

Rural Housing Enabler (RHE) Programme Background Note

As part of the Government's 'Unleashing Rural Opportunity' strategy in July 2023, it announced funding for a network of Rural Housing Enablers (RHEs) across England until March 2025. The Strategy recognises that the country's economic growth and sustainability is dependent on a thriving rural economy, and key to achieving this goal is the availability of a range of housing for those who live and work in rural communities.

In the past, Rural Housing Enablers have played a critical role in responding to this challenge. Theirs is a multifaceted role reflecting the complexity of developing rural affordable housing. They build community support and encourage constructive engagement, evidence communities' housing needs, help identify sites, and bring all the key partners to the table.

However, over the last 10 years the number of RHEs has fallen dramatically in response to pressure on funding partners' budgets. For some RHEs this has led to a vicious cycle in which loss of funding has led to a narrowing of the service, that partners have been unwilling to fund. It is not surprising that this trend has coincided with the halving of new homes provided on rural exception sites between 2017 and 2022.

There has been no dedicated RHE service in Northumberland for many years.

Northumberland County Council delivers elements of an enabling service primarily through negotiating with developers on section 106 schemes, advising Registered Providers with respect to privately owned land, and with respect to local authority owned land and assets. This covers the whole county, and is mainly occupied in larger settlements. The local authority also supports Neighbourhood Plan development up to the point of adoption, many of which identify the need for affordable home creation. The local authority also supports Neighbourhood Plan reviews. The local authority is a core partner with CAN in developing our new RHE service.

The funding now made available by Defra, will enable a service to be developed focussed solely on rural Northumberland and on progressing more affordable home delivery in settlements of 3000 or less by working with communities, Housing Associations, the private sector and the local authority.

The postholder will have the benefit of working alongside CAN's existing Community-Led Housing (CLH) Coordinator who works to support community-led affordable home development across the region and CAN's Chief Executive who is secretary to the national Rural Housing Alliance.

We are excited to get going, and we hope you are too!

October 2023