RHE Service is to be well regarded and truly effective

• the definition of rural areas in Wales is WAG’s to make, and not a problem

• the very sensitive issues about impacts on Welsh language and culture need ‘kid gloves’ treatment with a large input from the local community in the areas where a significant % of people speak Welsh, and also far more active awareness and support in the other areas of rural Wales where a smaller % currently speak Welsh – if WAG is seriously committed to aligning the delivery of more housing and the vision of Wales as a more bilingual nation, and Welsh RHEs will need to be tuned into this sensitivity and any future adjustments to planning practice and law which relate to it

• there is clearly scope to grow and improve the current RHE Service into a more impressive and effective one, in and for Wales, and the necessary steps to be taken are fairly obvious, given the analysis of views received from the interested parties

• the focus needs to be on building a better Welsh RHE Service, a true National RHE Network, with all that entails - which will be cost-effective, and distinctive to Wales in that it does the job sensitively and well, in Wales - for Wales

• Options 1-5 range from ‘do nothing’ to a major STEP CHANGE, which could go as far as replicating the English system on a smaller scale ( Option 5B )

• we recommend Option 4 ( which is supported by the Steering Group )

• but we do see considerable merits in adding a regeneration adviser (as set out under Option 5A)

• the fall-back option/s would have to be Option 3, or Option 2, but these are unlikely to be nearly as effective as Option 4 (with or without a regeneration adviser); and Option 1 would be a reverse which we would not recommend

• we assume WAG would make a good contribution (up to 50% of the total overall costs of the expanded RHE Network), with the other half met through a high-level deal struck with the WLGA and WFHAs and bolstered by grant–aid and funds derived from a variety of sources: as we thing this is probably affordable for all the parties and would represent reasonable value for money; and

• there is much scope for experimenting with new ideas on affordable rural housing and rural regeneration generally in Wales, for the Wales of the future.
10.2 Prioritised Recommendations

10.2.1 THE 5 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

KEY RECOMMENDATION 1: We recommend a STEP CHANGE in the extent and quality of the RHE service in Wales to form a strong ‘National RHE Network’ for Wales.

KEY RECOMMENDATION 2: We recommend that the proper way forward for Wales is to embrace OPTION 4 (a Chair/Champion, Board, Central Support Unit, and 12/13 RHEs in total to cover the whole of rural Wales - as set out in full in Para 8.3 of this Study) and to aim for the addition to that of a regeneration advisor (as set out under OPTION 5A).

KEY RECOMMENDATION 3: We recommend that a decision on which Option to pursue be made this Autumn (2006), if possible, or immediately after the May 2007 Assembly Elections, if need be, with a view to making a STEP CHANGE starting as soon as possible in 2007/08.

KEY RECOMMENDATION 4: We recommend that WAG commits to fund up to 50% of the total overall cost of the selected Option over the next several years, in a deal to be struck with the WLGA and WFHA and other national level players, as necessary.

KEY RECOMMENDATION 5: We recommend a set of wider ideas and measures – such as those outlined in Chapter 9 – be considered by the proposed incoming National RHE Board and its partners as a means of both –

1) developing the role and contribution of RHEs, and
2) raising Wales’ game on rural regeneration.

10.3 Acknowledgments

10.3.1 Our thanks go to the Steering Group and all who gave generously of their time and expertise to assist us with this Study.
ANNEXES
Annex A - Previous Research Abstracts and Relevant Case Studies

A1. An early evaluation was carried out by the Joseph Rowntree Trust which came to the following conclusions:

- There is a long lead time associated with the provision of rural housing, partly because of difficulties identifying sites but also because of the difficulties of securing planning permissions and signing S106 agreements.
- While Rural Housing Enablers devote time to community development and appear to slow down the early stages of production, it pays dividends by gaining the support and confidence of the community and appears to shorten the overall time to completion.
- There may be value in linking the enabling role with the concept of a Land Bank Trust, which can acquire options or ownership of sites while other issues are resolved.
- Shared ownership was not a popular option, and there were difficulties in enforcing Section 106 agreements involving perpetuity in letting or sales agreements.
- Housing Corporation allocations favouring bigger schemes in the market towns and larger villages could undermine the small rural schemes supported by the enablers.

(cf. Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust Housing Research 141 - Evaluating Rural Housing Enablers, April 1995.)

A2. A Countryside Agency review of the scheme it supported (50%) at the end of the 1990’s, amounting to 16 RHEs costing £210,000, came to the following conclusions:

- the RHEs have achieved measurable outputs (in terms of additional homes provided), as well as raising awareness of rural housing issues locally and speeding up the development process.
- this is largely due to their independence, itself a consequence of their funding from the Countryside Agency, who have no direct development interest, and their management (mainly through the RCCs) and local steering groups
- securing match funding for the posts has been difficult
- bringing rural housing schemes forward for development takes a long time - at least three years;
- much of RHEs time was community development activity
- the RHEs often lacked sufficient support and training
- the Countryside Agency does not make the most of their information and experience.

A3. The CA commented that:

“We attach a high priority to the work of the RHEs as part of our housing influencing activity and we believe the Agency should, if possible, make the necessary funds available to expand the scheme… as a high priority.” The CA Board agreed to fund an expanded national programme, to cost £1m by 2004/5, about three times the scale of the existing programme. In doing so, it proposed:

- that the work of the RHEs should be more focused strategically to assist the Agency to achieve its corporate objectives and housing priorities;
that the RHEs should be managed by the county Rural Community Councils (RCCs) with the support of a local advisory group to help assure their independence from particular development or local political interests;

to provide CA support for a further 5 years, at 50% for the first three years and subsequently 33%; and

to set clear outcome targets, in terms of affordable housing units delivered.

(cf. Countryside Agency - The Future of the Rural Housing Enablers Scheme, 2000.)

A4. The Affordable Rural Housing Commission also considered the role of Rural Housing Enablers in some depth, describing their work in detail:

**The Role of Rural Housing Enablers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Rural Housing Enablers (RHEs) are specialists who:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Help parish councils to understand the processes and options for achieving affordable housing;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Identify housing needs which cannot currently be met by the market;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Develop and maintain positive relationships with housing and planning authorities in pursuit of the provision of affordable housing;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identify potential sites and liaise closely with landowners and planning authorities over constraints and opportunities;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Liaise closely with local housing associations and Housing Partnerships to facilitate a smooth handover from pre-development to development processes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Operate independently to achieve consensus among partnership stakeholders, and contribute to relevant strategies at national, regional and local level to deliver affordable rural housing, and;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Identify potential means of funding.</td>
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and came to a number of recommendations:

• consolidation and extension of the service provided by Rural Housing Enablers,
• a greater role for Parish and Town Councils
• much more explicit action by Regional Housing Boards to ensure that their strategies are sensitive to the needs of rural areas.
• local authorities and housing associations should work with Rural Housing Enablers and the Housing Corporation in sub-regional partnerships to develop a forward pipeline of schemes…..
• Rural Housing Enablers should engage in the reclaiming of empty homes where appropriate to complement their work on developing new affordable homes.
• That the funding for Rural Housing Enablers being provided through the Rural Social and Community Programme with three years of increased continuity/development funding ..costing around £5m… [in order to] comprehensively raise standards of delivery, and develop a professional progression and vigorous approach to continuing professional development.

(cf. Final Report - Affordable Rural Housing Commission, 2006.)
A5. Another report emerging at almost the same time, from the Rural Housing Policy Forum, also published by the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust, made extensive reference to the role of Rural Housing Enablers throughout the report, and in particular:

“Rural housing enablers play a crucial role in helping rural communities and social housing providers overcome some of the fundamental problems of providing new affordable homes. They can raise awareness and provide evidence of need through organising village appraisals / local assessments. They can work with Parish Councils to determine need, to plan action and to overcome objections. They can identify potential sites and sympathetic landowners. They can do the groundwork which housing associations – from a distance – find difficult. They can act as advocates for local people in need of a home. Potentially they could also offer regional offices a valuable source of information and advice on meeting rural needs. Our Rural Housing Policy Forum has been much impressed by the quality of work and the successes achieved by RHEs. Equally, we have been alarmed to note that their funding, initially from JRF and the RDC, and latterly from the Countryside Agency and through local authorities, has become more precarious with the transfer of the Countryside Agency’s delivery responsibilities to Government Regional Offices. Apart from being diverted from their work to seek future funding for their own posts, there are issues of isolation and lack of support inherent in their current structure. Without the tenacious consensus-building of these enablers we fear there is little chance of securing much needed affordable housing in many rural areas. Their posts should be core funded and supported through a national network, with consideration given to their being employed by Government Regional Offices, each with a sub-regional remit on behalf of rural communities. Wherever RHEs are physically located, their work should be funded and coordinated at regional level.”

A6. On which basis the Policy Forum recommends:

“We urge central government to establish a new £5-6m pa fund for the secure employment of a wider network of Rural Housing Enablers funded by DEFRA through regional offices, together with professional development and networking opportunities.”

(cf. Homes for Rural Communities – Conclusions from the Rural Housing Policy Forum – Richard Best and Mark Shucksmith – Joseph Rowntree Foundation, April 2006.)

A7. The most recent research on RHEs in England was a Review of the Rural Housing Enabler Programme (2005) by the Three Dragons consultancy, followed by a seminar (2006), was based on extensive interviews with the RHEs. The report noted that while RHEs operate in relatively favourable policy context they often have to contend with hostile local environments resulting from 'nimbyism', and uncertain short term funding. It made a number of recommendations on the RHE functions, their structure and management, and funding:

RHE Functions (England)

- Their roles should be simplified to concentrate on local issues giving greater weight to site identification, unlocking sites, and delivery of affordable housing, as opposed to the more social aspects of their functions;
- To be considered as trustworthy their independence needs to be maintained;
- Long term funding should be found for posts with proper career and salary structure related to local authority posts;
• Establish posts with especial expertise (e.g. funding, planning permissions);
• Shift responsibility for finding funding from RHEs themselves to elsewhere in management chain (see below).

RHE Structure & Management (England)

A clearer structure is needed, namely:
1. A National Rural Strategy Group should set rural housing policy and receive reports from ...
2. Regional Housing Boards, which in turn should set regional priorities and allocate ring-fenced resources to each ...
3. Regional Rural Strategy Group which should
   • provide input into the Regional Housing Strategy
   • raise regional and local funds
   • oversee the structure of RHEs
   • oversee their career structure and development
   • and oversee work of ...
4. Local Steering Groups at county level which should establish strategies & priorities for RHEs, while the ...
5. Host Organisations should provide day-to-day line-management for RHEs under a commonly agreed protocol which should clarify roles of LSGs & Hosts.

RHE Finance (England)

• Long term funding is needed if schemes are to be delivered and expectations not raised unrealistically.
• Current funding levels (85% national: 15% local) should be maintained for 2 years.
• Long term funding arrangements (25% national: 75% local) should then be introduced over next 2 years in a smooth and tapered fashion by RHBs.
• Other possible sources of finance need to be considered -
  o RHB Grant
  o Planning Delivery Grant
  o Second home tax
  o Local authority contributions paid as a lump sum
  o HA contributions raised by a levy on RHE enabled housing
  o Private funding (holiday companies) – Co-op Bank.
• Self funding via fees for surveys do not generate much income and can take a disproportionate amount of an RHE’s time.
• RHEs should not work in areas where they receive no support from local authorities do not support them financially.

CASE STUDY - Lancashire

BACKGROUND / CONTEXT

In the case of Lancashire the Countryside Agency has produced a draft but detailed specification of an RHE functions, coverage, budget, etc., which may be regarded as a useful model for the establishment of other RHEs. In the event only Pendle and Ribble Valley took forward the idea of a RHE, but this specimen CA advice, written in the same style as the case study provided for Monmouthshire, is instructive for the notional figures involved, and for the extensive list of intermediate outputs that it expected the RHE to produce.

CURRENT SET-UP

Membership and Financial Contributions

Note: Notional budget only of about £50,000 specified by CA in pre-setup stage of Lancashire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>£k</th>
<th>Member</th>
<th>£k</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RCC (Host)</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>CA (50%)</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>LA2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>LA4</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Project Fees</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>HA 1-4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication sales</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>Conference fees</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The size of communities surveyed to be limited to the Housing Corporation guidelines for rural settlements of a population - less than 1,000 and between 1,000 and 3,000.
- Countryside Agency housing need questionnaire to be used.

INPUTS, OUTPUTS, and OUTCOMES

A. Nature and Scale of Resources and Other Inputs

With a notional budget of about £50,000, the CA thinks this may be accounted for by £27,000 salary and overheads (at point H on the CA salary scale of about £22,000 to which a pension contribution of 18% would need to be added and an essential car user payment of £1,200); office overheads and expenses and insurance and computer support (£8,000), administrative support (£3,000), the cost of meetings (£600), travel and subsistence (£1,500), printing etc (£3,500), staff training and conference fees (£750), and other fees £1,000). They envisage a management fee of 10% of total expenditure (£4,500).
B. Measurable Outputs / Achievements

Not specified in detail in CA document, but may consist of following (as in Quarterly information reports Monmouthshire):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordable Housing (delivered on site)</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>Sites now being considered (9)</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Planning Permission</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>Needs Surveys completed</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline planning permission</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>Surveys in Progress Aug 06</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Applications (8)</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>Surveys Planned (next 2 years)</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. Intermediate Outputs and Desired Outcomes

- Detailed expected outputs over the programme have been specified by the Countryside Agency.
- In addition they would expect the following reports to be provided:
  - Quarterly work programme reports
  - Quarterly information reports
  - Half yearly monitoring reports
  - Annual Reports which should contain three elements –
    - a report which assessing performance against targets;
    - a completed copy of the work plan pro forma;
    - summary of the information contained within the quarterly information reports, including information on barriers to the work of the RHE and any examples of good practice.
- RHEs should also prepare an exit strategy in the event of funding ceasing.
- RHEs should address other issues where appropriate in relation to the supply of affordable housing, such as -
  - homelessness, supported housing, empty homes, provision in national parks,
  - improving quality, sustainable building techniques, effect on the economy.
- Undertake, where appropriate additional research to lead to a better understanding of local housing issues which contribute to more effective solutions to meet rural housing needs.

KEY CONTACT
Kirstine Riding, Senior Policy Adviser - Planning, Housing and Transport, Commission for Rural Communities, 20th Floor, Portland House, Stag Place, London, SW1E 5RS.
CASE STUDY - Lincolnshire

BACKGROUND / CONTEXT

The Lincs RHE Project has been established in one form or another since 1991, when West Lindsey was chosen as part of a national pilot project by Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE) and the National Association of Rural Community Councils. Following the successful evaluation of this project the Rural Development Commission (RDC) launched the Rural Housing Enabler Programme in 1996, which rolled the concept out across England with the eventual aim of providing at least one RHE post per county. However, the RHE project is now in its last year of guaranteed funding from the Countryside Agency and there is no longer any funding available.

Other contextual factors:
- Four of the other six pilot areas went on to develop Land Bank Trusts, which can acquire options or ownership of sites while other issues are resolved, but Lincolnshire continued with the original concept of RHE support.
- When the project first started Lincolnshire was one of the cheapest counties in which to buy a house and also had one of the lowest average household incomes but that is no longer the case.
- The RHE works in East and West Lindsey Districts and covers around three hundred parishes, with active involvement currently in over 30 parishes.

CURRENT SET-UP

The strategic nature of the RHE’s functions are managed by a Steering Group, each of which jointly provided £35,000 in 2003-4.

Steering Group Membership and Financial Contributions (2003-4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>£k</th>
<th>Member</th>
<th>£k</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCL (Host)</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>East Lindsey DC</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Lindsey</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HC*</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>Lincs Rural</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Valley HA</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>Acis Group</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolds</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Linx Homes</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Withdrawn in 2004-5 leading to £7,300 shortfall …

- Co-located at the Community Council of Lincolnshire.
- Part of ACRE, the national network for RCCs.
- Sits on EMRAF’s Regional Housing Platform.
- Uses standardised Countryside Agency questionnaire.
INPUTS, OUTPUTS, and OUTCOMES

A. Nature and Scale of Resources and Other Inputs

In 2005-6 the total cost of the RHE Operation was £35,000. The major items of expenditure were on salary (£22,500), office overheads and expenses (£1,600), management and administrative support (£7,700), and the cost of meetings (£900).

B. Measurable Outputs / Achievements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordable Housing (delivered on site)</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>Sites now being considered (9)</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Planning Permission</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>Needs Surveys completed</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline planning permission</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>Surveys in Progress Aug 06</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Applications (8)</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>Surveys Planned</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. Intermediate Outputs and Desired Outcomes

In addition to the ‘hard’ outputs above a number of other activities and intermediate outputs have been undertaken during the pilot stage of this project although quantitative information appears not to be readily available at the time of writing (being pursued):

- high quality support, needs assessment and community development work to rural communities across East and West Lindsey
- finding sites
- negotiating with land owners
- developing local lettings agreements (resulting in a high number of units developed locally compared to the national averages)
- a marketing strategy to help secure a long-term future for the post, was noted as an example of ‘Best Practice’ by the Affordable Housing Commission which proved successful in helping the RHE and the project steering group demonstrate the value of the project, and so secure longer-term funding.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

The primary challenge was to secure the continued existence of the post, which the marketing report helped to achieve - local partners have committed to funding the project for the next three financial years, with some partners increasing their contributions, and resources were obtained from DEFRA’s Rural Social and Community Fund for the coming two financial years and for an additional post covering districts in the south of the county.

KEY CONTACT

Jessica Thomas, Rural Housing Enabler, Community Council of Lincolnshire The Old Mart, Church Lane, Sleaford NG34 7DF
Tel: 01529 302 466 Fax: 01529 414 267 Email: jessica.thomas@cclincs.com
CASE STUDY - South Shropshire

Jake Berriman  
Head of Planning and Building Control  
Stone House,  
Corve Street,  
Ludlow,  
Shropshire,  
SY8 1DG  
Tel 01584 813000  
Jake.berriman@southshropshire.gov.uk  
www.southshropshire.gov.uk

- South Shropshire have recently recruited a strategic RHE officer (Strategic housing and enabling officer), working within the council.
- Katherine Hinton employed by SHOG - the Sub regional housing group - has led on the recruitment process for a county wide RHE.
- Independence unlikely to be impugned – more likely to be the case if employed directly by a HA as enabler may be seen as little more than a development officer for the HA.
- Key issue is to ensure proper 'joined-up' approach, which is being attempted in SS by development of housing partnerships – the 'only show in town' - which include the RSLs to consider sub-regional assessments of housing need and affordability (including forthcoming research on cross-border issues with Powys), which has the 3rd greatest affordability problem in Wales, based on South Housing Market Area specification and achieve better co-ordination.
- The Housing Partnerships have no full time permanent staff, the secretarial functions being undertaken by the SSDC, but they tie in to the West Midlands observatory / Assembly at both member and officer level.
- But this needs to tie in to other strategic issues such as the regional target housing figures, planning outputs and Spatial Plan for Wales, and the fear is that no-one is joining the pieces together.
- There is a danger of an RHE, if acting relatively independently, of adding to the confusion by raising expectations amongst landowners and RSLs.
- Greater clarity is needed on affordable housing policies, and Interim Planning Guidance on rural housing has recently been published for consultation.
- A JVC is being established to include the LA, RSL and private sector developers.
Dear Dr Isherwood

**STUDY ON THE FUTURE OF THE ‘RURAL HOUSING ENABLER’ SERVICE IN WALES**

In response to you letter sent to Andy Farrell dated 1st August Chester City Council would like to offer the following comments;

A. Cross Border Issues

- Housing markets are defined by the wider ‘housing offer’, we recognise that District, County or even Country boundaries play little part in their definition.
- A buoyant housing market in Chester has undoubtedly had an effect on affordability within surrounding areas, aided by increased mobility.
- Chester considers a significant relationship exists in the context of housing markets for the West Cheshire/North East Wales (Chester, Ellesmere Port, Wrexham, Flintshire, Denbighshire) and is keen to gain a better understanding of this.
- Cross borderer issues should be considered at a strategic level to consider the relationship between housing markets at various levels, for example Liverpool City Region, West Cheshire/North East Wales. The RHE service should focus on local delivery issues, with an awareness of the strategic context.
B Developing an effective RHE service

- The RHE must act as ‘honest broker’ between parties with skills in diplomacy and people management essential.
- We would recommend the RHE employer is not a Local Authority as this fuels perceptions of bias and hidden agendas.
- The RHE must be able to develop relationships on the ground, therefore a good understanding of the ‘local patch’ is essential. This could be difficult if a RHE is covering a large geographic area as this local knowledge would be diluted.
- RHE are often funded by a group of organisations. In our experience this has led to the RHE being pressured to follow more than one agenda, leading to frustrations and an inability to move things forward.
- Clarity of role is vital, the focus must be on delivery within the current policy framework and not challenge of the policy framework, although some scope should exist to implement best practice.
- A good knowledge of the planning and development process is vital. This could be difficult if covering a wide area as the RHE will be working to different policies in different areas, for example Denbighshire SPG of Affordable Housing sets clear guidance on delivering rural affordable housing, this may not be the case elsewhere. A more strategic approach to housing market assessment should provide greater streamlining of policy in the long term, making cross boundary working more effective.
- The RHE service cannot exist in isolation of other initiatives looking to support the rural economy. Rural affordable housing must be accompanied by an increase in local employment opportunities, this offers joint working opportunities for example needs assessment into live/work units. The importance of sustainability needs to be acknowledged.
- The role of the organisations such as county wide Association of Parish Councils or Council of Community Councils as the case may be, has perhaps been underestimated in the past, further research to establish clarity on this issue could prove useful.
- Don’t underestimate the labour intensive nature of the RHE role. Realistic targets need to be set, this needs to be considered at a strategic level to ensure all partners and communities get ‘value for money’ from investment in the RHE.

HELEN WHITE
Senior Regeneration Officer (Housing)
CASE STUDY – COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS

A CLT is a community controlled organisation that owns, develops and manages land and buildings for the benefit of the local community. By separating the value of land from the buildings that stand upon it, the CLT can be used to preserve the value of any public and private investment, as well as planning gain and land appreciation, for long-term community benefit.

A number of CLT’s are being explored. They will act as enablers, working with local people on projects that will regenerate their community in a sustainable way, with an emphasis on affordable homes for local people.

CLT’s are a form of Industrial and Provident Society, which are regulated by the Financial Services Authority, operating as an exempt charity which enables them to reward people who give them land, buildings or money. Donors are eligible for tax relief equal to the full market value of the land or property donated. They can also add 28% to monetary gifts through Gift Aid. This substantially reduces the cost of land.

Uplifts in land value can be captured by restrictive covenants excluding the land from sale on the open market in perpetuity enabling the CLT to benefit because the notional value of land held in the trust increases in line with the open market so that future increases in equity can be passed on to successive generations. Land can be obtained from public sector organisations; through Section 106 planning agreements, through planning exception sites or philanthropic gifts. Local farmers and landowners are crucial to the supply of land in rural areas. CLTs can build relationships of trust and provide reassurance for landowners that land will not pass to private ownership for profit.

There are two broad methods of financing affordable housing in CLTs to ensure that assets are excluded from the open market in perpetuity and to avoid the threat of leasehold enfranchisement:

- **Equity Purchase** whereby a purchaser buys a percentage share of the freehold based on the amount of mortgage they can afford with the CLT subsidising the purchase by obtaining an equity mortgage for the remaining share

- **Mutual Home Ownership Society (MHOS)** which uses a corporate mortgage to cover the entire housing development and individual households buy shares by monthly payments based on their household income.

Even so, many issues remain to be resolved before CLTs are likely to be recognised as a straightforward vehicle for affordable housing provision that can be exploited by Rural Housing Enablers.

Taken from brochures produced by:

1. Jonathan Brown, Land for People, 31 High Street, Welshpool, Powys SY21 7YD, telephone 01938 556819, email; jonathan@landforpeople.co.uk
2. Richard Clarke - Building and Social Housing Foundation – 01530 512445

And also: Land for People (Castle Caereinion and Pantydrw Ceinws) and Bishops Castle CLT in Shropshire, Cumbria Community Assets Reinvestment Trust (Withenslack); Letchworth, Stonesfield, Oxfordshire; High Bickington, Devon; Rock and St. Minver, Cornwall; three CLT pilots backed by the Welsh Assembly.
CASE STUDY – BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY

Affordable Rural Housing Initiative - An Opportunity for Business

BiTC runs a Affordable Rural Housing Initiative, launched by the Prince of Wales in June 2003, with the aim of engaging the private sector in provision of affordable homes in rural communities.

It encourages businesses - landowners, property owners, housebuilders, developers and lenders - to explore opportunities to deliver affordable housing by:

- Providing land: bringing forward surplus or underused sites for development of new affordable housing
- Making property available: converting or renovating empty or underused property for residential use
- Enabling access to finance: providing access to loans and mortgages or investing in the development of shared ownership/equity schemes or community trusts
- Ensuring high quality developments: building high quality homes of locally distinctive design to ensure integration with the local community

BiTC has produced an impressive range of materials to assist businesses in becoming involved in rural housing, all accessible on their web site. For example the recent publication ‘Rural Housing Results’ says of Rural Housing Enablers –

“RHEs play a crucial role in delivery of affordable rural homes. Businesses often have neither the expertise nor the resources to take an affordable housing scheme through to delivery. The RHEs have the ability to work with landowners and businesses to define local need and engage the local community to increase local delivery. Future funding arrangements for RHEs are unclear and it would make a considerable difference if ongoing support for such ‘brokers’ were provided and the RHEs were encouraged and supported to engage the private sector to increase delivery. Additionally the private sector could be courted to help fund RHEs or other independent delivery bodies. For example Norfolk Country Cottages, a holiday lettings business, provided funding for a Rural Housing Enabler in Norfolk as part of its corporate social responsibility.”

Other relevant publications recommended include:

- Good Design Guide – Creating a Sense of Place
- Developing New Affordable Rural Housing
- Affordable Rural Housing: an Opportunity for Business
- Affordable Rural Housing: Opportunities for Farmers and Landowners
- Making Use of Empty Space for Affordable Rural Housing
- Affordable Housing Conference Report
- Cheshire Affordable Rural Housing Event
- Cornwall Affordable Rural Housing Conference
- North Wales Housing Conference.

KEY CONTACT
Emily Trevorrow, Rural Action Team - Tel 0870 600 2482.
CASE STUDY – ENGLISH NATIONAL PARKS

1. Yorkshire Dales Local Plan (Adopted April, 2006)

Because of the limited scope for residential development if the special qualities of the National Park are to be conserved, the YDLP restricts residential development in most settlements to that required for people meeting local needs criteria, and occupation is to be restricted to prevent subsequent sale to those without a local need. Nor are such units allowed to be available as second or holiday homes. The theory is that this will reduce competition for such dwellings and lower their price, thus making them cheaper. It is suggested that experience of the use of such occupancy restrictions is that they reduce open market value by around 30%, making them more accessible to the local community. But the strategy does not apply to existing housing: so, more than 90% of all dwellings will remain available on the open market – leaving ample space for people who do not meet the local needs definition to buy property in the Park. And within the larger Key Service Centres an element of further market housing is to be allowed. It is recognised also that local needs housing although cheaper than market housing will not necessarily be affordable – so affordable housing will be required as a proportion of a site where need is demonstrated through a housing survey, generally on a one for one basis in the Key Service Centres. Also, affordable housing can be provided on rural exceptions sites on the edge of settlements. So, the Plan creates 3 types of housing – Open Market, Local Needs and Affordable (the latter for those in housing need – mainly those in unsuitable and unsecured housing, or sharing a dwelling, or key workers, and the homeless. (cf. Based on information in the YDLP, 2006).

2. Lake District NPA Structure Plan (Adopted April 2006)

The price to income ratio for the National Park is reported to be 6:1, while mortgage companies tend to use a ratio of 3.5:1 as the maximum that can be borrowed. A fifth of all homes in the Park are second homes, although the distribution varies: Coniston, for example, is noted as having 40% of its houses used as second homes. The Plan states that research commissioned by Cumbria Rural Housing Trust suggests that if more than 25% of the housing stock are second homes, it starts to have negative impacts on the maintenance of a healthy rural community. So, the Plan’s policies rest on local housing needs surveys – as the “only clear, robust and consistent way to demonstrate the housing needs of the locality” and it defines housing need as follows: “The Lake District National Park Authority considers that, to be in housing need, a household must be - (a) inappropriately housed AND (b) unable to afford to rent and/or buy on the open market AND (c) have a need to live in the locality.” (cf. Based on information in the LDNPSP, 2006).


Within villages, the Plan sees opportunities to provide new housing through conversions, sub-divisions, flats over shops and development of un-used derelict land. It sees the potential in many villages as being related to buildings previously in agricultural use. Outside the Local Plan process, the NPA is working with LAs and other partners to promote community planning through a range of techniques including village appraisals, parish maps, planning for real and village design statements. The Plan, meanwhile, aims to provide a range of housing tenures including market, private rental and social housing. (cf. Based on information in the NYMLP, 2003.)
CASE STUDY – SCOTLAND and IRELAND

Affordable Rural Housing in Scotland

Overview
- £1.2 Billion to be invested in providing affordable housing in 2006-2008.
- To provide 21,500 homes (16,500 social rented, 5000 low cost home ownership).
- 28% of Communities Scotland's £88m funding this year is going to rural areas.
- Extra revenue by reducing second home council tax discount to 10%.
- Possible transfer of housing stock to community ownership.
- Investment following transfer substantial - 150 new homes in the Western Isles.
- Review of grants currently available for affordable housing and their conditions.
- New shared equity model about to be announced.
- Examination of Mechanisms for keeping affordable housing affordable beyond first sale.
- Local authorities can suspend any right to buy if they have a valid need to do so.
- £3M to create innovative new land banking fund for the Highlands.

Policy / Advice Sources
“Planning for Rural Development” - Planning Document 15
“Housing in the Countryside”
“Rural Diversification”
“Planning Advice Note on Affordable Housing”.
“A Guide to the Process of Registering an Interest in Land: Community Right To Buy”
Rural Housing Service Annual Conference 250205.

Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar - Western Isles Council

Housing Situation
- Population falling but number of households in the Western Isles is rising.
- 75% of houses owner occupied, >50% on crofts.
- 17% council housing, reducing each year due to Right to Buy.
- HA sector is very small, currently providing 20-30 additional units a year.
- Demand for rented housing is not reducing.
- Increased obligations on the Comhairle to provide housing for the homeless.
- A shortage of sites for housing, and also a shortage of houses.
- No regular commercial private housing development in the Western Isles.
- Affordability an increasing problem.

Housing Objectives
- Overall objective is to stem the out migration of households from the islands within a few years and to ensure annual increases in population within a decade.
- Increase the supply of affordable housing by at least 350 units by 2009.
- Bring back into use 15 empty homes to provide affordable accommodation in Greater Stornoway Area by 2009.
- Secure access to land for additional housing.
Increase private accommodation targeted at younger economically active households in Greater Stornoway by 50 units as part of a wider area regeneration strategy by 2008.

Strengthen and make better use of sound evidence on links between housing investment and economic/social development in the Western Isles to inform policy development.

Ensure that at least 70% of the social rented stock achieves the Scottish Social Housing Standard by 2009.

Improve stock condition in the private sector by 2009.

Provide appropriate housing related solutions to prevent homelessness.

Increase assistance to all households who become homeless by the introduction of a range of new initiatives by 2009.

Provide additional and more responsive housing related services to enable vulnerable people to remain in the community.

Increase the proportion of older people assisted by housing and related services to maintain their independence in their own home or community.

**Funding Mechanisms to Assist New Housing**

- Crofter Building Grant and Loan Scheme (CBGLS).
- HA Grant £3M pa a year for the last two years.
- Funding for New Housing Partnerships, Empty Homes Initiative, Homelessness.
- Rural Home Ownership Grant (RHOG) for first time buyers – only 30 houses.
- The Grant for Rent and Ownership (GRO) - 68 households assisted into owner occupation by a grant to developers who then sell houses at a discount.
- Private Sector Housing Grant to provide house sites for sale.

**Changes in Prospect**

- Crofter Grant scheme.
- Council Tax discounts on second homes (LAs to raise more revenue).
- LAs to be able to sell land for housing with a restriction on any future sale.
- Greater use of community land buyouts – eg North Harris Trust.

**Other methods to provide land for affordable housing**

In addition to grant aid, the Comhairle are considering a number of administrative methods of increasing land supply for affordable housing, such as:

- Reviewing all Local Plans.
- Identifying sites and possible sites for inclusion in Western Isles Local Plan.
- Reviewing all surplus land owned by the Comhairle itself (eg school sites).
- Discussing with land owners and grazing Committees to establish if suitable land in other ownership may become available for housing with the Comhairle’s assistance.
- Supporting and promoting funding bids from other organisations.
- Ensure Comhairle is a Rural Housing Body as defined by Title Conditions Act 2003.
- Consider Compulsory Purchase Orders to obtain land for housing.

(cf. Briefing Paper For Policy Development On Land Suitable For Housing In The Western Isles - Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar / Western Isles Council, November 2004.)
A Local Example - Uig

Lack of affordable housing in Uig is already a major barrier to the sustainable development of the area socially and economically. 30% of the population is over 65, and a large proportion of the small number of houses or land that do become available are being sold to people of retirement age, or as holiday homes. There simply are not enough housing opportunities for young people who want to make their home in Uig, and going by other rural areas’ experiences, without intervention now, the problem is only going to get worse.

Potential solutions to the housing problem on Uig:
- Tackle absenteeism
- The subdivision of crofts
- Croft reorganisation schemes
- The use of common grazings (identify areas that have potential as plots, taking into consideration servicing and access to grazings)
- Grazings Committees, a community group or housing association tasked with tackling the problem, could sell a restricted number of plots on the open market to make money, using this cash to allow the rest to be sold at highly discounted rates.

A Local Example - Gigha

Background

In 2002 the islanders of Gigha bought their island. Then, the population was 98, today there are 131 people living on Gigha. The school roll has also increased, from 6 to 15. There are only about 5 holiday homes on Gigha, but as per many rural areas, income levels are low. At the time of the buyout, 65 homes were identified as being substandard (a house condition survey classed them as Below Tolerable Standard), and there was no housing available for key workers coming in to the island.

A Gigha Housing Trust was formed as a charitable Registered Social Landlord and a Designated Rural Housing Body to own the land (which it sells at the district valuer’s rate) with the aims of creating “warm, dry, affordable housing for all” and to increase the population of Gigha so that the community is sustainable. Its initial step was to conduct a housing needs analysis with the help of the Rural Housing Service which identified the need for 8 – 10 new houses.

Methods of providing Affordable Housing
- Fyne Homes RSL to build 18 new rented (14) / shared ownership (4) homes after consultation with community on sites and choice of architect.
- Rural Home Ownership Grants (35%) to assist 6 private self-builds with owners choosing architects.
- Plots Available for Private Building specified in a GHT/Fyne Homes Masterplan, followed by selection of architects producing a sustainability strategy and mandatory Design Guide, with community consultation at all stages emphasising traditional characteristics of the island – with GHT building in a right of pre-emption to every title deed to have continued control over the land.
- Refurbishment of GHT’s own housing stock (42 houses) using a consortium of local builders from mainland Kintyre employing cutting-edge energy-efficiency measures (cf. Rural Housing Service Annual Conference 250205).
A Local Example - Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust

**Background**

In the Highlands, house prices are increasing by 37% per year. HSCHT is a charity designated as a Rural Housing Body, working in partnership with the agencies in the Highlands to provide affordable plots and land to housing associations for rented accommodation. Its RHB status allows it to set a pre-emption right (which is different from a Rural Housing Burden which stays in the title). The price of land is set by a formula.

**Mechanism**

A Highland council passes land to HSCHT for nothing, then HSCHT sells on to a developer with RPI burdens attached. This avoids subsequent purchasers making profits at the expense of the original landowners. The public subsidy is thereby locked in to ensure the houses remain affordable in perpetuity.

The second purchaser is controlled by the exercise of the pre-emption right. Funding must be available, and there is a period of 42 days to exercise it. With RPI on the plot price, market value can still make it unaffordable to the second purchaser. HSCHT uses RPI combined with Depreciated Replacement Cost – the cost it would take the builder to replace like for like, taking into account improvements/ wear and tear. This model has been cleared with the Royal Bank of Scotland and other lenders are likely to follow suit (they will lend on houses with the burden attached as normal).

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**Language and Culture in Scotland & Ireland**

The major difference in the Highlands and Islands and in the equivalent areas of Ireland, from the rural areas of England and Wales, is that while there are vast tracts containing virtually no settlements, bespeaking no demand for housing, there are also many linear and apparently dispersed collections of housing that function as settlements. Whatever their size they are recognised as places to which language policies apply.

In Ireland, the Local Government Act (2000) requires all local authorities with Gaeltacht Areas to publish a language policy, use language impact statements and inform the Gaeltacht Authority / Údarás na Gaeltachta of all planning applications. The planning appeals board (An Bord Pleanála) has taken a reasonably strong line and has turned down County Council permissions which have not taken the quantitative strength of the language into account - insisting on a quota of at least the current percentage who are fluent as the minimum which must be allocated to those with fluency in Gaelic (as tested by oral exam).

The other objective in Ireland is to minimise out-migration of native speakers, similar to the Scottish 'local person' policy. Planning policy, in both Ireland and Scotland, now treats this category as a priority.

The main tensions arise when opponents of single housing in the smallest townships blur this distinction between rural areas and countryside.
CASE STUDY – THE STATES OF GUERNSEY

“Guernsey’s Housing Strategy aims to address the issues of availability, affordability and quality of housing. It is made up of seven objectives which are listed below. As you read through these objectives, you will see that the strategy looks at all aspects of the housing market in an integrated way.

- To ensure that all persons legally resident in Guernsey have access to housing accommodation to meet their reasonable needs.
- To meet housing needs in a sustainable manner in the long-term interests of the community as a whole, making prudent use of all resources and recognising that investment in housing must be prioritised and compatible with strategic policies and the wider programme of public expenditure approved by the States.
- To ensure that there are measures in place to limit any growth in population through immigration in order to manage housing demand in accordance with the principles of sustainability.
- To provide the community with a range of housing options, acknowledging that while home ownership has historically been the preferred means of meeting housing needs, good quality, fairly priced housing may be provided across the housing market by other means and through a variety or mix of agencies – public, private and voluntary.
- To enable housing to be provided for those financially unable to enter the private housing market, either to purchase or rent, through a range of housing measures attuned to meeting their specific housing needs including social rented housing, partial ownership schemes, etc.
- To enable the provision of supported accommodation for older persons, young people, people with learning disability, persons with mental illness, ex-offenders, etc.
- To maintain and improve the quality of housing in Guernsey across all sectors bearing in mind the impact of housing conditions on the health and well-being of the community.”

Extract from the Official Guernsey Government Website.

NOTE:

The States of Guernsey are very concerned to control in-migration and limit the growth of population. To that end, they define ‘qualifying residence’ for locals very tightly and precisely in their Housing Laws. There is also a strict system of ‘employment licensing’ for incomers – an ‘essential’ licence being given where no suitable local person is available for the employment and allowing the holders to occupy their own units of accommodation with their immediate family, and the ‘short term licensing’ being generally confined to workers in industries which have manpower shortages allowing access to ‘restricted accommodation’ such as staff quarters. And they also allow a few non-essential – not related to employment – “compassionate” licenses.

Based on material from the Official Guernsey Government Website.
A casual glance across the Channel suggested that the extent of the French countryside and the evident decline in the vitality of many small towns and villages, along with the importance accorded by the French state to its rural population, might offer alternative methods of addressing the problems of affordable rural housing. There are some similarities – both Welsh and French rural areas tend to be relatively poor by comparison with urban areas and English rural areas – but also some important differences. They are well described in a number of monographs and presentations from the organization in pole position to tackle such issues – Habitat et Developpement, encompassing 109 organisations in 80 Departments of France. This network brings together teams of architects, sociologists, economists, developers to study rural problems, produce plans for the revitalization of villages, and improve the local economy. The key problems appear to be the abandonment of agricultural buildings in the face of rural depopulation; a need to revive local economies by inventing new income generating jobs; and a concentration on breathing life back into rural towns.

After a century or so of population decline, the 1970’s onwards has seen a stabilisation of the rural population, with many incomers seeking second homes or land on which to build, particularly in the south east and south west, the coastal and mountainous areas. There are 7.7m houses in rural areas, some 27% of the 28.7m total in France, but relatively few are main dwellings – 30% are second or occasional homes, or empty. It is estimated that there are 550,000 vacant houses, of which 70% were built before 1949; 770,000 people in rural areas are badly housed; 1.8m houses are uncomfortable (similar to the ‘ unfit’ classification - 40% of the national total), and only 7% of rural housing is social housing (compared to 20% nationally). The indigenous rural population suffers from similar problems to that in Wales – relatively low resources compared to urban areas, an ageing population, many owner occupiers in a precarious financial position living in poor housing, with young people unable to find appropriate housing in their own area. Policies to revive rural housing are well developed, and a wide range of initiatives are being pursued by a large number of partnerships and agencies.

It is estimated that some 63,500 agricultural buildings are abandoned each year, and that in the last fifteen years almost one million buildings, many of significant architectural, historical or social interest, have been left unused and are deteriorating in condition. There is a particular problem in the south and the Atlantic coast areas, but on the other hand these also offer opportunities for diversification into tourism-related alternative uses. And there are many examples of farm buildings being converted into a rural café with housing above in an attempt to retain young people in the village, a school for hairdressing, a workshop and social centre for handicapped people, a theatre, a library and cultural center, a small steelworks and a glass factory.

Many small towns are also feeling the effect of a drift to the cities, and there too the effect can be seen in abandoned and dilapidated town houses, particularly in the historic core of such towns. It has been found that 60% of elected members of town
councils are principally interest in the renewal of their town centre, so housing provision and improvements to the public realm are closely linked. The example of Montfrin provided by H&D shows the careful process of analysis, masterplanning, partnership development and public funding that is required to solve just a few of the problems facing the town.

The importance of a plan to set out the long term nature of the task (10-12 years is needed) and to provide a blue print for immediate operations (over 3-5 years) is emphasized.

French advice to local areas developing plans is that ‘observatoires’ should be established to bring together all the partners, whose functions should be clearly differentiated and someone should be identified as being in charge – the ‘animateur’ or perhaps enabler although the French version appears to go rather wider than that of a typical rural housing enabler in the UK. One particular example is the Réseau Local de l’Habitat du Cézallier (the Cézallier Local Housing Network) which specifies the roles of the 17 local authority mayors involved to provide information to anyone seeking it, while keeping the network informed; the network itself is to keep a daily account of demand for housing, analyse it, and keep the developers agents informed; while it is for the developers themselves to react to demands for accommodation. Good time management is required of all partners if they are to benefit from what is usually work over and above their normal responsibilities and are not to become demotivated. It is noted that things can soon fall apart in the absence of an animateur.

However it must also be noted that in all the sources cited, this is the only mention of a post that might contain aspects of ‘enabling’. French regeneration practice, as has been seen by a study into the renaissance of Birmingham in which one of the authors was closely involved, is very dependent on formal structures, codified behaviour, a clear separation between the activities of the public and private sectors, and a strong reliance on formal contracts. The ‘Anglo-Saxon’, for which one might read Celtic, approach based on pragmatism and trust, on which enablers presumably rely to a large degree, is a concept beset with philosophical and practical difficulties amongst our Gallic neighbours.
Annex B : The Policy Context - Detail

The Relevant Policy Background for this Study

A1. WAG’s Strategic Agenda and the National Housing Strategy

The WAG’s Strategic Agenda - ‘Wales –a Better Country’ (2003) reflects ( inter alia) on Wales’ "strong community identity and self-help", strengthening Wales’ cultural identity and helping to crest a bilingual country, health issues as a factor in all policy areas, commitment to race equality, building the Welsh economy, social justice, tackling poverty, the environment/biodiversity, etc. It also indicated an appetite for legislative change to deal with certain specific rural and other housing issues.

There is also a ‘National Housing Strategy: Better Homes for People in Wales’ (2001) which commits Wales to the development of sustainable, mixed communities, and which heralded a step change in the scale of investment in the existing housing stock. It aims to achieve the Welsh Housing Quality Standard by 2012.

The policy for Wales is set out in the National Housing Strategy: Better Homes for People in Wales’ (NAW, July 2001), which committed Wales to the development of sustainable, mixed communities, and heralded a step change in the scale of investment in the existing housing stock. It set objectives for improving both social housing and privately owned housing and aimed to achieve the Welsh Housing Quality Standard by 2012. It reported that (in 2001) “Wales has the highest proportion of home ownership (72 per cent) in the UK. It has also the highest proportion of homes built before 1914”...and it reported “98,200 (8.5 per cent) homes classified as unfit.” (Ibid, page 47).

The process of reviewing and updating the National Housing Strategy has already commenced - with the WAG commissioning a range of studies on, for example, homelessness and the true impact of low-cost housing initiatives in Wales.

A2. Housing and Planning Policy Interface

This section deals with the current position re housing and planning issues in Wales which have a bearing on rural housing issues. This necessarily forms a backcloth to the evaluation of the 4 RHE ‘pilots’ in Wales, and some commentary by HIRC on the issues which arise form that which are relevant to this study. The relevant concerns – in HIRC’s view - are:

- delivering sustainable development
- spatial planning and regional, sub-regional and local housing markets
- ensuring a full spectrum of housing choice in rural areas in Wales
- facing up to the scale of need and identifying it accurately, repeatedly
- planning policy – on affordable housing the role of ‘rural exception sites’
- the relationship with wider economic / regeneration needs
- recent research and guidance
- environmental and design issues, and
- rural homelessness.

A3. Delivering Sustainable Development

A variety of problems emerging around the globe triggered by poverty, damaging land use practices and destructive development, wasteful use of resources, gross levels of pollution, etc. – arguably now intensifying – sparked the dialogue among nation states
which led to a series of international conferences - from Rio’s Earth Summit of 1992, through the Kyoto treaty on Climate Change to the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, etc. International commitments were made by the UK – and articulated more fully in the production of a UK nation-state and lower level Action Plans. The UK is committed to delivering Sustainable Development and regards itself as being in the forefront of action to deliver progress on some of the critical environmental issues of the time – especially re global warming / climate change which is fast moving into the forefront of political concerns.

The current First Minister for Wales has said “Sustainable development is not an option that will go away - it is the only way forward”. That quote prefaces the current Sustainable Development Scheme for Wales – Starting to Live Differently (cf. WAG 2006), which forms part of the framework for the sustainable development strategy for the UK. So far, the WAG has concentrated on - energy efficiency, renewable energy, indigenous micro-generation of energy, alternative fuels, meeting BREEAM standards for new public buildings, ECO-homes, agri-environment schemes, conserving wildlife in the face of a continuing decline in biodiversity, reducing Wales’ ecological footprint, better health and nutrition, and addressing “challenges in maintaining communities and the Welsh language in the pace of demographic change (such as an ageing population)”. (cf Wales – SAP, p7, Nov 2004.)

Sustainability Appraisals (including Strategic Environmental Assessments) are needed in Wales as part of the evidence base providing justification for a departure from national planning policy (on housing and other development). (cf WAG, MIPPS, para. 9.2.4.)

The policy on housing issues in Wales is set out in the National Housing Strategy: Better Homes for People in Wales’ (NAW, July 2001), which is alive to the wider sustainability issues - including ‘home energy efficiency’ - and generally supportive of the concepts of ‘Lifetime Homes’, ‘Secured by Design’, and other initiatives including ‘Rethinking Construction’.

A4. Current Housing Standards Used in Wales

Those urged in Wales currently are:

BRE ‘Ecohomes’ – the Building Research Establishment (BRE)’s ‘homes version’ of BREEAM – an authoritative Environmental Assessment Method and rating for new, converted, or renovated houses and apartments – with ‘credits’ given for energy, health and well being, land use and ecology, management, materials, pollution, transport, and water considerations.

‘Secured by Design’ – a Police initiative, promoted by Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), to encourage the building industry to adopt crime prevention measures in the design work for new development.

‘Lifetime Homes’ – A 16 point standard which applies to the exterior and interior of homes, which uses a wheelchair turning circle as a benchmark for good space requirements, thus enabling use over a lifetime.

‘Rethinking Construction’ – ‘Rethinking Construction’ reflects the recommendations made in 1998 by a taskforce led by Sir John Egan - commissioned by the ODPM to assess the efficiency of the UK construction industry. The report acknowledged that some parts were world class, but concluded that most of the industry was failing to perform satisfactorily, particularly in terms of cost, quality and time. It needed to:
• Address the needs and expectations of the end-user more closely
• Move away from traditional (restrictive and confrontational) ways of doing business,
• Aim to achieve targets for -
  o Reductions in costs, time, accidents and defects
  o Increases in predictability of cost and time, productivity and profitability.

Already the report has been one of the most significant drivers for change in UK construction. It is the banner under which the construction industry, its clients and the government work together to improve UK construction performance. The principles are simple: (i) Client leadership, (ii) Integrated teams throughout the delivery chain, and (iii) Respect for people. The objectives are to achieve radical improvements in the design, quality, customer satisfaction and sustainability of UK construction and to be able to recruit and retain a skilled workforce at all levels by improving employment practices and health and safety performance.

A5. The Wales Spatial Plan

The EU-wide move in recent years to a ‘spatial planning’ approach has seen much more attention being given to defining the regional and sub-regional areas which share economic, cultural and other ties and which everyone agrees represent a recognisable ‘unit’ spatial and other planning purposes.

Within such areas, the UK government and its devolved administration in Wales have encouraged regional and sub-national / sub-regional analysis (eg of housing markets), and also local housing market assessment (LHMSs) to feed into local plan-making, which is also – critically - informed by central government’s latest household projections. There has also been a strong focus in recent years on using ‘previously developed / brownfield’ sites, wherever they are available and suitable in advance of considering ‘greenfield’ land release, and where necessary.

In Wales, spatial planning has involved all the 22 unitary authorities and led to the creation of a distinctive Wales Spatial Plan – ‘People, Places, Futures’ (Nov 2004) (required for Wales, under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, 2004).

A6. The Six Sub-National ‘Areas’ of Wales

The Wales Spatial Plan identifies six ‘Areas of Wales’, centred on ‘Areas of Socio-Economic Hubs’ namely:

• North West Wales – Eryri and Môn
• North East Wales – Border and Coast
• Central Wales
• South East – The Capital Network
• Swansea Bay – Waterfront and Western Valleys
• Pembrokeshire – The Haven.

A7. Building Sustainable Communities in Wales

It identifies two major issues re ‘Building Sustainable Communities’ in Wales – (i) deprivation, and (ii) demographic change. It says this of demographic change in respect of rural areas. “The issue is different in rural areas. In modern society, younger people typically move out of all but the largest towns to pursue work or further
education opportunities, whilst a significant number of middle-aged people move into or back to rural areas. These population trends are found in most areas...

“In 2002 there were fewer than 31,000 children born and over 33,000 deaths. In-migration is therefore needed to sustain the vitality of our communities. The challenges are: to ensure that inward migration enhances rather than reduces the population balance and mix; to ensure that the mix of housing available supports that balance and does not exclude young people from local housing; and to sustain the distinctiveness of local culture. This is a particular concern for our more rural areas where many services would become increasingly unviable without inward migration. In-migration has the potential to contribute very positively to an area’s culture and identity, but can also pose challenges to communities and their cultural and linguistic identity and needs to be managed sensitively.” (cf. WSP, 2004, p9.)

It also includes a box of text specifically on ‘Affordable Housing’ – which rehearses the WAG’s visions, and provides a bit of detail on the suite of documents and processes of relevance.

On economic issues (‘Promoting a Sustainable Economy’), it says: “...new jobs have gradually replaced the ones that have been lost, and apart from a period in the early 1980s, total employment has grown steadily. Over recent years, many of the new jobs have been highly skilled and well paid. Nevertheless, GVA per head remains low compared to UK and European averages.” And it goes on to explain that the prime reason that Wales’ GVA per head lags... “is an employment rate that is low in UK terms...” due to “...relatively high levels of inactivity rather than unemployment”...which it goes on to explain “is concentrated amongst the low skilled, particularly those with self-reported health problems” and the geographic concentrations of the low skilled are found in the upper South Wales Valleys and in Cardiff and Newport (WSP, p16-17). In rural areas, it sees evidence of “counter-urbanisation”, sometimes “with increased commuting, but often employment growth has taken place to absorb the increased supply of labour.” And it adds: “Over recent decades, large increases in working age population have been seen in many parts of rural Wales, most notably Ceredigion and Conwy” (cf. WSP, 2004, p18.)

A8 Respecting Distinctiveness

The Wales Spatial Plan identifies ‘Respecting Distinctiveness’ as a key theme – and it has this to say, which may be relevant to this study: “A strong sense of place is evident throughout Welsh communities.”... “distinctiveness, sense of identity and pride in place are important elements of successful communities and countries.”... “We need to maintain and support the distinctive character of the Welsh historic environment...without compromising society’s present and future needs.” And..” The challenge is to retain and enhance a sense of place while embracing the change necessary to sustain those places as living, working areas...” and “This challenge is made particularly acute in Wales due to the combination of changing employment patterns, population changes, and the special place of the Welsh language in our national identity.”

It then says of the physical consequences: “the look of Wales is becoming more uniform. Standard building types are often failing to reflect traditional local building styles – with a strong growth in bungalows and executive estates that have no connection to local materials and style. With quality of life a major factor for long term prospects, Wales needs to stand out not to become bland.”
Then it notes: “Wales is becoming in some ways a more bilingual nation, with some 40% of Welsh speakers now living in urban areas, with an increasing proportion being under 25. At the same time, however, the percentages speaking Welsh in the rural communities, where the language has traditionally been strong, are continuing to fall gradually.”

A9. Demographics

Later on in the WSP, policy recipes are set out for each of the six ‘Areas of Wales’ and the supporting Annex on Demographic Change reflects on the evidence of an “aging population”: but, despite that is says “.....there is not expected to be much change in the overall dependency rate over the short to medium term (up to 15 years): rising numbers of elderly people are likely to be offset by declining numbers of children...and the proportion of people of working age is likely to be broadly stable.”

It proceeds to challenge two myths on demographics:

- Challenging ‘Myth One’ (ie. the perception that in-migration is mainly accounted for by retired people) by reference to the fact that “the number of in-migrants who are of retirement age is small both in absolute terms and as a proportion of total in-migrants” and although “....across the rural unitary authorities, the proportion of older in-migrants was a little higher, but there were still almost twice as many in-migrants aged under 16 as aged over 64.”

- Challenging ‘Myth Two’ (ie. the perception that the fall in the numbers of young peoples is primarily due to migration) by reference to the fact that “…over recent years, more people aged under 16 have entered Wales than left.”

A10. Cross-Border Spatial Planning Issues

Much of the in-migration into Wales comes from neighbouring English Regions. There is much commuting to work across the border in both directions, and macro-scale planning policies on either side can easily impact across the Wales-England border.

The Welsh Assembly Government and Government Offices for the adjoining Regions in England liaise regularly on cross-border spatial planning issues, the issues, their implications and how best to manage the pressures.

In the English regions alongside Wales, there has been a focus on framing spatial policy to counteract out-migration from the big cities (‘the middle-class flight from the cities to the countryside’), to support the urban renaissance in the cores of those big cities (Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, and Bristol), and tackling low-demand housing areas - through ‘Housing Market Renewal – Pathfinder’ initiatives.

These concerns informed, for example, RPG 13 (ODPM, 2003) which put a severe brake on new housing development in the rural counties of England in the North West, on Wales’ borders, for a few years. This followed on many years of new house building, on a very considerable scale indeed, throughout the rural areas and market towns of Cheshire and Lancashire. The recent restraint on more house-building in the more rural areas of the North West of England has demonstrably helped to support measures to address the many challenges in the big cities.

Elsewhere, in South East of England especially, different pressures have been evident due to huge economic growth, and major in-migration from other parts of the UK / the EU and further abroad. A much larger increase in household numbers is now being
projected for the South/South East of England, due to these factors, leading to a fresh emphasis on releasing more land, quickly.

This is a very clear demonstration of the power of the planning system in England - and the same applies to Wales - to turn the housing development ‘tap’ on or off in particular areas in response to close analysis and policy imperatives – and in a manner which respects the different circumstances, pressures and choices in particular regions and countries, and their wider spatial impacts.

A11. Ensuring a Spectrum of Housing Choice in Rural Areas

In Wales, the spectrum is seen as including -

- **market housing** - “private housing for sale or rent where the price is set in the open market” (cf. MIPPS, WAG, June 2006) – ...“which would normally have no occupancy condition...” (cf. MIPPS, WAG, June 2006, para 9.2.4.)
- **low-cost market housing** (the cheaper end of the above, not regarded as ‘affordable housing’ by WAG TAN 2), and
- **affordable housing** - defined by WAG (cf. TAN 2. WAG, June 2006), for the purposes of the land use planning system, as –

“housing provided to those whose needs are not met by the open market” and which should also:

- “meet the needs of eligible households, including availability at low enough cost for them to afford, determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices; and
- include provision for the home to remain affordable for future eligible households, or if a home ceases to be affordable or staircasing to full ownership takes place, any subsidy should generally be recycled to provide replacement affordable housing.”

...and broken down into “two sub-categories"

- **social rented housing** – provided by local authorities and registered social landlords where rent levels have regard to the Assembly Government’s guideline rents and benchmark rents”;
- **intermediate housing** – where prices or rents are above those of social rented housing but below market housing prices or rents”....including “equity sharing schemes (for example Homebuy)”.

Local authorities are required to promote “mixed tenure communities” (cf. MIPPS, WAG, June 2006, para 9.2.2) – so some schemes may include an element of all or many of these.

Other categories recognised by WAG (re land-use planning) (cf. MIPPS, WAG, June 2006), are –

- **agricultural and forestry dwellings** (for “genuine” workers only)
- **residential mobile homes** (as “low cost accommodation for small households”), and
- **Gypsy sites**.

A12. Housing Need and Housing Needs Surveys (HNSs)

Wales’ Unitary authorities (the County Councils) and their partners produce assessments of housing needs and demands in their areas to inform policy and action.
Welsh RHEs can conduct Local HNSs for rural Community Councils - a much finer scale of analysis - to inform and fine-tune policy-making in County-level local development plans and housing strategies. The emphasis – in terms of considering ‘affordability’, as advised by WAG, is on the local authorities –

STEP 1 - making "an assessment of the ratio of household income or earnings to the price of property to buy or rent in the open market in the required local housing market area"

STEP 2 – defining what they mean by the term ‘affordable housing’ (but closely informed by the WAG definition)

STEP 3 - quantifying the need for affordable housing, and

STEP 4 - indicating in the local development plan the affordable housing policies to be applied, including policies on site thresholds, targets, and rural exception sites. (cf. WAG, TAN 2).

The current Welsh RHEs have put considerable effort into assisting with this process, especially on STEP 3, as envisaged by TAN 2 (in para 10.15):

“In rural areas in a particular, it may be necessary to undertake housing needs assessments at the ward or village level to accurately define the need for affordable housing and identify potential housing sites. Local authorities should work with community councils and where they exist, rural housing enablers, to collect this information.”

Such analyses have to be repeated every few years to be effective and to keep plans up to date – which is essential. That implies (as at the County level) a rolling programme / continual review, local knowledge, continuity of expertise, ongoing training to keep up with higher-level policy and methodological progress, and professionalism.

A13. Planning Policy on Affordable Housing and the role of Rural Exception Sites

As part and parcel of the recent focus on the interface between planning and housing policy, the WAG have (in 2006):

- adjusted planning guidance through review of the housing chapter of Planning Policy Wales, and reviews of TAN 1 and 2 – to inform land-use planning work,
- published a Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) Guide – to develop improved evidence bases for housing policies in local housing strategies and local development plans
- provided funding – to fund Rural Housing Enablers and the development of Community Land Trusts, and
- published ‘The Affordable Housing Toolkit’ – to “encourage authorities and their partners to use all the powers and tools at their disposal to maximise the supply of affordable housing commensurate with local housing needs and circumstances.” (WAG, Ministerial Foreword - The Affordable Housing Toolkit, June 2006.)

In Wales, the recent Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statement (MIPPS) ‘Housing’ (June 2006), Para 9.2. 14/15 - encourages the production of LHMSs as the “evidence base supporting policies to deliver affordable housing”, and the setting of “an authority-wide target for affordable housing (expressed as a number of homes)
based on the Local Housing Market Assessment...” It encourages LPAs to set out the mechanisms they will use to deliver that “(for example, site thresholds, site specific targets, and rural exception sites)”. Para. 9.2.16 – enables local authorities to “identify sites for up to 100% affordable housing based on criteria reflecting local circumstances set out in the development plan in the context of developing sustainable communities. Such sites are likely to be small in number in relation to the total number of sites available in a local planning authority area and small in scale.” It is not yet clear whether all local planning authorities in rural Wales have used this freedom to full effect. Also, para. 9.2.18 requires that authorities indicate that they “...will seek to negotiate with developers where it is intended to include an element of affordable housing” and “state what the authority would regard as affordable housing and what arrangements it would expect to ensure that such housing remains reserved for those who need it.”

The MIPPS rehearses policy on housing in rural areas more generally, and very clearly, in para. 9.2.21, reproduced below.

“9.2.21 In planning for housing in rural areas it is important to recognise that development in the countryside should embody sustainability principles, benefiting the rural economy and local communities while maintaining and enhancing the environment. There should be a choice of housing, recognising the housing needs of all, including those in need of affordable housing or special needs provision. In order to safeguard the character and appearance of the countryside, to reduce the need to travel by car and to economise on the provision of services, new houses in the countryside away from existing settlements recognised in development plans, or from other areas allocated for development, must be strictly controlled. Many parts of the countryside have isolated groups of dwellings. Sensitive infilling in of small gaps, or minor extensions to such groups, may be acceptable, but much depends upon the character of the surroundings, the pattern of development in the area and the accessibility to main towns and villages.”

The MIPPS also sets out current policy on rural exception sites – in para 9.2.22.

“ 9.2.22 The special provision off rural exception sites must be considered to help ensure the viability of the local community. Local planning authorities should refer to their up to date housing assessment or survey at the ward or rural settlement level, to support policies. Policies should make clear that the release of small housing sites, within or adjoining existing rural settlements, for the provision of affordable housing to meet local needs, which would not otherwise be allocated in the development plan, is an exception to the policies for general housing provision and must be fully justified, setting out the type of need and the kind of development falling within the terms of the policy. The affordable housing provided on such sites should meet the needs of local people in perpetuity. Sites must meet all the other criteria against which a housing development must be judged. Rural exceptions sites are not appropriate for market housing.”

The rural exceptions policy has – in recent years - enabled many sites to be released on the edge of villages in Wales which would not otherwise be released, at a lower land cost – thus enabling houses to be built more cheaply as social housing for locals. Many landowners have accepted the logic of this and many village communities have decided it is the right thing for their community, with safeguarding provisions for them to be closely involved in deciding who is a ‘local’.
Limited use is made of rural exception sites by local planning authorities, and in practice their use is small relative to the overall scale of the issues, but nevertheless they are clearly capable of making an impact in small settlements.

A14. Rural Exceptions Sites and Key Interest Groups

In Wales, the use of special measures like rural exception sites seems to trigger debate between four very different sets of ‘interests’ – which can complicate efforts to reach a consensus in the rural villages of Wales.

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KEY INTEREST GROUPS

RHE and other feedback re this study suggests these are four major interests to balance:

- **the interests of landowners** – who think they should have the full open market price for their land (as if it had permission for open market housing) and who may prefer to hold on to it for its ‘hope value’ rather than release it at low price for rural exceptions housing: a concern exacerbated by the suspicion that an affordable housing scheme might mutate, in any case, into disposal onto the open market (as developers sometimes like to try and negotiate that as a “last resort” clause): although TAN 2 (para 13.3) provides clear advice on how to avoid being manoeuvred into that position: and, at the opposite extreme, those who do not want to release their land because they want to retain the use of the land and/or beauty of the countryside as it is;

- **the interests of wealthier residents / incomers / retirees** – who think that the newcomers will include people who may indulge in unwelcome behaviours (or even ‘anti-social’ behaviour), and/or generate scruffiness/unsightliness in the external environment thus reducing the prettiness of the area: and they may fear direct or indirect impact on traffic volumes, peacefulness, scenic views / landscape quality, and value of their homes and their ‘hope-values’;

- **the interests of very keen sustainability activists** – who think that village-edge and urban-fringe sites are just too peripheral and insufficiently integrated with job opportunity sites, transport links, other facilities, etc, and so risk encouraging emissions-generating, car-bore commuting by car owners and severe social isolation and segregation (‘ghettoisation’) of non-car owners, especially women, young people, children, the frail and the elderly, plus habitat destruction/ecological damage, etc.; and –

- **the interests of Welsh-language supporters** - who worry that new housing may sooner or later (because of the ‘occupancy cascade’ principle, which gradually widens the criteria to fill any units vacant or vacated) be occupied by people who are ‘less local’ and possibly unsympathetic to the Welsh language and culture in numbers sufficient in themselves to cause tensions and/or cumulatively to change the everyday language of the community to English, thus eroding the continuity of use and standing of the Welsh language, or setting back progress in areas where the language is currently a minority tongue but recovering its place slowly: and, at the other extreme, those who worry that the locals - often on low incomes and Welsh speakers - will all be corralled into low-cost housing schemes next to a growing contingent of ‘gentrifying’ wealthy incomers with a different language and different values, thus exacerbating cultural and linguistic tensions, and sparking

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Identifying specific sites for “100% affordable housing” (now possible) would not prevent these interests surfacing or dispel the concerns (nor should they, as democratic influence is central to the operation of the country’s planning system), but it would enable the debate to take place earlier and more clinically at the development plan-making stage, in a formal setting and context, in our view.

A15. Economic Development and Wider Regeneration

In Wales, there is a National Economic Development Strategy (‘A Winning Wales’), 2001, which sets out WAG’s aspiration to increase the standard of living in Wales, so that within a generation it matches that of the UK as a whole. It identifies as a key step raising income per head from around 80% of the UK average to 90 per cent. The WAG has pursued that agenda by focusing on increasing employment and raising value-added per job and earnings. More recently WAG’s vision has been set out further in the consultation document - ‘Wales : A Vibrant Economy’ (November 2005). It notes that 100,000 extra jobs have emerged and earnings have risen 10% in real terms since 1999. (Ibid, page 67). It also emphasises partnership approaches – citing the ‘Heads of the Valleys Development Strategy’ (a 15 year regeneration strategy - to tackle comprehensively the root causes of economic inactivity and other key issues, to be taken forward in the context of the Wales Spatial Plan and set to address a range of social issues and social infrastructure provision in the Heads of the Valleys area.

HEADS OF THE VALLEYS Development Strategy / Regeneration Programme

This is a £500M regeneration programme designed to transform the Heads of the Valleys, brings together the WAG, 5 LAs and other organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors. It has a Strategy and Action Plan – which has been subject to a recent sustainability appraisal – plus clear baselines, targets for progress, criteria for investment, and a few high-level indicators to monitor progress. In terms of structure it has 3 arms:

PROGRAMME BOARD
- Chaired by a WA Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks
- Senior representatives from public, private and voluntary / community sectors
- The STRATEGIC OVERVIEW role.

PROGRAMME TEAM
- Chaired by a Programme Director
- Dedicated team including local authority secondees
- The STRATEGIC PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT role.

STRATEGIC PROGRAMME GROUPS
- Chaired by Strategic Programme Managers
- Representatives from public, private and voluntary sectors
- The DELIVERY role.

The HOTV approach is ‘A Sub-Regional Approach to the Regeneration of Settlements’ - with roles identified for each settlement, and the provision of a mix of executive, market and affordable housing, plus major upgrades of the housing estates, renewal of

These initiatives demonstrate, above all, the current will and capacity in Wales and of the WAG to undertake special initiatives to address problems and opportunities based on clear evidence.

Of the more deeply rural areas of Wales it says that : “Should ‘West Wales and the Valleys’ [ the Objective 1 area] be eligible for regional development funding, support is likely to focus on:

- Promoting the knowledge economy
- Creating a favourable business environment
- Building sustainable communities
- Increasing employment and reducing economic activity
- Improving skill levels.”

Of these, ‘Building Sustainable Communities’ clearly resonates with work of the RHE Service in Wales, and in that respect it sees that developing : “ by developing integrated approaches to tackling economic, environmental and social problems in communities most affected by economic inactivity and deprivation”. (Ibid, para 4.15,page 65.)

The Skills and Employment Action Plan for Wales, 2005 (SEAP 05) applies to Wales as a whole. In the section dealing with ‘Demand for Skills’ it sees as a “key challenge” the need to tackle the “low-skill, low-value added culture” in Wales and it identifies a need “to drive for innovation and better business performance that will promote investment in education and skills, which in turn should generate competitive success, economic growth and sustainable employment opportunities.”

While it says - “Simply supplying more highly – skilled individuals, without at the same time ensuing increased demand for those skills, will not work.” – it also goes on to say – “Investing in a suitably qualified workforce, capable of meeting the demands of the knowledge economy is crucial. It is vital that the economic and learning agencies work together to raise employers’ sights and create more high quality jobs as well as ensuring appropriate learning provision is available to meet and promote skill needs.” (SEAP’05, page 11.)

In terms of housing’s contribution to wider economic issues, the latest (June 2006) advice on housing and land-use emphasises :

- re market housing, respect for “local studies such as those deriving from the community strategy or those forming the evidence–base for the development plan”( Ibid, para 9.2.4)
- devising “a settlement plan” ( Ibid, para 9.2.5)
- “addressing the “scope and potential for rehabilitation, conversion, clearance and redevelopment when considering suitable sites for housing development” ( Ibid, para 9.2.6);

and also ( cf. MIPPS, WAG, June 2006, para 9.1.2 ) :

- “mixed use development so communities have good access to employment, retail and other services”,
- “development that is easily accessible by public transport, cycling and walking; although in rural areas development might not be able to achieve all accessibility criteria in all circumstances”

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• a raft of other considerations - re basic infrastructure, access to employment, social infrastructure, contamination, stability, flood risk, etc (set out in Ibid, para 9.2.9).

A16. Recent Housing Research and Guidance

WAG’s recent research report ‘The Role of the Housing System in Rural Wales’, (published in January 2006) reviewed all the available research and issues re rural Wales very thoroughly, and reported that the “main rural housing issue raised by the national stakeholder representatives was the lack of affordable housing” (WAG, 2006, para 5.2, page 87). It found (inter alia):

• a rate of population increase in rural Wales (5%) between 1981 and 1991 (compared with 2% for Wales as a whole) and between 1991 and 2001 by over 3% (more than double that recorded for Wales);
• almost all of this growth had resulted from in-migration, but without such migration the population of rural Wales would have declined;
• continuing net out-migration of younger age groups;
• varying patterns of migration, age groups of migrants etc relative to geography;
• 71% of rural Welsh households owning their properties;
• a lower proportion of households in the social rented sector (16%, compared with 18% in Wales as a whole);
• a buoyant private rented sector;
• second homes only impacting on a small number of wards;
• a significant minority of (older) dwellings remaining in disrepair;
• house price increases (83% in rural Wales as opposed to 73% between 1997 and 2003 in Wales as a whole);
• in 87% of rural wards, an average house price in 2003 more than three times the mean level of local household earned income;
• dramatic increases in the cost of development land and property prices; and
• a net loss of social rented accommodation.

It found that the age group split in rural Wales was 19% (0-15), 10% (16-24), 25% (25-44), 27% (45-64), and 20% (65+) – which was not all that different to the all Wales figures of 20%, 11%, 27%, 25% and 17%, respectively, but the overall figures masked wide spatial variations. It rehearsed many different facets of the housing market and perceptions of it in Wales – noting large differences in the forces at play in different localities – and concluded that “any understanding of, and policy solutions to, the housing challenges faced in rural Wales must be based on place-specific assessments of local circumstances and need.”

A17. The Affordable Housing Toolkit

The Welsh Assembly Government’s vision for housing in Wales, remains – “that everyone should have the opportunity to live in good quality affordable housing: and to be able to choose where they live and whether buying or renting is best for them and their families.” (NAW, July 2001: & WAG, “The Affordable Housing Toolkit” June 2006).

In June 2006, Edwina Hart, AM, MBE, Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration explained: “Since we published Better Homes, the issues of housing supply and affordability have become an increasing concern throughout the UK. In Wales we are fortunate that overall we do not have a large imbalance between rates of housebuilding and household formation as is evident in several parts of England: but there are clearly localised pressures, particularly in rural Wales, as well as a general background of declining affordability. It is therefore critical that local authorities take a positive and
A responsible approach to meeting their housing requirements within the framework of collaboration encouraged by People, Places and Futures – the Wales Spatial Plan and the sub-regional household projections published by the Assembly Government’s Statistical Directorate." (WAG, Ministerial Foreword in ‘The Affordable Housing Toolkit’, June 2006).

The ‘Toolkit’ refers to:

- “a significant increase in net migration from England to Wales since 1997/98” with, in 2003/04, a “net gain of over 14,000 persons from this source” (45% moving into Mid and West Wales, and 29% moving into North Wales);

- national and sub-national population projections which suggest (between 2003 and 2006) a likely 20% increase in the total number of households (to 1,478,500) – with the largest increase being in South Wales (22%) and the smallest in North Wales (14%), and smaller households (2.09 rather than 2.34 on average), with more cohabiting couples and an overall increase on average of 20% in single parent households.

The Ministerial Foreword to the ‘Toolkit’ also faces up to the possible implications of all this for the Welsh language and culture:

“...in considering the need for new development it is essential that sustainability considerations are reflected including the possible impact on the future integrity of Welsh speaking communities, in accordance with Planning Policy Wales and Iaith Pawb, the Assembly Government’s Welsh Language policy.”...... “The issue of the Welsh language being lost from rural communities is one that has taken on increasing importance owing to the up swing in net in-migration and the pressure this has placed on local housing markets in rural Wales.”

The Toolkit includes an arsenal of schemes and initiatives already up and running in Wales (and real world examples) to help people struggling to afford to buy (or rent) a home in Wales, and sets out how to apply each, including:

○ Homebuy
○ Homefinder
○ Buy to Let
○ Transferable Discount and Home Release Schemes
○ Shared Ownership
○ Right to Buy and Right to Acquire.

It also emphasises other sources of subsidy to be garnered such as:

○ Section 106 agreements
○ Forestry Commission land initiative
○ Land acquired by the WAG and its Sponsored Bodies
○ Disposal of Land and Property by Local Authorities
○ Housing Association Reserves
○ Community Land Trusts
○ The Resale Covenant Scheme.

The Toolkit also has a section reserved specifically on Rural Housing Enablers, and that section refers to there being over 40 RHEs in England at that time, and the setting up of the first such post in Wales – in North Monmouthshire and South Powys. It also refers to the fact that ‘the Assembly Government has agreed to provide funding
towards a project which will develop a framework for the establishment of a national network of Rural Housing Enablers serving rural communities across institutional boundaries." And that “Assembly Government ministers will give further consideration to the issues when this project reports in the summer of 2006”.

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WAG Definition of Rural Housing Enablers

“Rural housing enablers:
• Work with communities to identify local housing need via housing needs surveys and use the information to raise awareness of current and future housing pressures within rural areas
• Work with planning and housing authorities, the community, landowners, and housing associations to find suitable sites for housing schemes and bring them to development stage. The enabler may also seek to influence the provision of affordable housing on open market developments.
• Act independently to broker agreements between the parties.
• Support local authorities, where necessary, in speeding up the provision of affordable homes.
• Contribute to various strategies relevant to affordable rural housing at local, regional and national level.”

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The Toolkit also emphasises the role and scope of Compulsory Purchase of Land to develop for the provision of affordable housing, where a good case can be made, and mentions the remit (formerly with the WDA, now with the DEIN in WAG) to provide land for affordable housing – either through direct sales to housing associations or via planning obligations and development briefs. And it points out that the WDA strategic land assembly, etc. powers are retained by the WAG in DEIN and other Units.

It ends by encouraging good design through a closing section on Designing Good Quality Sustainable Housing. There are specific injunctions here re affordable housing:

• “....it is essential that sustainability considerations be at the forefront in planning the development of affordable housing”, and
• “Affordable housing whether supplied by the private sector or housing associations should ... be well designed, of good quality and sustainable.”


The WAG Toolkit also mentions the commissioning of a report on “low-cost home ownership which will provide a better understanding of its role and potential in rural Wales.” ( The latter had not emerged at the time of writing this report.)

It is clear that WAG officials expect these ‘tools’ – a wide-ranging set of initiatives and powers - to be used.
This advice is sure to trigger some reviewing and revision of more local policy documents, such as Affordable Housing Action Plans and Supplementary Planning Guidance and other local tools devised to address affordable housing issues. An example of that would be Gwynedd County’s (2005) Affordable Housing Project: *Supplementary Planning Guidance – Affordable Housing : Gwynedd Council Planning Authority Area* – which sets out very fully how the Council will use the planning system to support its objectives on affordable housing, and deal with its findings (*inter alia*) that – “house prices in Gwynedd bear no relation to local income levels”, and are “significantly driven by external factors which manifest themselves especially in areas of high scenic value” – and it sets out its research on the variables with respect to dozens of villages, and includes a copy of its local housing needs assessment forms.

**A18. Environmental and Design Issues**

The common tendency is to think that good environmental practice and high quality design costs a lot extra. This is not necessarily the case. Much depends on the determination shown very early in the planning and design process to factor in – (i) rational analysis of sites, and (ii) good design principles, and (iii) a commitment to quality. Welsh land use planning policy on housing (*cf.* WAG, MIPPS, para 9.2.2) instructs local planning authorities (*inter alia*) to promote –

- “attractive landscapes around dwellings, with usable open space and regard for biodiversity, nature conservation and flood risk;
- greater emphasis on quality, good design and the creation of places to live that are safe and attractive;
- the most efficient use of land;
- well designed living environments, where appropriate at increased densities;
- construction of housing with low environmental impact that especially maximises energy efficiency and minimises the use of energy from fossil fuels sources, using renewable energy where appropriate
- ‘barrier free’ housing developments, for example built to Lifetime Homes standards."

And the policies on affordable housing (*in* TAN 2 para 11.1), specifically, include – “As set out in Planning Policy Wales, good design can protect the environment and enhance its quality, help to attract business and investment, promote social inclusion and improve the quality of life. These objectives apply equally to market housing and to affordable housing, the overriding principle being to establish a sense of place and community. For small sites the visual integration of old and new development is of particular importance. Affordable housing should also be indistinguishable from market housing provided on the same site, in terms of external design quality and materials.”

CCW commissioned in the early 1990s a report (*produced* by Chapman Warren, and Brown & Parnaby (Architects), and Jeremy Lowe which rehearsed the local vernacular, noted the emerging styles, looked at the available design guidance, encouraged good practice and suggested a ‘checklist’ approach to new planning applications. (*cf.* ‘Ideal Homes for Rural Wales’, 1993).

And, the English Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) published, in 2002, a useful report on the value which good design adds in the economic and social sense – in healthcare, in educational environments, in housing, in promoting civic pride and cultural activity, for business, and in crime prevention –
drawing on international research into these matters. Re housing – it points (inter alia) to:

- RICS research of 1997 (in the UK) which estimated that more money was spent on treating illnesses arising from poor housing conditions that was spent by local authorities on their own housing stock.
- Californian research in the 1970s and 1980s which discovered that the overall impression of the exterior of a house and its surrounding dwellings have an impact on how people feel about their homes, and in many cases their personal sense of worth.
- FDP Savill’s study of 2002 which indicated that higher quality design in residential schemes could expect to yield a residual value per hectare of up to 15% more than conventionally designed schemes.


The Welsh unitary authorities now all have some policies on design. Taking Gwynedd’s SDP document on affordable housing, for example, there is reference to:

- WAG’s Planning Policy Wales – Technical Advice Note 12 : Design
- WAG’s Social Housing Grant – funding guidance (Appendix 9 - and its ‘specific design standards’)
- Gwynedd Council’s Design Guide, (2004) and


A19. A Recent CIH Policy Statement

Professional organisations also help to move national policy onwards. The Chartered Institute of Housing – Wales (in partnership with the Rural Housing Authorities Network (RHAN) and the Rural Housing Associations Group (RHAG) and the RHEs in Wales) has recently produced a short policy document entitled ‘Action on Rural Housing & Communities in Wales’ (2006) which calls for action on affordable housing and homelessness. It is concerned about (inter alia):

- the loss of young, skilled people, and the consequential effect on the Welsh language and culture
- the growing affordability gap for 20-39 year olds (the ‘Young, Working and Still Homeless’), and
- growing homelessness in rural areas - with evidence that the homeless in rural areas receive worse services that their urban counterparts.

The CIH and its partners espouse four cornerstones:

- Cornerstone 1: securing high level political support (including, inter alia, supporting and co-ordinating a RHE network across all areas of rural Wales)
- Cornerstone 2: addressing specific housing priorities (including, inter alia, ‘rural proofing’ of major initiatives and programmes)
- Cornerstone 3: making joined-up action a reality (including, inter alia, producing ‘village design statements’)
- Cornerstone 4: mobilising the resources (including, inter alia, a ‘spend to save’ approach to investing in rural housing).
Annex C : The 4 Welsh RHE Case Studies

CASE STUDY – NORTH MONMOUTHSHIRE / SOUTH POWYS

BACKGROUND / CONTEXT

The RHE post was originally a three year pilot project (from August 2003) and received 50% match funding (now ceased) from WAG to cover the rural community council areas (population under 3000) of North Monmouthshire and South Powys (East Brecknockshire), but now covers all of rural Monmouthshire and rural Powys within the Brecon Beacons NP. A report on the pilot stage is in preparation. A successful Conference was held on 13th October 2006 near Brecon to review progress on this ‘pilot’ scheme.

CURRENT SET-UP

The strategic nature of the RHE’s functions are managed by a Steering Group, each of whose members intend to provide £52,500 from 2006-7:

Steering Group Membership and Financial Contributions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>£k</th>
<th>Member</th>
<th>£k</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>Powys CC (Chair°)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid Wales HA</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Brecon Beacons NPA</td>
<td>12.0</td>
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<td>Wales and West</td>
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<td>Monmouthshire CC</td>
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<td>Charter HA (Seren)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Welsh Federation HAs* (sec)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* In-kind funding; other contributions subject to annual review.
° Elected annually.

- Quarterly meetings review performance and agree the work programme.
- Gwerin HA hosts the RHE in a separate office to provide arms-length management yet retain independence (acknowledged by other partners as crucially important).
- Dedicated administrative support is being considered to reflect the larger area.
- The RHE works on a mixture of external work with rural communities using Community Councils, and internal policy and representative work with a wide variety of stakeholders (WAG, LAs, HAs, NPAs, WFHA).

INPUTS, OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

A. Nature and Scale of Resources and Other Inputs

In 2005-6, the total cost of the RHE Operation was £56,000, which gained grant assistance of £21,000 from WAG, leaving £35,000 to be raised from other sources, such as the HAs and County Councils and the National Park. The major items of expenditure were on salary (£30,000), office overheads and expenses (£9,500), management and administrative support (£7,700), and expenses associated with the evaluation of the project (£8,500, presumably non-recurring).
B. Measurable Outputs / Achievements

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Activity</th>
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<th>Activity</th>
<th>Units</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Full Planning Permission</td>
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<td>Needs Surveys completed</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outline planning permission</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Surveys in Progress Aug ’06</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Applications (8)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Surveys Planned (next 2 years)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. Intermediate Outputs and Desired Outcomes

In addition to the ‘hard’ outputs above a number of other activities and intermediate outputs have been undertaken during the pilot stage of this project:

- Establish databases in 12 – 16 of the 26 Community Council areas covering: land use; affordable housing opportunities; relevant organizations & individuals; different RHE models in England /Scotland; funding sources/ development options/ partners/ advocates/ statistics/ research.
- Created new Wales and Midlands Network.
- Set up 16 individual working groups/ projects.
- Provide reports to Community Councils on rural housing issues.

Other desired outcomes are:

- Improved identification and awareness of housing need in rural villages with specific relevance to future planning policy.
- Engagement of rural communities, in part through participation in the Community Strategy consultation process, and practical support to rural communities.
- Development of the Community Strategy, Local Housing Strategy and Unitary Development Plans in respect of rural housing issues.
- Removal of some of the barriers to affordable housing provision resulting in a reduction in the time taken for scheme completion.
- Research options re land-banking and self build to meet rural housing needs.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

- Tangible results needed – units of affordable housing must appear soon.
- Shorten lead times (to less than the 4-11 years/ in England): smooth the process.
- Ensure any expansion of RHE programme in Wales is financially secure and well managed at a national level – this will require housing and planning functions of WAG to collaborate closely.
- Decide on acceptable ‘hosting’ arrangements of RHEs, such as an RHE agency network or within an existing rural network (such as RCA or the Leader+ programme), to maintain their independence.
- Overcome ‘NIMBYism’ re Town Councils or Local Housing Needs Groups.
- Maintain collaborative networks within Wales and with English RHEs.

KEY CONTACT
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CASE STUDY – PEMBROKESHIRE

BACKGROUND / CONTEXT

The RHE in Pembrokeshire, established in August 2005 for three years by the two local planning authorities and the two local social landlords (with no funding from WAG) works with 70 Community Councils and a number of smaller rural Town Councils.

CURRENT SET-UP

Steering Group Membership and Financial Contributions

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tr>
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<td>5k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pembrokeshire CC</td>
<td>20k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pembrokeshire Coast NP</td>
<td>10k</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The RHE role in Pembrokeshire is funded and supported by the following partners, all members of the Steering Group:

- The RHE reports to the Steering Group quarterly, giving an update on the progress being made, proposed work schedule for the next 3 months and financial costs of the programme to date.
- The RHE in Pembrokeshire is based with Pembrokeshire Housing (HA) - every effort has been made to maintain independence.
- There is a separate website, separate e-mail address, separate phone line, promotional literature and stationery.
- The RHE first looks to assess the communities’ housing needs with the help of the Community Council. If a need is then identified, the RHE will, with the help of the Community Council, look to make contact with landowners in the area to try and find a possible development site, and keeping the community informed through the planning design, development and allocation processes.
- The RHE has to wait to be invited to conduct a Housing Needs Survey in an area.

INPUTS, OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

A. Nature and Scale of Resources and Other Inputs

Expenditure from the 1st of June 2005 to the 30th June 2006 was:

- Salary, NI and Car User Allowance: £25,177
- Travel Expenses: £1,602
- Equipment: £1,499
- Recruitment (non-recurring): £1,996
- Stationery: £1,941
- Telephone: £349
- Postage: £319
- Website (non-recurring): £2,220
- Office Rental: £821
- IT Support: £1,073
- Miscellaneous: £353
B. Measurable Outputs / Achievements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordable Housing (delivered)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Sites now being considered (9)</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Planning Permission</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Needs Surveys completed</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline planning permission</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Surveys in Progress Aug 06</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Applications</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Surveys Planned (next 2 years)</td>
<td>20-25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Potential sites are being investigated in a number of locations, eg Marloes (2); Dale (initial response negative); St Ishmaels (feasibility study needed); Herbrandston (first seeking affordable housing on private development); Newport (development of a playing field); Dinas Cross (foul sewer problems); Nolton & Roch (planning issues being explored); Rosemarket (acceptability and access issues); Lamphey (contacting landowners); Jeffreyston (examining survey implications).

C. Intermediate Outputs and Desired Outcomes

- Raising awareness of affordable housing issues at local level – eg gave presentation to 23 Community Councils (last 12 months) (and smaller TCs).
- Empowering rural communities to be proactive in addressing the problem of affordable housing provision in their community – eg by providing community councils with newsletters and information, on a quarterly basis.
- Collecting data on level of housing need within rural communities in Pembrokeshire, through rolling programme of housing needs surveys.
- Influence affordable housing policy in the area – eg by supplying articles in the local newspapers, appearing on BBC Wales Radio, meeting local AMs and MPs.
- Working with communities, landowners, planning officers, Housing Associations and private developers to identify possible development sites.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

- Important to maintain successful momentum to date.
- Communities need to understand that the process of moving from a housing needs survey to delivering units on the ground will in most cases be lengthy.
- Community Councils must be kept informed and updated on a regular basis with regard to any possible development sites, so they can see the progress made.
- Delivery of specific affordable housing developments for local people.
- Opportunities developed over last 12 months need to be realised.

KEY CONTACT:
Matthew Owens - Rural Housing Enabler
Meyler House, St. Thomas Green, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, SA61 1QP
T 01437 774769 E matthew.owens@rhe-pembs.co.uk W www.rhe-pembs.co.uk
CASE STUDY – MEIRIONYDD / DWYFOR (GWYNEDD)

BACKGROUND / CONTEXT

The RHE post is a three year pilot project (from September 2004) and received 44% match funding from WAG to cover the rural community council areas of Dwyfor population 27,319, and Meirionnydd 32,877 (2001 Census).

CURRENT SET-UP

The strategic nature of the RHE's functions are managed by a Steering Group, each of whose members provide as follows for the duration of the project:

**Steering Group Membership and Financial Contributions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Year 05-06 £k</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WAG</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyngor Gwynedd* (in kind)</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT Eryri * (Host)</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT Clwyd</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awdurdod Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mantell Gwynedd</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[* In-kind funding; other contributions subject to annual review.]

- Meetings are held every 2.5 months to review performance and agree the work programme following strategic research by GC of potential affordability hot spots.
- CT Eryri hosts the RHE in a separate office to provide arms-length management yet retain independence (acknowledged by other partners as crucially important).
- Administrative support is given with distributing and inputing surveys.
- The RHE works with a mixture of stakeholders which include Community Councils, Gwynedd affordable housing working group, the internal HA working group.
- Social housing grant used for shared ownership, to allow communities to gain more control over their own houses.
- Self build is increasingly sought as an option.
- Using affordable land via a public body or RSL (or CLT) is a future consideration.

INPUTS, OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

**A. Measurable Outputs / Achievements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordable Housing (delivered on site)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sites now being considered (6)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Planning Permission</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Needs Surveys completed</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline planning permission</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Surveys in Progress Aug 06</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Applications (2)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Surveys Planned (next 2 years)</td>
<td>&gt;15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C. Nature and Scale of Resources and Other Inputs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Funding</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwynedd Council</td>
<td>35,150</td>
<td>26,362</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowdonia NPA</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Public Funding</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contributions in Kind</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cymdeithas Tai Eryri</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>6,180</td>
<td>6,365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central overheads</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>3,090</td>
<td>3,182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management support</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>2,575</td>
<td>2,652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative support</td>
<td>11,500</td>
<td>11,845</td>
<td>12,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Projected Income</strong></td>
<td>51,650</td>
<td>46,207</td>
<td>20,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL PROJECT COSTS</strong></td>
<td>88,119</td>
<td>72,573</td>
<td>51,324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GRANT SOUGHT</strong></td>
<td>36,469</td>
<td>26,366</td>
<td>31,125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% TOTAL PROJECT COSTS</strong></td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total WAG grant : £93,960 (44%)

C. Intermediate Outputs and Desired Outcomes

**Soft outcomes of the project to date**

- Better cooperation and communication between project partner bodies.
- Seeking new ways of meeting needs, e.g. shared ownership / self build / CLT with Housing association / establishing a CLT.
- Improving relationships, community development (new football team) and intelligence on housing/planning issues through HNS.

**CHALLENGES AHEAD**

- Expansion of Wales RHE programme must be financially secure - WAG crucial.
- Funding needed from other partners (HAs, RCC & CC).
- Better co-ordination needed between WAG and LA housing, planning property and rural development departments/ functions.
- Hosting arrangements must maintain RHE independence.
- Maintain collaborative networks within Wales and with English RHEs.
- Explore new models, using public, private, grant aided funding with HA’s and CLT’s, individual private landowners and self builders.
- Need to find enough land for development.

**KEY CONTACT**
Arfon Hughes, Hwylusydd Tai Gwledig Gwynedd / Gwynedd Rural Housing Enabler, Sgwâr y Parc, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Gwynedd, LL41 3AD, Tel - 01766 833018 Fax - 01766 831082 Mobile - 07979 803547 E - arfon@taieri.co.uk
CASE STUDY – Conwy and Denbighshire

BACKGROUND / CONTEXT

The RHE in Conwy/Denbighshire was established in January 2005, initially for three years, by the two local authorities, Snowdonia National Park Authority and a local social landlord. It works with 52 Community Councils and 1 Town Council.

CURRENT SET-UP

Steering Group Membership and Financial Contributions (2006 – 7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd (Host) 2 members</th>
<th>Conwy County Council 2 members</th>
<th>Welsh Assembly Government ** 1 member Denbighshire Vol. Serv. Council 1 member Conwy Regeneration Service 1 member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10,610</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>20,610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire CC 2 members</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowdonia National Park* 1 member</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(* SNP up-front contribution equiv £2K/annum) ( ** recycled funds /not grant)

The RHE reports to a Steering Group whose members contribute as shown.

- The RHE reports to the Steering Group, quarterly.
- RHE is located in the same building as Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd (HA), but every effort is made to establish the independence of the post.
- The RHE has coverage on the Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd website, and an email address linked to their system, plus a phone line, and specific RHE promotional literature.
- The RHE responds to invitations to help assess the local communities’ housing needs with the help of the local Community Council. If and where the analysis demonstrates a real need for affordable rural housing, the RHE follows up leads on possible sites and talks to the landowners, and keeps the local community informed through the succeeding stages.

INPUTS, OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

A. Nature and Scale of Resources and Other Inputs

In 2005-06, the total cost of the RHE project was £42,000, exceeding the £39,000 budget largely because of the higher than expected number of surveys conducted. The major costs were salary, travelling and postage costs. The travelling and postage costs were in excess of the budget, which had initially expected 3-4 surveys to be conducted in the first year.
B. Measurable Outputs / Achievements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordable Housing (delivered)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Sites now being considered (2)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Planning Permission</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Needs Surveys completed</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline planning permission</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Surveys in Progress Aug 06</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Applications</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Surveys Planned (next 2 years)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Potential sites are being investigated. It is expected that 2 planning applications related to the RHE work will be submitted over the next 6 months. One at least will be seriously considered for development in the near future.

D. Intermediate Outputs and Desired Outcomes

- Raising awareness of affordable housing issues at a local level.
- Empowering rural communities to be proactive in their community.
- Collecting data on level of housing need within rural communities in Conwy, County and Denbighshire, through rolling programme of housing needs surveys
- Influencing affordable housing policy in the area – meeting key people.
- Working with communities, landowners, planning officers, Housing Associations and private developers to identify possible development sites.
- Increasing affordable housing provision – eventually.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

- Response from the local Community Councils has been fairly positive. But the RHE considers that the relative lack of powers for Community Councils and the newness of the RHE approach – and its short-term time horizon (3 years) relative to the scale and complexity of the task - presents a communications challenge.
- The Community Councils are unused to working collaboratively with others on this type of project (unlike English Parishes that produce ‘Village Plans’) and need time to adjust to the new challenge, but are now becoming more engaged.
- Important to focus on ‘real need’ and realistic options.
- Using RHE engagement / discussions to conserve, develop and promote the use of Welsh language to help create more viable communities as schemes are delivered.
- Communities need to understand that the process of moving from a housing needs survey to delivering units on the ground will not be automatic – real need has to be established – and will usually take some time to organise.
- Community Councils must be kept informed and updated on a regular basis with regard to any possible development sites, so they can see progress – but expectations must be managed also.
- The wider value of the assessment process needs to be recognised and the views and input of the local community valued (not ignored) in relation to the wider canvas of issues and not just supplying more affordable units.
- Opportunities for affordable housing developments developed over the last few months need to be polished and realised.

KEY CONTACT
Helen Cook – Rural Housing Enabler
54 Stryd y Dyffryn, Dinbych, LL16 3BW
T 01745 818412 E Helen.cook@taiclwyd.com W www.taiclwyd.com
Annex D : Views of the Interested Parties – the Detail

SCHEDULE OF CONSULTEES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAT</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>INVITED TO COMMENT</th>
<th>% RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Steering Group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 HAs, NFHA, WLGA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>The 4 RHEs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Other Major (Housing)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organisations - Wales</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Welsh LAs/NPAs already</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involved in RHE work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Ditto, not involved yet in RHE work</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>English Border LAs</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Other major Welsh Organisations</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Other major English Organisations</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Other UK/Overseas</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>WAG officials</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Community Councils</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involved in RHE work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>110</td>
<td>c70% overall</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note : HIRC were appointed at the end of July 2006, and where required to produce a Draft Report by the end of September 2006. Consultations had to be progressed during August and the first half of September – when most Community Councils are in recess.)
1. Views of Unitary County Councils and NPAs already involved in RHE work in Wales

The 9 LAs (6 Welsh Unitary County Councils and 3 National Park Authorities) already involved were approached, and all responded to the HIRC request for comment (through written comments or through structured interview) on the RHE Service In Wales. The views were generally very positive, but also alert to the complexities of using RHEs and the issues they face. The big concern is continuity of funding for the existing RHE service.

Consultees said:

Current Effectiveness / Importance /Strengths –

“We are very happy with the RHE service so far. [The RHE] has carried out a number of housing needs surveys at Community Council level and these have identified a need in most areas. We are now working together to try to identify land and some sites are starting to come through.” [Monmouthshire CC]

“Independence is one of the main strengths. Ability to conduct independent surveys and gain [the] trust of the Community Council. [Also,] ability to bring stakeholders together, [and ] effective political lobbying.” [Monmouthshire CC]

“Strengths -

• Locally “owned” and managed – [but] Independent
• Developed from good practice/experience in England
• Have attracted good calibre of staff
• RHEs are networked both within Wales and across border
• Welsh speaking staff in Welsh speaking areas.” [Powys CC]

“RHE's exist, they network well, they have made links with LGDU to standardise questionnaires; moving the affordable housing agenda forward, raising profile locally and nationally.” [Pembrokeshire CC]

“The RHE in Conwy and Denbighshire has now operated for nearly two years. During that period, local housing needs studies have been carried out in a number of community council areas. One of the main benefits from a local planning perspective is that they enable us to assess applications for ‘exception sites’ in circumstances where general market housing will not be permitted. The number of such applications in Conwy has historically been very low, which possibly reflects a general lack of awareness of policies on exception sites. There has been some increase in the number of planning applications for exception sites in Conwy since the RHE was appointed. This may reflect greater awareness of these policies.” [Conwy CC]

“The Local Development Plan process means that there will be an increasing need for policies to be grounded on reliable, up-to-date and consistent evidence. Without the RHE service, it would be far more difficult for local planning authorities to deliver the requirements of TAN2, for example, in justifying the allocation of sites for affordable housing.” [Conwy CC]

“…RHEs provide an invaluable resource, and …their contribution to deliver affordable housing in rural areas needs to be recognised.” [Conwy CC]
“As a National Park Authority / local planning authority that has involvement in two out of four of the current RHE projects we feel well placed to comment. The authority has supported both the Gwynedd and the Conwy / Denbigh RHE projects and remains supportive of these initiatives. It will be important to maintain the service beyond the current projects and to identify appropriate resources for this.” [SNPA]

“The current arrangements have come about as a result of individual authorities, be it housing or planning, pooling resources to fund the RHEs. Greater support, financially from government to do so would be of assistance. The difficulty is - how would this be done? At present we work to ensure the RHE in Pembs is an independent broker. It works well as long as we can continue to resource [ the RHE]. This gives us an opportunity to be on the steering group and help achieve our individual organisation’s objectives. If the Welsh Assembly Government became a major player would the job description change, would our good working relationship through the steering group be altered? Would local communities be more suspicious? It is a difficult one to gauge. I assume that some research with local communities will be done which could help gauge what the reaction would be.” [ PCNPA]

“Strengths –
• the 4 RHEs work in Wales as an informal network which is certain to strengthen work on affordable housing for the communities in need of it in rural areas of Wales
• the WAG Affordable Housing Toolkit acknowledges the RHEs as an important tool .... and the WAG clearly values the RHEs
• here in Gwynedd, the strength of the project lies in the partnership achieved under a Steering Group ( consisting of housing associations, planning authorities, housing authorities, and representatives of the voluntary sector)
• much has been achieved in Gwynedd through the RHE’s work and that of the [Gwynedd CC’s] Affordable Housing Officer. That has led to 150 units of affordable housing being given planning permission ( subject to Section 106 Agreements ) since the Affordable Housing Project and RHE were established in Gwynedd
• more resources [have been secured] for local authority housing services and for housing associations in order to secure increased Social Housing Grant.” [ Gwynedd CC]

“The RHE’s ‘independent broker’ role is essential for ensuring collaborative working in some ‘difficult’ communities. It is inevitable that housing associations and/or local authorities will ( with or without foundation) have a bad name in some communities.” [Gwynedd CC]

“[ The RHE] has been here for just over a year and the speed of progress has surprised us: we were hoping for three questionnaires a year [but]...10 or 12 have been done in Conwy / Denbighshire in that period: a pace must faster than anticipated.” [Denbighshire CC]

“The survey form has been rubber stamped by the LGDU and now appears in Government guidance.” [Monmouthshire CC]

Weaknesses –

“Weaknesses
• Insufficient in number – all rural Wales should be covered
• Lack of long term funding (contrasts with time it takes to get from concept to completion)
• Not always perceived as being independent – need to be located in neutral premises.” [Powys CC]

“Weaknesses: There are only four of them, some (if not all) are on short term contracts; affordable housing provision is not a quick win - it takes time - in Pembrokeshire will there be sufficient time given limited land availability to deliver schemes? Building up good local relationships - potential that these will be lost if positions not retained.” [Pembrokeshire CC]

“Weaknesses -
• Hosting by a Housing Association sometimes makes it difficult to demonstrate your independence. [RHEs are] often seen as working for the Housing Association.
• Resource issues - lack of admin support. A lot of the background work is administrative. Core work sometimes gets pushed to the side. [RHEs] really need admin support to feed in results of the surveys, etc.
• People often use RHE as a planning consultant.” [Monmouthshire CC]

“A couple of problems – 7-8 Community Councils in each of Conway and Denbighshire have refused assessments, or not responded....creating an impasse...[especially where the LA feels affordable housing is needed in those areas so Denbighshire has “ set up task and finish group to address this issue.”] [Denbighshire CC]

“RHEs in England get to look at empty properties as potential affordable house: there is scope for that in [this County] and the County might prefer that in some cases/locations.” [Denbighshire CC]

“Surveys generate demand faster than the partners can ensure monies for new housing – a larger ring-fenced social housing budget is needed to meet demand.” [Denbighshire CC]

“...it is important to emphasise that the planning system will not single-handedly resolve problems of rural affordable housing and that problems of affordability extend country wide in rural and urban areas alike. There are more significant structural issues that need to be resolved, for example in relation to public sector funding of housing and also the right to buy (for public sector housing, whether rented or shared ownership). Whilst such housing has a requirement for the RSL having first option to buy back, it is not clear the extent to which RSLs have adequate funding to follow through on such options. All such housing should carry a section 106 agreement. “ [SNPA]

“...important to recognise that the 4 pilot projects have been operating across major national changes in Policy and guidance in relation to affordable housing and in relation to the wider planning system in Wales. It is also relevant to note that changes to the planning system in Wales means that of the 4 Local Planning Authorities [ in North Wales] involved in these 2 projects only one has an up to date development plan. It is likely that these recent changes to the planning system in Wales will take some time to implement, to bed in and to demonstrate results. Many of the detailed difficulties in developing and delivering the RHE initiative may well recede once the new policies and support mechanisms take effect.” [SNPA]
“Through the Rural Housing Enabler there has been increasing pressure for rural exception sites of 10 or more (large scale development in NP terms) and in some cases the work of the rural housing enabler has created unrealistic expectations amongst the community in particular in relation to the suitability of individual sites and to the scale of development appropriate to small settlements. There is a house building rate or 50 - 60 per year in Snowdonia. Just two such sites approved on rural exceptions sites within a year could result in up to 40% of the area’s new house building being delivered on land outside identified development boundaries and sites. It is important to the long term success of the initiative that new build affordable housing is sensitive to the scale and culture of small settlements.” [SNPA]

“We need to send clearer messages to the community about the partnership arrangements for the RHE. It is not easy for the public to understand the complexities of partnership working. Some applicants / potential applicants are either not aware of or choose to ignore the partnership nature of the Rural Housing Enabler’s role and instead have an apparent impression that the RHE is some sort of development guerrilla who will win the day against the best efforts of the local planning authority to prevent planning approvals for housing.” [SNPA]

“Evidence tends to be anecdotal or to relate to individual circumstances. There have been difficulties with an apparent lack of clarity between current housing need and aspiration / future need. There have been difficulties in agreeing section 106 details that will stand up to testing whilst also being acceptable to lending organisations - a clearly stated requirement of PPW – MIPPS (Housing). Housing Associations will need adequate resources if they are to deliver on new affordable housing and on ‘buy back’ clauses.” [SNPA]

“Weaknesses –
• no official network in Wales ..... and therefore no formality re the networking between the current four RHEs, as compared with the arrangements in England
• the current variation in the funding and administration of the current 4 RHEs could create disjuncture in administrative methods, and duplication of effort / human resources re setting up systems and arrangements ( hence the importance of establishing a network)
• 4 RHEs are not enough – in terms of human capacity – to cover all the rural areas of Wales
• the rural community area to be covered by a RHE needs to be firmly defined. The 'rural' definition may be too restricting in the context of Gwynedd..... the whole of Gwynedd is rural apart from Bangor, Caernarfon, Pwllheli and Porthmadog – but there is a tendency to concentrate [RHE] efforts on very small communities, rather than targeting larger centres were greater impact might be achieved in terms of the numbers of affordable housing built, the availability of land, etc.” [Gwynedd CC]

Opportunities / Aspirations / Future Development –

“Aspirations -
• We aspire to having 3 RHEs in Powys to cover all the territory and for all rural Wales to be covered and for secure long term funding.” [Powys CC]

“Aspirations: Development of RHE service in other areas will assist in achieving a degree of consistency in approach (whilst realising there needs to be differences at a
local level) in Pembrokeshire: to continue to support the existence of an RHE beyond the current 3 year contract period to actual scheme delivery.” [Pembrokeshire CC]

“How to develop the service over the next 5 years: Needs political push. Given WAG funding unlikely to be available, it will be reliant upon individual authorities to see it as a sufficiently high priority to resource appropriately. Partnership management of posts to continue - the work done by an RHE is useful to a range of organisations. Perhaps the next phase would be to have private sector developer representation - get them involved in the affordable housing debate.” [Pembrokeshire CC]

“Opportunities -
- Funding: LAs, HAs, NPAs may be willing to contribute to funding
- May be a role for county associations of voluntary organisations (AVOs) – this has yet to be explored.” [Powys CC]

“As a starting point we need a funding protocol with ongoing support at a lower level than WAG. [But] WAG does need to approve the scheme and keep control.” [Monmouthshire CC]

“[ Scope for ] -
- Some sort of central support/ coordination/ best practice/ evaluation as used to be provided by the Countryside Agency would be useful
- Would WCVA be able to provide the quality of provision that is needed? – again this has not been explored.” [Powys CC]

“[There is scope in] Wales as a whole – [for] national recognition of the valuable role RHEs play - perhaps through part funding the office and admin arrangements for each RHE. Locally - to be able to fund the RHE on a permanent basis.” [PCNPA]

“A 'Welsh programme' for RHEs would give the post/s more credibility, and an RHE programme would also give more security in terms of funding from WAG.” [Monmouthshire CC]

“Opportunities for –
- continuation of the service in Gwynedd and its extension to cover the rest of Gwynedd ( ie adding the former Arfon BC area, to the former Dwyfor DC and Meirionnydd DC areas)
- the WAG to fund an RHE Network for a minimum of 5 years.” [Gwynedd CC]

“ Ideas for developing the [RHE] service over the next 5 years –
- ...establish a Welsh Network, to be one focussed on information exchange rather than being a monitoring body which sets output targets for each RHE
- important that any arrangements for formalising a Network do not adversely impact upon current project arrangements for individual RHEs ( re work programmes, steering group/s, targets, outputs)
- ...a network which provides some 'additionality' to the current arrangements, rather than assuming a dictatorial role
- an idea for part-funding the RHE – set aside a %, say 2.5%, of the WAG Social Housing Budget earmarked for particular projects towards meeting the RHE costs – subject to the RHE being central to the delivery of the project plan : a sort of agency fee.” [Gwynedd CC ]

“ 1 RHE for 2 Counties is enough " for Conwy/Denbighshire...and “lining up the money” [for RHEs and the work they generate] to get “schemes on site” is “very important".
[Denbighshire CC]

**Threats –**

“*At the moment the funding is not secure. There is a need for stakeholders to appreciate that this is a long term project.*” [Monmouthshire CC]

“Threats -
- Funding may well still be insufficient unless there is a contribution from WAG – in England the Countryside Agency had a crucial role – we lack any such body for these purposes in Wales.
- Lack of long term funding.” [Powys CC]

“*The RHE costs [this County] £5K per annum...the post is funded for another year... the Council’s budget is under pressure... RHE cannot be funded from the Housing Revenue Account and so has to be charged against the general Housing Strategy head ( Net Revenue Budget of £544K after some big pluses like homelessness grants have been accessed ) ...”* [Denbighshire CC]

“Local and national politicians need to make a long term policy commitment towards affordable housing as there is a danger that other major issues will overtake it in terms of policy and funding priorities.” [Powys CC]

“The RHE service not continuing. The service is an additional resource for the Affordable Housing Officer in Gwynedd, and so increases capacity re working with local communities to develop affordable housing plans.” [Gwynedd CC]

“*Enlargement of the areas covered by the current RHE/s on such a scale as to lead to less effective synergy between the work of the RHEs and the [County] Affordable Housing Officer.*” [Gwynedd CC]

**Impatience –** “Affordable housing schemes can take years before bricks and mortar appear on the ground because of different factors such as problems in finding suitable sites, the work involved in gathering evidence of need, and ‘difficult’ communities. Future joint-funders of RHEs will need to take this into account when they commit to joint-funding arrangements ( and ensure that the joint-funding is available for a period of at least 5 years).” [Gwynedd CC]

**Other Points to Note -**

Dealing with determined challengers of the planning system  – “*There have been instances where individuals have used the RHE scheme as just one more opportunity to push development on land which has previously been shown to be unacceptable for housing.*” [SNPA]

Inflated expectations – “*The RHE project has of itself created an expectation that is beyond its capability to deliver because of the scale of the problem compared with the scale of the projects. There has been an expectation that the problem can be resolved quickly by the intervention of the RHE. However it is impossible to make any structural difference to a problem of the scale of affordable housing overnight. From identifying need within a community, through identifying potential sites, obtaining relevant permissions, funding acquisition and building, to the eventual occupier hanging curtains can take a considerable time.*” [SNPA]
Relationship with Housing Waiting Lists - “There is an issue about how the work of the RHE fits in with wider work on Housing Market Assessments which is carried out. How does the LPA present a position statement on what housing need is in a community when they also have to take account of housing waiting lists?” [PCNPA]

Progress on affordable housing (not RHE generated) reasonably strong in some areas – “Denbighshire has 250 units with planning permission currently (over last 4-5 years) and 20 low-cost units now being built.” [Denbighshire CC]

Allowing a bit of ‘variable geometry’ - “Here [in Pembrokeshire] we have one RHE serving one housing authority and two planning authorities. It works well. There may be difficulties in getting the geography right in Snowdonia and Brecon but there seems to be two RHEs working well there.” [PCNPA]

Extracting Local Knowledge on Land Ownership, etc. – “Joint working from the outset is essential for any affordable housing project. Communities clearly have the ability to strongly influence the delivery, or not, of a project but they are also an important source of information e.g. on the availability of suitable land, its owners, and which is really in need of affordable housing, etc. RHEs are essential to ensure this collaborative working.” [Gwynedd CC]

The nature of development in ‘deep rural’ areas – “A quarter to a third of planning applications [in the national park] are sub-divisions [of buildings] and barn conversions. Developments of 3-5 units are used to obtain income to help fund affordable housing - via commuted sums.” [BBNPA]

Design quality of affordable housing in Wales – “BBNP, WLGA and the three National Parks are looking at design guidance. It is important that affordable housing is done to the same standards – lifetime costs are needed, and passive solar gain and good insulation are very important.” [BBNPA]

Scope for multi-disciplinary working / a regeneration programming approach – “Multi-disciplinary approaches might help...BBNP and Powys [CC] Housing could work together [instead of] sitting in our silos defending the various regulations. Regeneration programming isn’t done: just minor one-offs [as developments in the Park] and the big schemes elsewhere.” [BBNPA]

2. Views of Community Councils already involved in RHE work in Wales

A total of 24 were approached, across the four RHE areas, and 12 responded to the HIRC request for comments on the RHE Service in Wales. The views expressed are very supportive of RHEs and their work.

Consultees said:

Current Effectiveness / Importance /Strengths –

“The role of the RHE is a valuable one...’most valued’ in the ‘coordinating role’. The current RHE is very effective in co-ordinating the community council, landowners an, the housing association and the local authority planners. The RHE is also very knowledgeable about legislation on affordable housing. The CC’s perception of the RHE service is very positive. The RHE has helped a lot with (i) formulating surveys/questionnaires, and (ii) analysing them - all invaluable help. Other Community Councils would certainly benefit from the RHE service.” [Rosemarket Community]
“Without [the RHE] I really do not know how a local community could proceed....We would not have known what to do...........We now have hope”. [Hay Town ]

“Following discussion with my fellow councillors and other members of the community most were concerned to impress how vital community involvement is in all stages of any rural housing schemes, particularly concerning the allocation of affordable housing. Also, that lengthy costly studies are of no value if there isn’t any realistic hope of capital resources becoming available.” [Tremeirchion Community]

“Providing affordable housing is all important, and it is essential that the RHE service continues over the longer term.” [Dinas Mawddwy Community]

“We have worked closely with .....the local RHE, and appreciate the help and advice he has given us. We are in the early stages of affordable housing but together we carried out a housing need survey and we are now working towards local affordable housing in our valley.” [Vale of Grwyney Community]

“We saw a report produced on our behalf which was succinct and easy to understand and which did not cost us a penny!!” [Llansannan Community]

“...the Conwy/Denbighshire RHE system seems to me to be working well. In the end, it is vital that communities, landowners, and local authorities work together, but how you organise that is another matter. Of course, there is a need for training and a ground-breaking long-term view by RHE officers and it takes time to nurture contacts with the community.” [Llansannan Community]

“From our limited early stage experiences, we wonder whether the geographically large area, [Monmouthshire/South Powys] perhaps combined with inadequate administrative back-up, has led to an overcapacity of demand. In making these points, the positive outcomes anticipated from the survey will be beneficial to the community as a whole.” [Talgarth Town ]

“Our approach locally, involved joint working between the Town Council and local Regeneration Group, with seven defined “delivery areas” and a team of three people allocated to each area. An explanatory flyer was delivered, with personal contact and explanation wherever possible, 1 to 2 weeks prior to the survey. The survey forms were then hand delivered, and the opportunity to explain and/or reinforce the original message was again taken where personal contact could be achieved. This approach certainly appeared to be of benefit and did provide some opportunity for clarification with a number of people.” [Talgarth Town ]

“ The RHE is quite effective...but the process is complicated. The questionnaire established a need for 12 units, for young people who lived and worked in the area...but, at the public meeting, quite forceful anti-development views were expressed by some people. The [National Park - as planning authority ] then approved of the scheme, having been won over by its rustic, barn-like design, only for the Environment Agency to object because of floodplain concerns, blocking progress - requiring us to start again..... Everyone is doing their best...” [Crucorney Community]

“[The RHE] has already given an overview report to the Community Council on the responses received – 25% of the population replied – to a recent consultation on rural housing needs in [this locality].” [Tremeirchion Community]
“The Community Council conducted an assessment of housing needs in [a local area] with the assistance of ...[the] Rural Housing Enabler. There was a good response to the questionnaire which was distributed or sent to every house in that area. The Enabler was a great help to us – doing all the paper work and consultation. And we as a Council helped to distributed some of the questionnaires.” [Llangernyw Community]

Weaknesses –

“Having conducted the review we found that there was a need for affordable housing but no suitable land available or land which might be sold for a reduced price. We would like to see a scheme wherein which landowners are assisted by the government to sell their land more cheaply or for money to be available to adapt old buildings for affordable use.” [Llangernyw Community]

“A weakness is that organisations have to contact the RHE and that they [the RHEs] can not work alone. They are aware of the problems but we feel that they cannot work independently.” [Llansannan Community]

“...although the need for affordable housing has been established.....we cannot move forward because there is a need for stronger testimony. We cannot force the public to put their names on to Council waiting lists or to register for the assisted purchase scheme. The questionnaire was anonymous. Much publicity has been given in local newspaper articles to the building of very comfortable houses in the village of .... and a petition was signed by hundreds of local residents expressing their concern about the lack of affordable housing. At the end of the day we have as a Community Council given much time to trying to satisfy the needs of our young residents but at this time we can do no more. The feeling of the Council is that there is a need for affordable housing in this area, but those we who are in need must also play their part.” [Llansannan Community]

“Clearly, and again from our limited experience, the process is going to be one of repetition every few years. It is therefore essential, in terms of administrative coordination and ability to meet demands, that a definitive rolling programme be planned to smooth out any potential peaks and troughs in respect of demand for this service. It is certainly one that we would like to see continue, albeit in an improved and refined state.” [Talgarth Town]

“[The RHE] could be clearer about what ‘affordable housing’ is – RSL housing.” [Hay Town]

Opportunities / Aspirations / Future Development -

“We believe that more RHEs should be appointed in Wales. There are many localities with a shortage of affordable housing, including Ceredigion, Powys and the North East.” [Llansannan Community]

“.....the service can be further developed by a clearer and more definitive explanation of the process and its implications to the community generally. Despite excellent opportunities of door to door explanations, a number of people still did not really understand that this is for “local” people, and also, that it does not imply “cheap and nasty” housing. Perhaps these latter points could be summed up as a need for improved “marketing.” [Talgarth Town]
Threats –

“The greatest threat lies with failing to win the backing of those who need affordable homes and also the local authorities.” [Llansannan Community]

“Many people (mostly incomers) are objecting strongly to the latest proposal: it is anticipated that about 90 people will object, claiming insufficient public consultation and a flawed questionnaire procedure....Their concerns are really about the value of their homes being adversely affected....and that the new units will attract “undesirables”....although the Community Council has insisted on a right of veto on who is a “local” for the scheme lettings, to ensure they are “genuine” locals. The local Community Council itself is keen to avoid the scheme being used as an “overspill for problem families” from nearby estates and towns...This is a real fear.” [Crucorney Community]

Other Points to Note –

The Use of ‘Open Days’ - “The [RHE] has been present at our meetings on several occasions, and an open day was also held at [the local] Hall, in the middle of July. Thorough work has certainly been done in this field with local people, especially those on low incomes, who have had an opportunity to demonstrate the need for houses and to draw this to the attention of the relevant authorities. We are in detailed discussion with [the RHE] and in correspondence with [the County] Council. “ [Dinas Mawddwy Community]

Early consultation with key stakeholders – “Earlier consultation with the community and landowners – the two most important active stakeholders – would make things happen “more smoothly”. Despite “calling experts in from the very start” - the Community Council had found it challenging... [Crucorney Community]

The critical role of Community Councils – “The [Community Council] has worked closely with the National Park Authority, the RHE and landowners. The Community Council’s role is critical to “making it happen” – it would not happen without its input.” [Crucorney Community]

Concerns about the behaviour of wealthy, and not-so-wealthy, incomers – “Incomers are more critical [of the proposals] than the established population: the value of their homes is an issue...and they fear poor behaviour. The onus is on the housing associations and local authorities to demonstrate that they are not losing control of people’s behaviour on estates elsewhere...” [Crucorney Community]

3. Views of Other Major Welsh Organisations

A total of 15 major housing and non-housing organisations were approached: 7 responded to the HIIRC request for comments on the RHE Service in Wales.

Consultees said :

Current Effectiveness / Importance / Strengths –

“The current arrangements are effective in that it provides an enabling body that never previously existed to assist the delivery of affordable housing appropriate for a particular rural community.” [WWHA]
“Strengths include:

• Rural enablers focussed on areas to ensure local knowledge gain.

• The communities have one individual to provide advice and coordinate actions and communications with private developers, housing associations and the local authority departments.

• A consistent approach within the area of responsibility.

• An educational tool for the private developers, housing associations, local authorities and the Assembly Government.

• Allows early involvement of the affordable housing partner.” [WWHA]

“At the local level, small developments including new houses, and use of the existing stock, effectively targeted, makes a difference – enabling families to stay in the locality, taking on work locally, supporting services, etc.” [Shelter]

“...the [RHE] scheme is effective and contributes to noting the need for housing in local communities in rural areas and then trying to meet those needs. Local research into housing need is important and including communities in the research – rather than forcing development on to them – is key. This can also raise awareness of housing need and homelessness, the type of housing needed, etc., locally - ... this is often a problem in rural areas. [Shelter]

“Discussion with locals extracts information about land availability - over and above the Land Availability Studies - which can be researched and released over time.” [GHA]

RHE Independence - “An independent element is important – it is important to work with local authorities to develop housing strategies and ....a level of independence adds credibility when discussing matters with a wide range of contributors and communities.” [Shelter]

RHE Capacity - “....there are not enough RHEs. The introduction of the Rural Housing Enabler (RHE) pilot in Monmouth and South Powys has been a welcome development and its expansion to three other areas is encouraging. The target needs to be an all Wales coverage for the service.” [CLA]

Weaknesses –

RHE Funding - “They [RHEs] need longer term funding to secure real results. A five year WAG funding programme would allow continuity and credibility in the land market.” [CLA]

“The experience of RHE’s to date confirms the difficulty of matching supply to need. The current orthodoxy that Affordable Housing provision has to be through Registered Social Landlords (RSL) has notably failed to deliver, and needs to be re-examined. Furthermore this model does not necessarily reflect the appropriate need as many of those in the essential service sector for example, such as police, teachers and nurses requiring housing near to their work, do not necessarily wish to go to an RSL for housing provision. They are often sufficiently ambitious to look for a solution to their housing needs elsewhere without reliance on the state. The current model is too reliant on Housing Associations (HAs) as hosts. This may be acceptable for administrative convenience (employment, etc) but it gives the perception of "ownership" by HA’s. This reduces the perception of independence by local communities and landowners. A budget for accommodation should be established specifically for locations in the private sector.” [CLA]
“Communities do not always work at the same pace: they can sometimes take months to agree to go forward with particular sites and may raise lots of issues as things emerge. It is unlikely – given the time lapses [post survey] that the RHE service will deliver housing to the [precise] need identified at survey time.” [GHA]

“Planners tend to be reliant on RHEs to do work the LPA should otherwise be doing itself, i.e. negotiating elements of affordable housing on market schemes. It also important for RHEs to be involved as objective consultees where all housing development is being proposed in rural areas, to avoid incidences of inappropriate development to the detriment of local communities, eg Dolau, Powys where a proposal to build 16 houses on a postage stamp was against the wishes of the local community and disproportionate in scale to local needs. There was no initial RHE involvement and the community was not being listened to by the planning authority. However the process at local level can be susceptible to inappropriate political influence. i.e. local councillors and vociferous opposition groups can get too much say at the wrong time in the planning process. WAG need to be aware of this and more robust in many of their actions. RHEs could provide more balanced objective advice in such circumstances.” [CLA]

“WAG are unrealistic about housing market values at a local level which means Homebuyer limits may be inadequate for prosperous areas where the AfHo need is great.” [CLA]

“Weaknesses include: [weak] ability to influence local authority/national park to implement policies.” [WWHA]

“The lack of clear guidance provided by the Assembly Government on restrictions of developing with social housing grant.” [WWHA]

**Opportunities / Aspirations / Future Development –**

“CCW is committed to ensuring sustainable development in Wales’ rural communities, and ensuring the integration of environmental, economic and social aims. Consistent with this principle, our main comment on the future of the [ RHE ] service is that environmental considerations should be integrated with social / cultural matters at the start of the process and not as something which is considered as an obstacle further into the process when a particular scheme is under consideration. By doing that, it should be possible to secure outcomes which are good for the environment and for social / economic progress in our countryside communities.” [CCW]

“Need to scope a Better RHE Service in relation to the Wales Spatial Plan and other high level policy : need to improve coverage across Wales and the sensible stages and structure for doing that… and to take WAG officials’ informal guidance re links to other Welsh initiatives.” [C&R]

“Extending the [RHE] service to other areas, eg. Ceredigion…” [Shelter]

“Ensure that RHEs and their work become part of broader strategic work of WAG and local authorities re providing housing – [and] considering the environment, linguistic effects, etc. - to ensure the possible effects are taken into account. As LAs concentrate on their strategic [housing] role, the RHE’s work can help to ensure this within individual LA areas and also through collaboration across administrative and regional boundaries.” [Shelter]
“Ensure that authorities use the RHE’s local research and that any best practice re profiling, methodology, etc is used ... in other areas.” [Shelter]

“Look at longer-term funding perhaps ... [and] raising awareness of the plans – intentions, scope, and the type of work done.” [Shelter]

“New RHEs could be encouraged to work closely with the ‘Communities First’ schemes as a priority to good effect” - comment from an HA Chief Executive. [MWHA]

“ ...self build schemes, Community Land Trusts...more work on things like these may be something for the future.... [and] buying back houses sold [ under the Right to Buy] could in some circumstances make a contribution to meeting local needs in some localities... [and] converting buildings eg farm buildings for affordable housing...[plus] a handbook on best practice.” [Shelter]

“RHE’s should be sufficiently funded and trained to provide the enablement and communication to deliver objective Affordable Housing policy requirements at local level.” [CLA]

“The aim must be for RHE’s to be the trusted mediators and honest brokers for negotiation for sites with landowners. Government caution and orthodoxy have led to a failure to understand land markets, and hence poor returns for affordable housing. The recent revision of TAN 2 and its failure to acknowledge the case for ‘cross-subsidy’ of rural exception sites is a missed opportunity. This will result in a continued reluctance of landowners to come forward and so diminish the potential to address the problem. It will mean greater costs for provision of those affordable sites which do come forward.” [CLA]

“A template S106 to be created with standard clauses.” [WWHA]

“Service should be expanded – RHEs spread too thinly across large geographical areas.” [WWHA]

“Greater marketing to introduce the aims of the service to communities, resulting in the community contacting the RHE with considered views on addressing the issues of appropriate affordable housing, rather than the RHE always making the first contact.” [WWHA]

“Addressing issues such as NIMBYism through education.” [WWHA]

“The private housing market seeing the RHE as a resource with a complimentary agenda.” [WWHA]

“The local authorities taking a strategic and corporate approach when dealing with rural development opportunities, ensuring a high level of communication between departments and across into the national parks planning departments.” [WWHA]

“Legislation changes as necessary.” [WWHA]

“A structured approach to ensure that social housing grant could be accessed to improve financial viability.” [WWHA]

“Opportunities include:
   • Greater clarity for all concerned.
   • Joined-up working between local authority and national park departments.
• Successes breeding success.
• Greater flexibility and opportunity for innovation in terms of delivery.
• A better knowledge of local housing market requirements.” [WWHA]

“Ideas for developing the service over the next 5 years:
• create a standard S106 / determine definitions for affordability and eligibility
• provide training into the process and restrictions of developing within a WAG
• social housing grant regime
• maintain and develop the RHAN/RHAG meetings
• training to all stakeholders should be reinforced
• have a programme for local housing needs assessment and consider the use of an assistant/consultant to free-up the RHE’s time
• acceptance that the RHEs are independent of both local authorities and funders
• greater marketing to communities, developers, land owners
• the rural housing enabler officers [to] have a communication network in place to ensure that they are consistent in delivering the service: policies and procedures to be created
• have formal meetings with land owner bodies
• the impact of Community Land Trusts is fully considered
• advertise successes at appropriate conferences, both within Wales and England
• establish a community support and information network to enable sharing of ideas and guidance at a community level.” [WWHA]

Threats –

Policy weakness - “Overall focus should be on building, ie plots. Currently policies are overly cautious and obsessed with process. [It] needs a revolution in which everyone is engaged. There is a clear consensus of the need to take a proactive approach to analysing local housing need at individual village level rather than on a regional basis. We must identify the minimum housing provision to maintain the local infrastructure such as shops, post offices and schools. It is something all seem to agree on, but no-one dares instigate a solution, let alone experiment with exemplar projects. As we stated in our response to WAG consultation on TAN 1 & 2 “We hope that the WAG can be persuaded to rise to the challenge and adopt a distinctive policy on Rural Affordable Housing and Exception Sites, and introduce that spark of innovation whereby the opportunities for Affordable Housing are spoilt for choice rather than left as now, devoid of funding with no hope of delivery. The private sector is, we believe, broadly willing to continue in its traditional role, but lacks the encouragement to do so. The state fails to fulfil this role and the planning system currently remains too inflexible to enable delivery.” [CLA]

“Threats include:
• Lack of RHE resource.
• No joined-up approach by local authorities or national park departments.
• Lack of patience due to perceived delays in delivering dwellings.
• Communities not embracing [the RHE] service.” [WWHA]

Other Points to Note –

Unintentional side-impacts on other interests (eg nature and landscape conservation) –
“‘We had concerns about the RHE proposal for the Brecon [National Park] area ...” [CCW]
The need for a rural housing champion - “The EPC department of WAG needs to be more focused on rural housing issues. WAG deal with all Wales housing, but political priorities seem to be on urban Wales. In England there is a Commission for Rural Communities and the Affordable Rural Housing Commission. No such body exists in Wales.” [CLA]

Public expectations – “Survey evidence suggests 70% of people aspire to ownership but few can afford it...Cheaper housing for local people is what locals want...affordable social housing may be their best and only option, initially, even if its not their ideal. But some communities can be very anti rental housing.” [GHA]

The development process – “Most HAs prioritise urban sites. Rural sites are very difficult to find, and planners very demanding. Land availability studies are useful - but not all LAs welcome a search of their land assets registers. Generally LAs go for the ‘best receipt’ from land [they sell] and know they will get 20% affordable housing from a new development on a reasonable sized site but few or nil on very small sites. There is huge competition for brownfield sites. No cross subsidy is allowed from conventional to rural exception sites. Highway requirements evolve and sharpen as a proposal develops and that can have knock-on effects on the deliverability [of sites].” [GHA]

The social price of failure to provide affordable housing – “the end of the [local] school, fewer pubs, no Post Office, less pro-active communities, generally”. [GHA]

People’s reluctance to move even a few miles from their ‘cynefin’ - “They say ‘I’m not Penycraig, I’m Porth!’” [GHA]

4. Views of Local Authorities which do not yet have direct RHE experience

We approached the 8 Welsh Unitary County Councils with very extensive rural areas, not currently covered by RHEs. Of these, all 8 responded to the HIRC request for comments and/or discussion on the RHE Service in Wales.

Consultees said:

Current Effectiveness / Importance /Strengths –

“The benefits [of RHEs] are enormous.” (A view based on the individual’s previous experience of working with several RHEs in Lincolnshire.) [Flintshire CC]

“It would make sense to set up a network of RHEs covering the whole of rural Wales, with a quite large patch for each one. This would ensure that they are kept fully employed, as sometimes communities are not ready to engage. If an RHE has drawn a blank with some communities, they can move on to others where they can be more effective.” [Carmarthenshire CC]

“Wrexham has made little or no progress on affordable rural housing. An Enabler would be a significant help.” [Wrexham CC]

“We are conscious of the value of RHE’s and their valuable work in other authorities – particularly as this authority is a member of the Rural Housing Authority’s Network and is regularly in contact with them. We urgently require their assistance on the Affordable Housing ‘implementation’ front but have made unsuccessful bids via the SHMG process for Affordable Housing Facilitators in the past – those duties simply fall back on the staff currently operating in this field.” [Ceredigion CC]
“Officers have in recent months identified “capacity” to support this work [addressing rural affordability issues through a ‘team approach’] as an issue. However, this has not moved very far…it would seem that a rural housing enabler is the extra resource required.” [Isle of Anglesey CC]

“Absolutely convinced” [that an expansion of RHEs in Wales to cover Flintshire would be useful]: there is a need for “more joined up thinking” and “progress on housing strategy, affordable housing and rural issues [in the County.]” [Flintshire CC]

Weaknesses –

“Finance to pay for the posts will be the hardest issue. Experience so far has been that financial support is having to be patched together between different local authorities, national parks and housing associations, with a lot of last minute deals.” [Carmarthenshire CC]

Opportunities / Aspirations / Future Development –

“The Vale of Glamorgan is extensively a rural area and I would wish to see the Rural Housing Enabler Project expanded to include the Vale of Glamorgan.” [The Vale of Glamorgan Council]

“... having RHEs that cover more than 1 local authority area is going to be more sustainable long term. We will have to work out arrangements on an RHE’s work plan to ensure that the contributors are treated fairly. We will need to accept, however, that in some years an RHE will do more work in one than another, due to where the opportunities are. It will be down to us as local authorities to help RHEs so that there are places they can make a contribution in our areas.” [Carmarthenshire CC]

“Yes!” [the County could afford to contribute to an RHE scheme: they were preparing the 2007-2008 budget soon, and RHEs were... “a relatively small sum as part of a consortium” and the officer would be “very surprised if we could not afford to contribute to an RHE Service.”] [Flintshire CC]

“Building confidence is a long-term project, and so RHEs are unlikely to achieve quick results. They need to be seen as independent of housing associations and local authorities, as this will hinder the confidence-building process. However, they will of course need to work closely with both groups to get results.” [Carmarthenshire CC]

“...it is too early to have a full-time, Wales-wide support role, but this could be built in to the Job Descriptions of one or two existing RHEs, to ensure that mutual support / sharing of best practice happens.” [Carmarthenshire CC]

Threats –

‘Nimbyism’ - “We do not want social housing in our village [- a frequent refrain].” [Flintshire CC]

[Experience from other LAs with RHEs – in England - suggested that some elected members might feel that RHEs] “undermined the patronage powers of members on housing and planning issues.” [Flintshire CC]
Other Points to Note –

The work already being done by LAs on affordable housing through their Housing and Planning Teams (Anglesey as an example...) –

[The County Council] "made a 'step change' in their approach to affordable housing in parallel with work on their now stopped unitary Development Plan...[and]...used a 'team approach' rather than specifically retaining a rural housing enabler. The UDP process provided the opportunity to integrate work of Housing Strategy and Development Plan. In addition the Council adopted SPG on affordable housing in May 2004. Local housing need surveys have been completed in 11 communities. The recent Monitoring Report reports on progress over the two years"... and the Council is also "looking at their own land bank and bringing sites forward in Bodedern, Brynsiencyn and Llangefni" and “in January 2005 the county council also took the innovative step of inviting landowners to submit land that may be suitable as exception sites for affordable housing. This generated a reasonable interest and some sites have now come forward as planning applications. Evaluation of other private sites continues.” [Isle of Anglesey CC]

Holistic approach needed re supporting infrastructure – RHEs and associated officers needed to consider "infrastructure : accessing services and doctors, etc" and "these are issues which will ambush you later if you don't address them early." [Flintshire CC]

Very urban character and a different rural policy approach in a South Wales Valleys LA - “new housing developments in the countryside, outside of defined settlement boundaries are not generally permitted in terms of UDP policy [ in this authority. But]...this does not preclude 'enabling' initiatives being pursued in those settlements which fall within the 'rural' wards..... [ and ] the UDP....justifies Bridgend’s policy position (largely on the basis that the population is largely urban based and no part of the countryside is more than 4-5 miles from a main urban settlement). [ But: ] “Our approach excludes the consideration of ‘rural exception sites’ as a housing tool, which may be used as a policy option in other rural authorities in England and Wales.” [Bridgend CC]

Rural initiatives already unfolding in other directions - “Our Renewal Area (in a rural area), is currently undergoing the NRA process” [Neath and Port Talbot CC]

5. Views of the Organisations on Cross–Border (Wales/England) issues

All 9 English LAs with housing responsibilities, bordering onto Wales, were approached, and 4 responded to the HIRC request for comments on the ‘cross-border’ issues. We checked a couple of housing market strategy documents for Councils over the border, and found that the Oswestry HMS mentioned Wales to describe where it is but not in relation to cross-border housing issues. Oswestry is however planning to carry out a cross-border study, soon. The West Housing Market Area Partnership (Shropshire) says that affordable housing is a complex issues which needs to be studied more carefully in the light of the 3 Dragons report (the recent review of the RHE service in England), but does not mention Wales, and hardly mentions rural issues. Several other organisations - in Wales (including CLA-Wales, Shelter–Cymru, four County Councils, and a HA) - had views to offer on this matter. So, there were 9 respondees in all.
Consultees said:

**Points re Wales/England -**

“Cross Border Issues –

- Housing markets are defined by the wider ‘housing offer’, we recognise that District, County or even Country boundaries play little part in their definition.
- A buoyant housing market in Chester has undoubtedly had an effect on affordability within surrounding areas, aided by increased mobility.
- Chester considers a significant relationship exists in the context of housing markets for the West Cheshire/North East Wales (Chester, Ellesmere Port, Wrexham, Flintshire, Denbighshire) and is keen to gain a better understanding of this.
- Cross boarder issues should be considered at a strategic level to consider the relationship between housing markets at various levels, for example Liverpool City Region, West Cheshire/North East Wales. The RHE service should focus on local delivery issues, with an awareness of the strategic context.”

[Chester City]

“We have discussed cross border housing with our Monmouthshire colleagues.”

[Forest of Dean DC]

“...when working in partnership across boundaries eg different ways of working, different priorities......it is important to set the foundations at the beginning....There is more emphasis now on cross-boundary working (and this will increase), with authorities working in consortia with housing associations, for instance, and this could effect RHE work and how partners regard the provision of affordable housing.”

[Shelter]

“This can be difficult in some cases. For example - Cusop in Powys. Hay on Wye is in the Brecon Beacons National Park Planning Authority, and Powys Housing Authority. The most obvious sites for Affordable Housing are just across the border in Herefordshire. There seems a lack of coordination on planning and funding. It is an impossible situation which is difficult for an RHE to resolve.”

[CLA]

“ RHEs need to be aware of their local/ sub regional/ regional/ cross border housing markets ( which they are).”

[Powys CC]

“...the 4 RHEs are in contact with the RHEs in England ( at least in the border areas) and are learning about best practice in England. England already has an RHE Network - so if a Welsh Network is established it will be essential for the cross—border connection to continue ( in the short-medium term) to ensure sharing of best practice ( and learning from poor practice also).”

[Gwynedd CC]

“We need to formalise a process/model for Wales to include training - but the RHE’s should continue to work closely with their English counterparts.”

[Monmouthshire CC]

“Re cross-border working... Housing markets and local connection issues are no respectors of “national” boundaries ... [ and it is important not to ] lose sight of this point.”

[Powys CC]
Across boundaries within Wales -

“Lessons should be learned from existing and past experiences in relation to communication blockages in relation to local authorities and national parks.” [WWHA]

“Clarity is required from the Assembly Government in terms of delivering affordable housing through the use of social housing grant.” [WWHA]

“Cross border issues: Need for RHE’s to work cross border to reflect housing markets / developer areas etc. Wider cross border working would need to be managed effectively to ensure that the local issues do not become lost. Desire to deliver schemes at a local level may deter cross boundary working. Cross border working may increase resources available to appoint/continue the appointment of RHE’s but would this end up with a too many chiefs and not enough Indians situation - RHE pulled in too many directions.” [Pembrokeshire CC]

6. Views on dealing with rural housing issues in areas where there are related linguistic and cultural sensitivities

We invited views from all the organisations in Wales on the key points learned - re addressing rural housing / rural affordability and related issues in areas where cultural and linguistic sensitivities also need to be taken into account. 10 expressed a view.

Consultees said:

Key Points Learned –

“We cannot discriminate in favour of housing applicants on the basis of language – but by giving a priority to housing ‘local’ people we do help to retain and support the Welsh language and culture in rural Wales.” [Cym. Tai Clwyd]

“Brondanw Estate is a Charitable Organisation in North Wales which is committed to providing affordable housing to local and where possible Welsh speaking people. This has resulted in a thriving community which works well in that area. This also provides an example of how a non housing association owner is successfully providing affordable housing within Wales.” [CLA]

“Key points learned... –

- the importance of the community organisation playing a key role within the process in terms of grasping ownership and confirming the benefits of any development to the local residents
- the importance of a robust housing needs survey and the ability to identify hidden need
- transparency in activities
- the support of the local authority and planning department
- the early involvement of the affordable housing partner.” [WWHA]

Challenges –

“We recognise that there has been a reduction in the number of Welsh speakers in the area between the Census of 1991 and 2001 and that this will adversely impact upon the culture of the rural areas over time. The planning policy of the [County in
North Wales] Council states that it is necessary to have regard to the Welsh language and culture when considering planning applications but we see little sign of this as a Council when applications come before us.” [Llansannan Community]

“Only rarely is the Welsh language considered a factor to be assessed in the field of planning and housing, in practice. Assessment of the effect of development on the Welsh language should be a key part of the local needs research – especially in the rural areas in which the RHEs work.” [Shelter]

“ It is important to have clearer guidelines in TAN 20 as to how to assess linguistic impact ... as the Technical Note (planners say) is difficult to implement in practice: for example, as to when the Welsh language may be used as a reason to refuse planning permission. Often, this confusion is used as a reason for not including [in development plans] a planning policy on language issues.” [Shelter]

Opportunities / Aspirations / Future Development –

“Cultural and language issues are particularly important in certain villages and areas in Wales. This issue must to be thoroughly investigated when reports are being prepared for local needs.” [CLA]

“Issues of culture and linguistics: It is imperative that the findings of recent collaborative research [ on ‘Planning and the Welsh Language’ ] are taken forwards and that clear guidance is forthcoming to support local planning authorities in taking a stance and improving the effectiveness of establishing linguistic impact through careful assessment as a material consideration within the planning system.” [SNPA]

Threats –

“The over production of unsuitable houses in small villages can cause ghetto type problems especially where there is a strong cultural and Welsh language influence.” [CLA]

“Building tiny houses in large numbers where people end up being imported from other areas into certain close knit communities can have disastrous effects. The RHE’s and private landowners can contribute greatly in this area.” [CLA]

“In Pembrokeshire the Welsh language is relevant for the north of the County. I think that the cultural issue for Pembrokeshire goes beyond the Welsh language however. It is about affordable housing being allowed to be occupied by those who are not considered ‘local’. To explain if the RHE proves a need for 10 houses and can put 5 on part of a site within a development limit and 5 on what is called an exceptions site, local communities understandably believe that it will be for local people. In practice TAN2 by WAG only allows the planning authority to put such controls on where a private developer is managing or selling the properties. If managed by a Housing Association then the priorities from the Housing Register have to be addressed. In an exceptions site situation there may be an opportunity to introduce controls but this is not encouraged.” [PCNPA].

“Local communities will become jaundiced if the work they carry out in helping with surveys results in properties being built which are not housing their local need. Housing Associations here are offering special lettings agreements to overcome these concerns but it is voluntary and this may change.” [PCNPA]
Other Points to Note –

Lower awareness and concern re Welsh language and culture issues in areas with a low % of Welsh speakers –

“This is a border area and little Welsh is spoken here....” [Crucorney Community Council.

“Due to the low incidence of Welsh speaking in our RHE area....we have not had any relevant experience.” [Powys CC]

Dealing with different interest groups and NIMBYism -“Key points learned in trying to address rural housing /affordability in areas where [there are] cultural / linguistic sensitivities : ......... Main issues are the classics of insufficient land, support in principle for affordable housing - but this often overshadowed when it comes to scheme delivery in an area by NIMBY's. Also communities keen on the need to keep any affordable housing provision for "local" people - needed to take this into consideration when developing SPG on Affordable Housing.” [Pembrokeshire CC]

Protecting cultural landscapes – “...the [ National Park ] Authority is keen to work to resolve issues of rural affordability. In the context of the Authority’s status as a protected landscape and recognising that it is likely that there will be continuing challenges in funding affordable housing it is important that the RHE mechanism continues and to ensure that such intervention is carefully directed to focus on current and well defined needs.” [SNPA]

7. Views of WAG officials and advisors

WAG officials and advisors were very helpful: 12 provided background data, guidance, contacts, and informal views on the RHE Service and related issues. We made it clear that the any comments we might quote would not be attributed to individual civil servants.

Consultees said:

Current Effectiveness / Importance /Strengths –

“The view is - RHEs work!”

RHEs’ were clearly able to make progress by stressing to local communities that they were discussing “...housing for your community”, and that helped to “...find new sites.” Development lead times were “an issue” but it was recognised that RHEs needed “an element of independence”.

“RHE work more on planning issues, locally....”

“Important to look at the wide range of powers currently available to the LAs on affordable housing ( the Toolkit ): they are sufficient, but not fully used and fully tested.”

“If [powers are] found to be wanting, WAG would use its new powers [ from next May 2007] to change them, in response to a clear-cut case [ re any failure in the current powers] being put ....”
“LAs ask for more powers but have not presented convincing evidence yet that they are needed.”

Weaknesses –

“Not likely that there will be any major increase in funding for affordability issues...”

“...[ there is ] a perception that local councillors sometimes block schemes because of local reactions to affordable / social / rented housing ....”

“.... we have found the interface between the RHE’s and Planning Departments to be patchy - the links with Housing Departments appear to be much stronger. We have been told of instances where the RHE and Housing Department had discussion about potential rural exception sites without recourse to their planning colleagues. Unfortunately this has resulted in abortive work when planning colleagues informed them of policy and technical constraints. It would be useful if the RHE’s could be encouraged to work more closely with the planners on site related issues.”

Not much evidence as yet of “substantial progress made” by RHE/s in Wales.

Opportunities / Aspirations / Future Development –

“The Minister is very focussed on affordability (both urban and rural) and sees it as a priority for local authorities and housing providers...hence the Toolkit, the TAN 2, MIPPS, recently..... and more to come, on affordability...”

“ The Minister is very much ‘into’ RHE work and often mentions it in the Assembly.”

“...confident that there would be support [ from WAG, for an expanded RHE service with a central lead/support unit ] – so long as the intentions are clear, the likely achievements clear, there is buy-in from the LAs – politically, in principle, and in terms of funding, financially.”

“WAG is in favour of ‘collaborative working’ covering many local authority / administrative areas... and proposals should be presented in those terms”

“Vital to get LA buy-in and political support for RHE work, across LA boundaries....In South Wales: the South East Housing Forum works collaboratively - with WAG funding – and is getting political commitment to ‘working together’ ”...

“If the LAs are supportive, WAG would probably support - offering a ‘bit of help’ to set up an enhanced RHE service...”

If presenting a case for a National RHE Network, two important elements to cover would be its “ ... independence, and its fitness for purpose - to deliver.” Any bid for resource to create a larger national network of RHEs would need to be “evidence based....with demonstration of achievements to date....and signs of positive beneficial results...and effectiveness”.

“We would like to see more ‘regional working’ generally...”

“Restrictions can be placed on new housing...a lot of scope there still to be used [ re long term residency pre-qualification requirements for affordable housing schemes.]“
“[Scope for] developing the role of RHEs [re the planning process]:

- contributing to preparing (and subsequently monitoring) the evidence base to support policies to deliver affordable housing, in particular by contributing to housing needs assessments at ward or village level and to defining local affordability (as part of LHMA process);
- contributing to development plan preparation, particularly regarding strategies for implementing affordable housing schemes, including on rural exception sites;
- identifying potential sites for affordable housing (including rural exception sites) and checking their suitability with the relevant planning authority;
- involvement in setting affordable housing targets (especially site specific targets).”

Threats –

“First –time buyer initiatives are the first-choice option...and likely to be the Ministerial priority: such schemes do not necessarily require lots of subsidy.”

Other Points to Note –

S106 agreements – “...are rarely used in Wales” / “under-used in Wales”. The Affordable Housing Toolkit’s suggested spreadsheet approach to estimating the affordable housing element to be negotiated – re market housing “should help”.

Local authority planning discretion – allowing many houses to be built in the open countryside (including self-build and homesteading schemes) contrary to the adopted planning policy “encourages high ‘hope values’”... “[but such units] can be restricted to ‘locals’.”

Local authority housing grant discretion – the County Councils have the discretion to release a larger proportion of the available Social Housing Grant monies “for low-cost housing initiatives.”

Research in train – on housing markets, homelessness, and low cost housing – would inform future urban and rural measures and funding priorities. “Recent WAG research on social housing markets is ‘key’.”

Capacity issues – capacity in LA housing and planning units – “measures in train” to develop it were (i) “structure” - using Local Housing Market Assessments and producing Local Housing Strategies, (ii) training - the Chartered Institute of Housing’s ‘Fit for Purpose’ training programme, and (iii) networking - the Local Housing Strategy Network – recently established, and WAG serviced at the moment.

LA Statutory Plans – the regime in Wales is changing. In future, 4 ‘statutory plans’ only would be required of LAs – the umbrella ‘Community Plan’, which would need to cover housing issues “strategically and soundly”; and 3 others (the Local Development Plan, the Children’s Plan, and the Health and Well-Being Plan).

Welsh language issues - The Welsh language was “… a big issue in every respect…for the whole of Wales”. There is also full awareness of the cultural / linguistic sensitivities peculiar to Wales, which must always be factored in to planning new housing development in rural Wales. [Officials pointed to the recent Ministerial statement (cf. WAG, MIPPS, June, 2006) - the TAN on Affordable Housing (2006) and the Affordable
Housing Toolkit (cf. WAG, June, 2006) all followed from that, and should be read in the overall context of the Wales Spatial Plan (2004), and planning policy guidance which identified the Welsh language as a factor to be taken into consideration.

Linguistic and ‘local residency’ tests re planning and housing – some Welsh LAs had looked at that – but had not pursued it, for various reasons. “Difficult to see what would work... other than [ the Irish method or ] ...a policy to restrict ... future new building to housing for locals, closely defined”.

8. Views from the Current RHEs

A few other points – not made by others – but made by the 4 existing RHEs. We have decided not to attribute these comments to individual RHEs.

Consultees said:

Essence : the most important part of the RHE job in order to make progress on rural affordable housing ? – “...working with the local communities.”

Other strengths include - “ Supporting the language and culture of rural areas” ; “empowering communities” ; “… giving the rural communities a priority” ; “introducing best practice”; and “facilitating communication between communities and the relevant statutory departments.”

On focus - “There are no firm targets for delivering affordable homes...the emphasis is on informing higher level plans and programmes especially the (Local) Housing Plan and HSG programme collaboration.”

Need for a more strategic approach / overview -- “ Is there a need for a co-ordinating RHE?”...“Widening the work of the (national) steering group for the RHE project in Wales?”...” The steering group to become more strategic?”

On coverage of Wales – “...extend the areas covered by the project – employ more RHEs in Wales – extend the project to every local authority in Wales.”

Short term focus – “ ‘bricks and mortar’ targets are not practical for a three year [RHE] project [ contract] ”. “3 years is insufficient to measure the success and worth of [ an RHE] project.”

The importance of ‘independence’ for RHEs – “[ there is a ] lack of trust of county councils, developers, landowners, etc. generally within communities”.....and ... “ an RHE can look at a wider range of issues which affect the local community , i.e. not just housing – and ask – is the community viable?”

Getting an accurate and agreed idea of need can be challenging - (i) one RHE reported some locals would fill but refuse to sign ‘needs’ forms, and others would submit them speculatively with no real intention of follow-up, (ii) another saw evidence of growing tension between locals and incomers in areas where the use of the Welsh language was coming under pressure, and (iii) another saw a reluctance - because of general high prosperity in an area - to recognise that there were many people in need of social housing – including unemployed people of working age (20-40 years old).

Defining ‘local’ – “ RHEs can explain the framework – the locals’ own value judgements can inform Section 106 Agreements, quite powerfully.”
Dealing with local authority internal differences of professional opinion – “RHEs can help to bridge the gap” within institutions as well as between them eg between forward planners, and development controllers, etc. with different takes on one project.

Finding new sites – armed simply with “a map of the settlements and a set of pins” locals invited to identify suitable sites often reveal “… a lot of unanimity and shared local knowledge”. “County farms and landowners with land alongside villages” and “local authority land” were the best bets – but the local authority sometimes needs to get the best price for land (“best value”) and “[LA] Treasurers’ need to raise money” for a Council was sometimes an issue.

Tight village boundaries (in local plans) – some villages have “no or very little land allocated by planners for new market housing – on the back of which S106A affordable units could be harvested. Infill plots in such villages tend to be expensive, also.”

‘Hope value’ – the difference between agricultural land value and the value of land with planning permission for new housing is so massive that “some landowners hang on to land for the long term (hope) value”, “others will give up a nibble now for social purposes”, “others need to be convinced that ‘rural exception housing’ is all they will get by way of increased value - money.”

Process - “60% of the time” goes on “progress-chasing”. One RHE’s process is linear - to (i) use spread-sheet to track initial contacts, (ii) create a “local housing group” of anyone who will help, (iii) conduct a survey, (iv) identify sites, and then (v) ensure planning applications are made.

Houses on sites – the RHEs are confident that there will be a lot of “tangible results soon” - directly attributable to RHE input.

Every Community is different and each prospective development site is different - progress in one RHE’s area re identifying sites for development, could be summarised briefly as : (Comm 1) good site/owner willing to sell/ ecologist’s report awaited; (Comm 2) landowner of the most suitable site not keen / Community Council to be asked to approach him; (Comm 3) site valued/planners’ views known/feasibility study now awaited; (Comm 4) Community Council want to see how many affordable units will come of an earlier planning permission before thinking about other sites; (Comm 5) foul sewerage infrastructure capacity is a big constraint and issue in the area making it difficult to find a site – so the local MP to be asked to approach Welsh Water; (Comm 6) various sites – with landowners willing to sell - still under discussion with Community Council, and LPA feedback on their development potential also awaited; (Comm 7) one landowner to be approached shortly by the RHE, other sites have problems re peripherality and access issues; (Comm 8) feedback awaited on a County-owned site, and landowners of other also to be contacted shortly; and, (Comm 9) housing needs survey completed, findings to be discussed with Community Council, shortly.

Lack of specialist advice - The development process is “very slow” and there is no source of specialist advise available on “speeding the process” to get sites developed...

Grant–aid availability is not a problem - “lack of grant-aid is not the problem – consortia can overcome that…..WAG money is there - but sometimes not spent.”
Lack of training - “none” provided to date for the RHEs. “Lack of [personal] development in the post (CPD)”.

Rural regeneration – a wider ‘rural regeneration’ approach “could be applied in areas where institutions close and employment disappears – especially in mid Wales.”

Community Councils not used to inputting into such studies – “In England, the parish councils are used to contributing to “village plans” and are part of a process which considers development and future plans for the community as a whole”.
Annex E: A Definition of Rural Areas (in Wales)

A definition of rural areas

The new basis for rural – urban classifications is ‘settlement-based’ as opposed to being based on socio-economic characteristics – the latter was seen as being unsuitable for the purposes of statistical comparisons.

Each square hectare in Wales (and England) is scored on two measurements –

- settlement form (ie whether they are dispersed dwellings, hamlet, village, small town, urban fringe and urban (>10k population), and
- context (the population density is calculated at a range of 10km, 20km and 30 km – if this density is in the lowest 20% for all Wales and England at all three scales then the hectare grid square is said to be in the ‘sparsest’ context, otherwise it is in the ‘less sparse’ context).

On that basis the populations of Wales and England are distributed (according to 2001 Census) in the following way:

Population shares by settlement type – Super Output Area level 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlement Form</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Wales</th>
<th>England</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total persons (000s)</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>2,903</td>
<td>49,139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Towns</td>
<td>Less sparse</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>80.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sparse</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Towns etc</td>
<td>Less sparse</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sparse</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village and Dispersed</td>
<td>Less sparse</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sparse</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The differences in the percentage of people living outside large towns is very marked (35% in Wales compared to 19% in England); but also a considerably greater proportion of the Welsh population live in sparsely populated areas (13% compared to 1% in England). However, although the areas are statistically consistent, they do not necessarily accord with commonly recognized neighbourhoods.

The classification is a statistical tool, designed to provide a framework for analysis and reporting of geographical statistical information on people or households. It can be used to link into census data, for example on age and occupation (but not key worker status), or even into claimed knowledge of the Welsh language (although there are problems with self-reporting of such information on which census respondents may feel they ought to give an affirmative answer).

However the classification is not necessarily an appropriate tool with which to describe rural housing conditions, let alone where to place rural housing enablers. It has no statutory or regulatory force and is to be used mainly for understanding socio-economic issues affecting people living in smaller populated places (rural) as opposed to bigger populated places (urban). Although it can consider land use for residential purposes, based on existing patterns, it would not be able to identify areas required for
rural housing, or suitable for it. It is primarily a tool used for broad statistical comparisons and deals less well with local circumstances:

“...the classification does not consider the “look” or “feel” of a locality. It is simply an objective measure of the settlement pattern and context. This can lead to local anomalies where the classification does not agree with what local residents think about their area”.

On this basis the selection of areas in which to place rural housing enablers should follow other considerations, for example those that have already been designated as such for political, administrative, or land use planning purposes.

Nevertheless the classification may help with this process by being used to give statistical profiles of different parts of Wales. The fact that it is linked to standard statistical geographies means that the classification can be used with a wide range of National Statistics data sources.

i Rural and Urban Area Classification 2004 - An Introductory Guide
The Countryside Agency; Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister; Office for National Statistics; Welsh Assembly Government.
Annex F: Map of Rural Areas and Towns in Wales

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Settlements
Local Authorities
Annex G: Planning and the Welsh Language: Study

‘Planning and the Welsh Language: the Way Ahead’

(Informed by a Study awarded to the Bartlett School of Planning (UCL) led by Dr Mark Tewdwr-Jones)

A Consortium of organisations including local authorities (LAs), the Welsh Language Board (WLB), the Home Builders Federation (HBF), and the WAG collectively appraised planning policy in relation to the Welsh language, which is spoken by 582,400 people within Wales (21% of the population), and by the majority of the local population in Gwynedd, Anglesey and West Wales. (This contrasts with 50% of the population recorded as being able to speak Welsh in 1901.)

It refers to Circular 53/88 on the Welsh language (which first established it as a ‘material consideration’ for planning purposes), Planning Policy Wales (2002), Technical Advice Note (Wales) 20, WAG’s ‘Dyfodol Dwieithog / A Bilingual Future’ (2002) and its ‘Iaith Pawb / A National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales’ (2003) and the targets set therein, which include (inter alia) a target of arresting the “decline in the number of communities where Welsh is spoken by over 70% of the population” and increasing “the percentage of people in Wales able to speak Welsh” by “five percentage points” up from the 2001 Census figure, by 2011.

The Report explains that the Study aimed to “produce a linguistic impact methodology which would enable LPAs to produce meaningful and practical policies to protect and promote the use of the Welsh language and to enable them to assess the implications of development plan policies and planning applications on the well being of the language and cultural character of communities.”

The UCL consultants suggested a two-stage Language Impact Assessment process to be applied to communities exceeding a proposed threshold of 30% of Welsh speakers - the latter set at a level which ensured continuity and consistency of approach over a single large geographical area (taking in Anglesey, Gwynedd, most of Conwy, much of Denbighshire, the northern edge of Powys, Ceredigion, northern Pembrokeshire, much of Carmarthenshire and small parts of other areas adjoining).
Annex I : A New ‘National RHE Network’ – Diagram

Biennial RHE Progress Conference

WAG and other Welsh Strategies

National Affordable Housing Action Plan (WAG/WLGA/WFHA)

National RHE Network CHAIR / CHAMPION
National RHE BOARD

National RHE Network DIRECTOR
Central Unit

Regeneration Advisor ————> Specialist / Voluntary Bodies ————>

WSP Area Fora (6)

Welsh LAs/HAs & LHSs

The Welsh RHEs
(Reporting to Local RHE Steering Groups)

Community Councils

All the Special Interest Groups
### Annex J: Costing Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COSTING FRAMEWORK</th>
<th>+ RHE Admin Supp ESTIMATED</th>
<th>- RHE Admin Supp ALTERNATIVE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Option 1</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The 4 RHEs @ c. £50K</td>
<td>c. £200,000</td>
<td>c. £200,000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Option 2 – as for Option 1 plus</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) 5 year min funding preferably...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) p/t admin (4) to Existing RHEs</td>
<td>24,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£240,000</td>
<td>£200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Option 3 – as for Option 2 plus</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) 2 central staff – 1 at £80 incl. on costs, and 1 @ £40k incl. on costs</td>
<td>120,000</td>
<td>120,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iv) 6 new RHEs (10 then in total) @ £50K [£30K sal + £20K oncosts]</td>
<td>300,000</td>
<td>300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(v) admin to (6) New RHEs</td>
<td>36,000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(vi) miscellaneous expenses</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£710,000</td>
<td>£650,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Option 4 – as for Option 3 plus</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(vii) 3 new RHEs (13 then in total - c. 2 per WSP Area of Wales)</td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(viii) admin to (3) new RHEs</td>
<td>18,000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ix) Chair /Champion (Part-time)</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(x) new Board (expenses only)</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£908,000</td>
<td>£830,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Option 5A – as for Option 4 plus</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(xi) regeneration advisor (secondee/consultant)</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£938,000</td>
<td>£860,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Option 5B – as for Option 5A plus</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(xii) up to 9 (max) new RHEs (max 22 in total = 1 per County)</td>
<td>450,000</td>
<td>450,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(xiii) admin to (9) new RHEs</td>
<td>54,000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(xiv) a paid Monitoring Board</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£1,482,000</td>
<td>£1,350,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex K : Key Contacts List for this Study

**MEMBERS OF THE STEERING GROUP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Contact Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd</td>
<td>John Glyn Jones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cymdeithas Tai Eryri</td>
<td>Walis George</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwerin Housing Association</td>
<td>Alan Sinclair (Chair)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pembrokeshire Housing Association</td>
<td>Graham Holmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh Assoc. of National Parks Authorities</td>
<td>Eric Bowles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh Local Government Association</td>
<td>Aled Evans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh Federation of Housing Associations</td>
<td>Amanda Oliver</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**THE EXISTING ‘RHEs’ IN WALES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Contact Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conwy / Denbighshire</td>
<td>Helen Cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwynedd (Dwyfor / Meirionnydd)</td>
<td>Arfon Hughes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Monmouthshire/South Powys</td>
<td>Rhidian Jones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pembrokeshire</td>
<td>Matthew Owens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**OTHER MAJOR HOUSING ORGANISATION CONTACTS IN WALES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Contact Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd</td>
<td>Bryn Davies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwerin Housing Association</td>
<td>John Millard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Wales Housing Association</td>
<td>Shane Perkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelter Wales</td>
<td>John Pritchard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales and the West Housing Association</td>
<td>Peter Jenkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh Federation of Housing Associations</td>
<td>Nick Bennett</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WELSH UNITARIES / NPAs ALREADY INVOLVED IN ‘RHE’ WORK IN WALES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Contact Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brecon Beacons National Park</td>
<td>Eric Bowles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conway County Council</td>
<td>S. Yates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire County Council</td>
<td>Paul Quirk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwynedd County Council</td>
<td>Simon Kaye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouthshire County Council</td>
<td>Aled Evans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys County Council</td>
<td>Ian Fraser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pembrokeshire Coast National Park</td>
<td>Martina Dunne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pembrokeshire County Council</td>
<td>Lyn Hambridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys County Council</td>
<td>David Thomlinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowdonia National Park</td>
<td>Cath Ransom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WELSH LAs NOT YET INVOLVED IN ‘RHE’ WORK**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Contact Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bridgend County Borough Council</td>
<td>Huw Owen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmarthenshire County Council</td>
<td>Mathew Miller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceredigion County Council</td>
<td>Nigel Rees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire County Council</td>
<td>Richard Birchett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isle of Anglesey County Council</td>
<td>Meirion Davies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neath and Port Talbot CB Council</td>
<td>Neil Davies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wrexham County Council  Malcolm Phillips  
Vale of Glamorgan County Council  James Cawley  

ENGLISH BORDER LAs

Chester City Council  Helen White  
Forest of Dean District Council  Malcolm Vine  
Oswestry District Council  Brighid Carey  
South Shropshire  Jake Berriman  

OTHER MAJOR WELSH CONSULTEES

Country Landowners Association (Wales)  Julian Salmon  
Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)  Keith Davies  
Royal Town Planning Institute - Cymru  Owain Wyn  

OTHER MAJOR ENGLISH CONSULTEES

Business in the Community (BITC)  Emily Trevorrow  
Commission for Rural Communities  Margaret Clark  
Kirstine Riding  
DEFRA (Rural Communities Division)  Stephen Cane  
Joseph Rowntree Trust  Lord Best  
Lincolnshire RHE  Jessica Thomas  
Peak District National Park  Di Walmsley  
Shrewsbury and Atcham DC  Andy Goldsmith  
South East Rural Community Councils  Jacinta Thornley  
University of Newcastle—on-Tyne  Prof. Mark Shukesmith  
West Dorset RHE  Nick Ward  

OTHER ‘INTERNATIONAL’ CONSULTEES

Foncière Logemont  Gilles Horenfeld  
Habitat et Développement  Jeanne Fournier  
Tighean Innse Gall  Sean F.Ó'Drisceoil  

WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS / ADVISORS

Ministerial Advisor  John Bader  
Officials ( Social Justice &Regeneration)  Dr. Emyr Roberts  
Chris Hobday  
Helen Warren  
Julian Anderson  
Paul Webb  
Dr. Mike Harmer  

Officials (Heads of the Valleys Team)  Esther Edwards  
Officials (Env’t, Planning and C’side)  Neil Hemmington  
Lesley Punter  
Officials (Statistical Unit)  Stuart Neil  

WELSH COMMUNITY COUNCILS WITH ‘RHE’ EXPERIENCE

Crucorney Community Council  Mr. S. Cooper  
Dinas Mawddwy Community Council  Mr. Huw T. Jones  
Dyffryn Ardudwy & Talybont Comm. Council  Mrs. Judith Hughes
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Council</th>
<th>Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hay Town Council</td>
<td>Cllr. June Cooper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llansannan Community Council</td>
<td>Mr. E. Jones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llangernyw Community Council</td>
<td>Mrs. E. Owen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosemarket Community Council</td>
<td>Mr. Horton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talgarth Community Council</td>
<td>Cllr. Bob Martin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trawsfynydd Community Council</td>
<td>Mrs. Karen Hughes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tremeirchion Community Council</td>
<td>Mrs. A Davies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vale of Grwyney Community Council</td>
<td>Mr. Roger Austin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex L : Bibliography


Frank Knight (2006) Planning-gain Supplement Audit – Final Report (Prepared on behalf of the BFH, the CBI, the HBF, and the RICS).


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WAG (2006) The Affordable Housing Toolkit. WAG.


Working for Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants on this Contract were –

**LEAD:**

**EIRA HUGHES DipLA, MCD, MRTP, MLI** (Director, Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants) is also an Enabler for the Transform South Yorkshire HMR Pathfinder Scheme, and a SOLACE Enterprises Associate. She was previously Executive Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhood Services for an English Unitary Council, with a focus on devising, master-planning and delivering major regeneration schemes and before that she was the Director of Planning, Environment and Regional Policy Co-ordination for the Government Office for the North West (of England). Previous to that she was Head of Conservation Policy and Advice and Chief Planner for the Countryside Council for Wales; and worked on housing and planning policy and practical regeneration schemes for Newport and Arfon Borough Councils, and Manchester City Council. Eira is professionally qualified as a town planner and a landscape architect.

**MAIN SUPPORT:**

**BARON ISHERWOOD BA (Econ), PhD** (Director, Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants) is currently advising the French Government on regeneration best practice in the UK. He was previously Director of Regeneration for the North West Development Agency, in England, with responsibility for many major regeneration programmes and initiatives; and before that he was Director of Strategy (and Regeneration) for the Government Office for the North West - where he managed very major (Single Regeneration Budget and EU) programmes. He has also been a Regional Controller for Housing, for GONW. He held a range of civil service posts in Whitehall on health, housing and environmental issues; and, also worked on agricultural economics for the international Food and Agriculture Organisation in Rome. Baron is an economist.

**ADDITIONAL ADVICE / ASSISTANCE :**

**DAVID BRIGHTMORE Dip.BAdmin, DipAD** (HIRC Associate) is the Former Chief Executive of the North Wales Housing Association, a Former Chair of Newydd HA, and the Former Chair of the Oriel Plas Glyn-y-Weddw Trust. Previous to that he worked for a number of public and private sector agencies on housing renewal, including Abbey National Building Society (as an inner-city housing co-ordinator), and as Head of Renewal Strategies in Newport Borough Council: and he also worked in a private sector architectural practice in South Wales. David is now principally an exhibiting artist.
Report, Photographs and Report Design by -
HUGHES-ISHERWOOD REGENERATION CONSULTANTS

Front Cover : Rural Powys, and outer edge of the small town of Montgomery.

Back Cover : New Rural Affordable Housing, Tyn Llan, Llandyrnog - part of a Wraysbury Homes Development involving Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd.

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eira_hughes@btinternet.com
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Baron.Isherwood@btinternet.com
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-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
A Study commissioned by -

Gwerin Housing Association
Pembrokeshire Housing Association
Cymdeithas Tai Eryri
Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd
Welsh Federation of Housing Associations

in partnership with the -
Welsh Local Government Association
Welsh Association of National Park Authorities

and grant-aided by the -
Welsh Assembly Government.

www.hughes-isherwood.com