

Written evidence from Rural Housing Scotland

Rural Housing Scotland welcomes the focus given to rural housing within the LRRG Report. We are pleased that the report recognises the extent of rural housing need and the crucial role of housing in sustaining and regenerating our rural communities. RHS supports communities across rural Scotland to tackle housing problems and we are pleased that the report identifies the potential of community led initiatives to meet rural housing needs. We appreciate the LRRG's recognition of the role of RHS and welcome the prospect of working with the Scottish Government, local and national partners and rural community groups in helping achieve the goals of land reform.

Community Land Rights

In our evidence to the LRRG we highlighted several locations where community land ownership has enabled affordable housing development and we called for communities to have the right to buy land where required to meet a demonstrable need for affordable housing. We are therefore pleased to see the range of statutory land rights and the community right to buy land as key recommendations of the LRRG (p.101).

The community right to buy land and the proposed right of pre-emption for local housing bodies (p.140) will facilitate land for housing in areas where planning is more relaxed and land values lower. In rural areas where land for housing is restricted through planning and land values higher these rights will be of limited use unless Local Development Plans recognise rural housing needs and are sufficiently responsive to enable land use where housing need is demonstrated.

We are encouraged by the recognition of the need for "more effort to identify and address very localised, specific housing need" with this information being used to zone land for housing within Local Development Plans (p.140 para.45). We would also highlight the value of rural exception site¹ policies to enable development on land that is not zoned for housing and available at lower values.

Housing Land Corporation

We welcome the promise of the Housing Land Corporation to enable a more strategic approach to land assembly ensuring land is available to facilitate housing where it is needed rather than the sometime approach of making the case for housing where land is available. This strategic approach is particularly welcome in rural Scotland where through planning and high land values land is not always available where it is required and rural housing need is sometimes *addressed* by building in the nearest town.

We particularly welcome the commitment that the HLC should have "explicit performance targets that recognise the needs of rural...communities" and that their responses to increasing housing supply include "bottom up solutions capable of renewing our villages and small communities" (p.140 para.44) and "an extended operational role to enable these to be addressed"(p.141 para.50). This extended

¹ Rural exceptions site policies enable the development of affordable housing, where need can be demonstrated, on land that would not otherwise be released for housing development. As mostly agricultural land it has a lower value.

operational role should include community profiling and local housing needs analyses to ensure a detailed understanding of rural housing needs, to help shape planning and housing investment decision making.

We would hope to see the HLC working with rural communities to acquire land where housing need had been demonstrated and are pleased to see the suggestion that communities may form joint venture partnerships with the HLC (p.136 para.30)

The rural performance targets of the HLC depend to large extent on their securing land for housing in rural areas and will therefore depend on their relationship with planning authorities in ensuring that Local Development Plans take full cognisance of rural housing needs. With this in mind the LRRG should ensure that their recommendations are fed into the review of SPP before this is completed in June.

Empty Homes

We support the suggested introduction of a Housing Re-Use Power to tackle the problem of empty homes through compulsory leasing or purchase by a local authority, and would also like to see this being used by local communities.

Private Rented Sector

The private rented sector is a significant provider of housing in rural Scotland, and is more likely to be a provider of a long term home than in larger settlements. In our experience security of tenure is a significant issue for rural tenants with many seeking alternative housing due to insecurity - real or perceived. There can be a reluctance to put down deep roots in a community where you have no security of tenure in your home, and where there a few alternatives to move to if you are asked to leave. We therefore welcome the LRRG recommendation that the Scottish Government introduces longer and more secure tenancies in the private rented sector. (p.145 para.24)

Overall we believe that the recommendations of the LRRG to enhance community land rights, establish a Housing Land Corporation (with rural targets) and address empty homes will significantly enhance the ability of communities and affordable rural housing providers to meet local housing needs.