

Unknown

From: David Sumsion [mailto:arbourarchitecture.com]
Sent: 24 January 2008 11:31
To: Housing Consultation 2007
Subject: Firm Foundations

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From David Sumsion on behalf of **Ardkinglas Estate, Cairndow, Argyll**

Further to our response submitted on 23.1.08 on your website form, we would like to make additional comments relating to the Firm Foundations consultation.

The Discussion Document includes a few references to rural issues but in general there is a surprising lack of recognition of the fundamental differences between the problems facing communities and developers in rural areas and those in urban areas or larger towns.

The rural issues that should be noted include:

- a) The relationship between the location of a person's home and their place of work is uniquely important in rural areas. In a city or town someone's choice of home may be unrelated to their workplace,- they can rely on public transport to move around the city and all the different types of housing in the city are potentially available to them. Also, due to the high volumes, a reasonable number of properties in a town or city are likely to be on the market at any one time. On the other hand in rural areas the choice of house types, and the number of them on the market, in the area reasonably near a workplace is likely to be restricted. Many people have to take accommodation at some considerable distance from their workplace, or have to take work at some distance from their home. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that public transport is not normally available for commuting to and from work in rural areas. Many people car-share but the rising cost of fuel is likely to make the problem even worse in the future. This problem effects individuals directly but indirectly effects every business and community. It becomes very difficult for businesses to attract new staff or for new businesses to start up if there is lack of suitable local housing. For these reasons, and others, it is uniquely important to rural areas that **communities and employers have some input into the type of housing that is built and the allocation of it thereafter, together with the allocation of the existing stock.**
- b) The **financial viability** of new housing development in rural areas is dramatically different from urban areas. Although land prices may be less (even if the gap is narrowing) every other cost is greater: connections to services (or provision of off-grid services), contractors' tenders, the lack of savings that come from higher density layouts, the additional costs of new roads, in many areas there are additional costs associated with steeply sloping sites, often Planning restrictions on the building form or external materials have serious cost implications, etc. At the same time average earnings in rural areas are lower than in urban ones, which adds to the problem.
- c) For the above reasons, even with existing measures (RHOG and Homestake for example) aimed at enabling home ownership amongst first time buyers **it may simply be impossible to develop the available sites in such a way that they are affordable to those working locally.** This situation could be helped by allowing greater freedom in the choice of sites and in the design of infrastructure that could be both more appropriate to the rural context and cost less.
- d) A recurring issue in discussions within communities is how to retain local housing for the local community in the future. ('Local community' includes newcomers who have local employment.) Mechanisms exist for RSL's to exert some control over this but what is desperately needed is a **new watertight legal template** that would enable those selling land for housing development to exert control over the selection of future purchasers, either directly or via the Community Council or similar body. This is NOT a 'protectionist' measure but is a necessary component of sustaining rural development in the light of the issues described in a) above. It is also a critical consideration for many who would like to assist the local community by selling sites but are currently put off from doing so because of the risk that they will soon become second homes or

sold to outsiders with no link to the local economy. There are probably also many existing homeowners who, when they come to sell, would like to offer their property at a fixed price to a member of the local community, rather than on the open market, but at present have no way of ensuring that a similar principle will be applied at the next sale.

e) Many of those studying rural affordable housing issues have come to the conclusion that **the only affordable housing for many people is going to be rented**. There is a lot of private rented housing already providing a vital component in rural communities. However most of these buildings are old and in need of renovation. The problem for landlords is that the rents for these properties tend to be below average but the costs of renovation are usually above average. Additional financial assistance from Government is required for renovation works, either in the form of grants or interest-free loans.

f) **New private rented housing** could be the most appropriate form of housing in many rural areas, for the reasons described above, but at present is likely to be unviable due to the high site development costs. **Government grants** towards the capital costs of such developments should be introduced.

g) From our experience the least 'affordable' element of new rural housing developments is likely to be a new road to serve them. Many otherwise suitable sites may be at some distance from existing public roads. Also, housing layouts tend to be lower density than in urban areas, necessitating more roadway. In our case (Argyll & Bute) council policy requires new roads to be designed and constructed to Adoptable Standard for any development of more than five houses. **This is simply not sustainable**. Either the adoptable standards for such developments must be dramatically revised or the number of houses that can be developed off a non-adoptable private road must be increased, - or a combination of the two.

h) Within the Local Authority's Local Plan the approach to identifying areas for housing development is governed too much by issues such as existing settlement patterns, past planning policy, landscape classifications and local resistance to change and not enough by the realities of affordable ecological development where issues such as site contours, access to public transport, access to infrastructure services, relationship to places of employment and appropriate construction and choice of materials should be allowed to dominate. The Local Authority is guided by Central Government in many of these matters and **policy revisions are required**.

i) The particular Planning and infrastructure problems facing developers in rural areas could be eased by greater co-operation from Planning Departments, consultees (SEPA, SNH, Trunk Roads etc.) and service providers (notably Scottish Water) in **discussions during the feasibility stage**. These discussions need to be backed by genuine commitment by all involved to enabling development, rather than the current tendency to hide behind a 'without prejudice' approach which makes progress so difficult.

David Sumsion on behalf of **Ardkinglas Estate, Cairndow, Argyll** 24 January 2008

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Unknown

From: info@ardkinglas.com
Sent: 23 January 2008 11:23
To: Housing Consultation 2007
Subject: Consultation Response

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Firm Foundations: the future of housing in Scotland

RESPONDENT INFORMATION DETAILS

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 Responding as: on behalf of a group or organisation
 Individual Permission:
 Confidentiality:
 Group or Organisation: Yes
 Share Response Permission: Yes

Consultation Questions

Firm Foundations: the future of housing in Scotland

Question 1: Do you agree that aiming to increase the rate of new housing supply in Scotland to at least 35,000 a year by the middle of the next decade is a sensible and realistic ambition, and that this will help set a necessary political context for acceleration in housing supply?

It is a sensible target if the houses are constructed to high ecological standards and if they are appropriate to those most in need. Whether it is realistic or not probably depends on many factors outwith the Scottish Government's control.

<p>Question 2: Do you agree that, to give practical effect to the ambition, local authorities should co-operate regionally in setting realistic housing targets for housing market areas, and in enabling the delivery of these targets? If so, what arrangements should be put in place to support and provide incentives for such co-operation between relevant local authorities?</p>	<p>This sounds like a lot of bureaucracy for not much benefit.</p>
<p><i>Question 3: Is there a role for a specialist national function to provide expert support for local authorities in strategic planning for housing. What expertise do you think this function would require?</i></p>	<p>no comment</p>
<p>Question 4: Even when land has planning permission there are still blockages that prevent new housing being built. What additional arrangements would, or could, accelerate development on land with planning permissions to help ensure that future housing supply targets are met?</p>	<p>Improved performance from Scottish Water on water and sewage infrastructure. Consistency in funding mechanisms over medium term. Flexibility in carrying funding from one financial year to next. New employees and contractors entering into building trades.</p>
<p><i>Question 5: We have proposed that much expanded or new, stand-alone settlements may be a valid solution. How should we best encourage the development of new, sustainable communities that are sympathetic to Scotland's landscape and environment?</i></p>	<p>Relaxation of planning policy. Financial support for ecological and appropriate infrastructure and services for new developments.</p>
<p>Question 6: How should different types of assistance within LIFT be targeted??</p>	<p>RHOG should be promoted to as many potential applicants as possible and funded to allow for increased take-up.</p>
<p><i>Question 7: How could the Government stimulate more innovative mortgage and related products and services to assist people in purchasing their first home?</i></p>	<p>no comment</p>
<p>Question 8: Should the Government provide direct cash grants to first-time buyers?</p>	<p>No. This would send the wrong message in a climate where the trend towards ownership rather than renting is already out of balance with most of Europe.</p>
<p><i>Question 9: How can the private house-building sector play a bigger role in providing, without public subsidy, increased provision of affordable starter homes?</i></p>	<p>Relaxation of Planning policy on external materials, encouragement of more contemporary design, closer relationship between design and construction methods and greater use of terraced row houses and flats rather than detached houses would all contribute to more appropriate and affordable homes.</p>
<p>Question 10: What issues do you consider should be taken into account when considering the increased use of private sector lets to house</p>	<p>For the best chance of success, any scheme should be based on the freedom of choice of both tenant and landlord, with the minimum of</p>

low-income and homeless households?	coercion.
Question 11: How should we ensure an appropriate balance between safeguarding tenants' rights and encouraging the private rented sector to achieve its full potential in Scotland's overall housing market?	In general landlords will want to retain good tenants who are positive in their attitude towards maintaining the property in good condition. There may be scope for introducing 'training' or ongoing personal support for tenants who have not been responsible for a property before or who have got into difficulties before.
Question 12: Do you think there is sufficient engagement between the public sector and private landlords? If not, what else should national and local government be doing?	Financial grants for construction of new private rented accommodation in rural areas.
Question 13: What other options should we consider for increasing the supply of private rented housing for low income and homeless households?	no comment
Question 14: How could more private landlords be encouraged to let to tenants on benefits and homeless households	no comment
Question 15: What other schemes or incentives might help us to recycle empty properties more effectively?	Interest-free loans to cover renovation costs.
Question 16: Do you agree that we should exempt new build social housing from the Right to Buy?	Yes.
Question 17: Do you agree that we should subsidise local authorities in areas of need to use their prudential borrowing capacity to build new council houses?	Yes, as long as the houses are ecologically designed and appropriately located.
Question 18: Do you agree that we should introduce large-scale competitions for subsidy?	no comment
Question 19: If not, how would you ensure that public subsidy is used to build as many good quality RSL houses as possible?	no comment
Question 20: Do you agree that we should subsidise the development of houses for mid-market rent?	Yes.
Question 21: If so, should the subsidy be awarded as part of the competitive regime for awarding HAG that we are proposing?	no comment
Question 22: If not, how would you increase variety in social housing?	no comment
Question 23: Do you agree that we should	

<i>encourage landlords to look at means of adjusting the mix of their stock in the interests of achieving more sustainable mixed communities?</i>	Yes.
Question 24: Do you think that subsidies for development should be provided to bodies other than registered social landlords?	Yes. Smaller private landlords have a crucial role to play, particularly in rural areas.
<i>Question 25: What sorts of protections should be offered to tenants in these circumstances?</i>	Medium term agreement on rent and controlled increases related to RPI or similar reference point. Also see Q.11 above.
Question 26: Do you think that the Scottish Government should vary Right to Buy discounts by (a) locality and/ or (b) type of property?	no comment
<i>Question 27: Do you agree that ALMOs can provide a satisfactory alternative to stock transfers?</i>	no comment
Question 28: Do you think that additional help from Government to enable landlords to meet the SHQS should be linked to improvements in a landlord's performance?	no comment
<i>Question 29: If so, what measures do you think would be beneficial? If not, why not?</i>	no comment
Question 30: Do you agree that we need to find new ways of focussing on the quality of place/open space and greenspace within deprived neighbourhoods?	Yes.
<i>Question 31: Do you have suggestions for approaches that are not resource intensive and that include stakeholders?</i>	no comment
Question 32: Do you agree that the lead role (and recipient of any resources) to undertaken this work should be open to a range of stakeholders?	no comment
<i>Question 33: Do you agree with the features and principles we have set out here for a modernised regulation framework?</i>	no comment
Question 34: How would you like social housing regulation to be organised? (For example, should it be a separate organisation or part of a group of other regulators?)	no comment

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