

Rural Affordable Housing Case Study



Development:	Church Lane
Where:	Rainton, Harrogate, North Yorks
No. of units to be provided:	5
Tenure:	Rented: 3x2 bed houses New Build Homebuy: 2x2 bed houses

Background:

Back in 2002, Rainton Parish Council decided to conduct a Parish Plan and due to hugely inflated house prices and concerns about young people not being able to afford to stay in the village, one of the key areas for investigation was housing. A working group made up of parish councilors and parishioners was established and they undertook a housing survey in the parish, which identified 5 people to be in immediate housing need. The Parish Plan was adopted and published in 2003 and one of the stated objectives was a requirement for 10 affordable homes by 2013.

The parish council and the Borough Council's Development Officer met to look at ways in which affordable homes could be achieved, including through the rural exceptions policy. The concept of exception sites was attractive to the Parish Council as the housing would be for local parishioners and the parish council could have an in-put into the local connection criteria for the homes.

Five potential exception sites were identified and the Borough Council's Planning Department identified the site at Church Lane as offering the greatest potential for development and fortunately, the landowner was philanthropic and agreed to sell the site at the exception site land value (i.e. 5-10 times agricultural land values). The Rural Housing Trust carried out an independent housing survey, which complemented the Parish Plan survey and a development of 5 to 6 properties was recommended.

In December 2005, the Borough Council appointed a Rural Housing Enabler to speed up the delivery of rural sites and a housing association partner was allocated the Church Lane site. Apart from the length of time taken, things had been running pretty smoothly until the proposal for five affordable houses on the Church Lane site were presented to the public at an Annual Parish Meeting. There was fierce opposition from residents of Church Lane who claimed that they were not opposed to affordable housing but it was the wrong site. They cited the following reasons as grounds for objection - location of site unsuitable, road safety fears, drainage system at capacity, concerns over the validity of the housing surveys etc. The Parish Council recognised the importance of representing a silent majority over a noisy minority and continued to support the scheme.

After many consultation meetings with the Parish Council and objectors, a planning application was submitted by Accent in January 2007. The application received a large number of objections, including a petition presented by Church Lane objectors but the Parish Council maintained their support. Harrogate Borough Council's Planning Committee voted unanimously to approve the application and the Housing Corporation agreed to fund the development. After a long and difficult process, works are due to start on site in February 2008.