

CELG(4) Hsg 14

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the provision of affordable housing in Wales

Response from Mid Powys Rural Housing Enabler



Rural Housing Enabler
Galluogydd Tai Gwledig

Mrs Susie Abson

Swyddog Galluogi Tai Gwledig Canol Powys/ Mid Powys Rural Housing Enabler

PO Box 44

Ffordd Cambrian/ Cambrian Way

Aberhonddu/ Brecon

Powys; LD3 7HR

rhemidpowys@googlemail.com

07825 145453

INQUIRY INTO THE PROVISION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

This response is compiled on behalf of the 2 Rural Housing Enabler (RHEs) working across rural Powys enabling the delivery of affordable homes for identified local needs. The RHEs work independently with rural communities to deliver much needed affordable homes, by unlocking the barriers to delivery through partnership with the local community, local authority and affordable homes providers.

Powys RHEs relish the opportunity to provide evidence to the National Assembly to enhance and develop new opportunities to deliver affordable homes in rural communities in Wales, through innovation and joint working.

Through the RHEs experience, it is evident that the delivery of affordable homes can not solely rely on SHG as there is simply not enough available to deliver affordable homes to meet the massive demands across Wales. For example in Powys there is a predicted need for 1185 social rented and 811 intermediate homes in the next five year period. To deliver 1185 social rented properties this would require in the region of £69 million SHG for Powys (based on 58% grant on the value of a three person, two bedroom house in SHG band 3).

In Powys RSLs are delivering affordable homes through a small SHG program and via developing intermediate products such as intermediate rents and shared ownership/ equity products. Although intermediate products are very popular with communities they are still not affordable for all those in need. In addition to this due to legal

agreement to protect affordability (section 106) some intermediate products such as shared ownership can be difficult to finance privately due to the risk adverse nature of banks in the prevailing financial climate.

More local authorities are investigating the opportunity to effectively guarantee mortgages on affordable development and to the first time buyer – this should be effectively encouraged and supported.

Working at a community level it is clear that affordable homes delivery is greatly affected by the supply of available land. In Powys where HRA land is available there is a move to support affordable housing development, however this is not the case for all Local Authority owned land. As land price and availability is key to delivery of affordable homes the RHEs would welcome any moves to incentivise or force land owners to make land available for affordable homes developments. In a sparsely populated area like Powys you wouldn't expect land availability to be an issue; however it can be very difficult to encourage landowners to sell land to deliver affordable homes. We would like to see more initiative which give incentives such as planning gain in return for land to develop affordable homes explored.

Planning policy is locked into lengthy development plan process and does not allow for any flexibility when considering the needs of a community for affordable homes; which can change from the beginning to the end of a planning period. In Shropshire County Council an “enabling” approach has been adopted, where a local community has much greater say on what provision of homes will be in their community and the benefits from development are directly available to the community as a result of this. This acts as an incentive to encourage sustainable development which is supported and directed at a local level.

Local authorities and RSLs in Powys have a good working relationship and there are moves to further develop relationships with the private sector. Financial institutions increasingly work in isolation and need to be encouraged and possibly incentivised to provide more finance models which would unlock stalled housing developments and support affordable homes options.

CLTs and co-ops should be supported but only through partnership with RSL and affordable housing providers will these models succeed. RHEs in Wales offer support to CLTs aiming to deliver affordable homes. These initiatives can provide new opportunities to communities who may have been over looked in the past when affordable homes have been delivered. Providing these methods “hook-up” with established homes providers they can be a force to enable homes delivery in challenging circumstances. RHEs in Powys welcome the opportunity to work with co-operative ventures to deliver affordable homes for rural communities and are keen to see more support and innovative finance solutions be developed to support these initiatives.

RHEs in Powys would welcome an opportunity to meet with those who may be developing future strategies relating to affordable homes and offer advice, experience and rural advocacy to guide and support further delivery of affordable homes in Wales.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susie Abson'. The script is cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first letter 'S' being particularly large and prominent.

Mrs Susie Abson

CC: Henk Jan Kuipers – Rural Housing Enabler – North Powys