

## **FAQ's for Winchfield:**

**What is a Rural Exception Site?** A Rural Exception Site is a site that sits outside the settlement boundary, which would not normally be given planning consent but may be considered where it provides affordable homes for local people. The sites are small developments of affordable housing in villages and can provide affordable homes for sale, shared ownership, and rent. The schemes are designed to meet local need and to enable people to remain living in an area where they may have grown up and have other family members. Some market housing may be permitted as part of a rural exception scheme where it would facilitate the provision of affordable accommodation to meet local needs.

Homes can only be brought forward on these sites if there is a proven local need for affordable housing. A legal planning agreement, also known as an S106 agreement, is put in place to ensure that the homes will remain so in perpetuity.

The S106 legal agreement limits who can live in the homes to local people. The criteria also apply when a new household moves into the property.

There is a national shortage of affordable homes available to rent and buy. With the huge gap between property prices and income, many young families have had to move away from the area as they are unable to afford to stay within their community. A rural exception site can provide homes for local people to live near their families and work.

**What is affordable housing?** Rural affordable housing is housing which is provided in rural parishes for local people who would not otherwise be able to find an affordable place to live locally through the general housing market. Affordable rented housing is usually owned by a Registered Housing Provider (Housing Association) and rented at a weekly rent that is below market rents. The housing is strictly for local people and the local connection criteria are specified in a legal agreement attached to the planning permission (called a Section 106 agreement (S106)). The agreement also ensures that all future lettings or shared ownership sales must meet the same local connection criteria as when the homes were first built.

**What are the benefits of affordable housing?** An affordable housing scheme can make a huge contribution to the parish. It not only meets the housing needs of local people, but it can help maintain the viability of services and amenities in the parish, such as the local school, a village shop and post office. It may also help maintain a mixed and diverse community and support informal social networks that are essential elements in small villages.

**How much and what type of housing will be built?** Information from the District Council and the village housing needs survey will indicate the amount and type of affordable housing that is required in each village. By asking local people for details of their income and housing preference, a proposal can be drawn up for each village

on the amount of affordable rented and shared ownership housing that is required to meet local needs.

### **What is a Housing Needs Survey?**

Housing Needs Surveys are anonymous questionnaires that are usually sent out to every household in the survey area within a parish. They provide information on the level of local housing need, in terms of size, type, tenure, housing cost and affordability.

A Housing Needs Survey allows us to understand the needs of local people and provides evidence to help us meet those needs. If a survey shows that there is a need for housing, the results can be used to help deliver new homes to meet that need.

**What will the rent levels be?** The properties would be let at a Social Rent or an Affordable Rent which are set in accordance with the Government's rent policy and the housing provider's rent policies. Affordable Rent homes are charged at a maximum of 80% of an equivalent home on the open market within the local area, and Social Rent homes are generally around 60% of an equivalent open market home. Whether an Affordable Rent or Social Rent is charged on a site will depend on several factors including available funding.

**How can we be sure they will go to local people?** It is outlined in the S106 agreement that any exception development must be for local people, and this is legally binding on the Housing Association and the local authority. People will have to meet the agreed local connection criteria to be nominated for a property, a list of neighbouring parishes are also put forward as reserves through a cascade process if no-one can be found with a strong connection to the main parish. The list of reserve parishes is agreed with the Parish Council.

**How will the homes remain for local people in the future?** The S106 agreement ensures that all future lettings or shared ownership sales must meet the same local connection criteria as when the homes were first built. Tenants will have the right to exchange their home with another social housing tenant, but only if the in-coming tenant meets the local connection criteria.

**What is meant by local connection?** The local connection criteria will be laid out in the S106 agreement.

Each Rural Exception Site scheme can have slightly different local connection criteria, but they all follow the general principles shown below.

- Applicant lives in the parish and has done so for xx years.
- Applicant works in the parish and has done so for xx years.
- Applicant has previously lived in the parish, and has close family members (e.g., mother/father/sibling/grown up child) who currently live in the parish and has done so for xx years.

- Applicant has a need to reside in the parish to provide/receive essential care or support to/from a family member who lives in the parish and has done so for xx years.

The required time that an applicant and/or family member must have lived within the parish as well as the list of accepted 'family members' will vary between each Rural Exception Site local connection criteria and a legally enforceable definition will be agreed between the Parish Council, Hart District Council and English Rural (the housing association who will deliver the homes).

**How does planning regulation differ between a Rural Exception Site (RES) and that for a standard housing development?** Rural exception sites are small areas of land adjacent to or outside a settlement boundary that would not otherwise get planning permission for housing. A landowner provides the land at significantly below market value and the sites would not get permission as wholly market housing sites. Rural Exception Sites should seek to address the affordable housing needs of local communities.

**Will this development lead to more housing being built in the village?** Due to the development being an “exception” site, it will not set any precedent for building outside of the development boundary. Should the Parish Council obtain a scheme which does not fully cater for the level of housing need in the village, they can apply for another Rural Exception Site scheme, but they will have to repeat the process (including evidence of housing need) from the beginning.

**Why are you proposing homes here?** The results of the 2021 Parish Housing Needs Survey carried out by the Rural Housing Enabler of Action Hampshire indicated there was a need for development of affordable homes for local people in the Parish. The results identified a need for housing from 9 local households with a need for 1, 2 and 3 bedroom homes. These homes will be for people who are:

- Unable to afford to rent or buy outright in the Parish; and
- Who have a strong local connection to the village.

These affordable homes will remain available for local people in perpetuity.

**How did you choose these sites?** Following the recognition of the local need, a “call for sites” was made to local landowners. The shortlist was compiled by a working group including members of the Parish Council, the Rural Housing Enabler, representatives from Hart District Council’s Housing Department and English Rural Housing Association.

On each of these sites, the landowner has confirmed the potential availability of their land for such a project.

**How will the affordable homes be paid for?** The full costs of the scheme will be met by English Rural Housing Association. Housing Associations are non-

profit organisations, which invest all their income into the business. There are no profits or dividends for shareholders.

New developments are primarily financed from a combination of capital reserves and commercial borrowing, often topped up with Government grant funding. Increasingly, Rural Exception Sites include a small proportion of market homes which provide a cross-subsidy to the affordable properties.

**What if there is no-one 'in need'? Do you bring in people from further away?**

If, in the future a vacancy occurs in one of the homes and no one from Winchfield Parish, meeting the qualifying connection is in need at that time, then applicants with similar connections to neighbouring Parishes will be considered. The names of the Parishes close to Winchfield will be agreed with the Parish Council and will be specified in the planning agreement. However, it is very rare that we have to look for applicants from outside the Parish in which a development has been built.

**What safeguards are there?** Before planning permission is granted, the housing association will enter into a legally enforceable planning agreement with the Local Authority to ensure that the affordable homes are allocated to local people and can never be sold on the open market.

The proposals are by definition an **exception** to development management planning policies and do not therefore set a precedent for the development of adjacent or adjoining land.

**Will tenants have a right to buy?** No. The statutory Right to Buy only applies to Council tenants or if your home used to be owned by the council, but they sold it to another landlord (like a housing association) while you were living in it you may have the Right to Buy. A similar, but less generous scheme, the Right to Acquire is available to Housing Association tenants, but not those in smaller designated rural settlements. The Parish has the designation of a smaller rural settlement and therefore tenants will not be able to buy or acquire their rented homes, thus preserving their affordable status for future generations of local people.

**What timescale are you working to?** Following this consultation and the next steps, one site will be selected. The detailed design of the development will commence and will include the undertaking of the many specialist surveys and reports to support a planning application. These will include, among many others, the full consideration of ecology, biodiversity, drainage, parking and sustainability.

**What is self-build and custom-build?** Self-build and custom housebuilding cover a wide spectrum. Generally, self-build is where individuals are involved in building or managing the construction of their home from beginning to end, whereas custom-build includes projects where individuals commission their home, making key design and layout decisions, but the home is built ready for occupation ('turnkey').

**Why are self-build/custom-build homes being included on the plans for this site?** A proportion of market homes can be delivered on Rural Exception Sites to help cross-subsidise the affordable properties.

The self-build/custom-build homes on these sites will allow us to deliver a wide choice of high-quality homes, widen opportunities for home ownership and create inclusive and mixed communities.

**How can I register for one of these homes?** English Rural is asking people, who have a local connection and need an affordable home, to register their interest by visiting their website at [englishrural.org.uk](https://englishrural.org.uk) where you can read more about what they do. If you prefer, you can also call 020 7820 7930 to request a form or speak to someone about registering.

Interested applicants looking for an affordable rented home will **also** need to register onto the Hart District Council housing register. You can complete a housing register application online on Hart's website. If you have any queries about registering, please call Hart's Housing team on **01252 774420**.

**Who are English Rural?** English Rural is a housing association and was formed in 1992 as a specialist provider of rural housing and now owns and manages around 1450 properties in 150 villages, mainly in the south of England. A non-profit organisation recognised and registered with the Social Housing Regulator, a non-departmental Government body.

<https://englishrural.org.uk>