

South Lakeland DC Housing Advisory Group
Minutes to Meeting Held 10.00 a.m., Tuesday 17 March 2015
Georgian Room, Kendal Town Hall

1. Welcome & Apologies

Present: Cllr Jonathan Brook – Housing Portfolio Holder SLDC (Chair)
Tony Whittaker – SLDC
Dave Pogson – NPS Group
Dan Hudson – SLDC
Simon Anstey - SLDC
Andy Lloyd- CRHT
Julie Jackson - SLDC
Anne-Marie Willmott – Impact HA
Peter Thomas – South Lakes Housing
David Peters – South Lakes CALC
Richard Hayes – South Lakes Housing
Elaine Glennon – South Lakes Housing
Paula Allen – LDNPA
Elsa Brailey – Home Group
Lynne Campbell – SLDC
Rebecca Field – Eden HA
Vicki Appleton – Progress Housing Group

Apologies: Ian Storey (Story Homes), Greg Denwood (Two Castles)

2. **Minutes of meeting held on 14/11/14 and matters arising.**

Item 3. JJ reported back on downsizing figures. A total of 39 households have been assisted to downsize in the year to 1/4/15. The next information will be to 1/5/15.

ACTION: JJ to report back the figures to 1/5/15 to this group at the next meeting.

As part of the action plan the first report on skipping is to be presented to the Cumbria Choice board on Thursday 19/3/15.

Item 4. TW met with Martyn Nicholson to discussion the provision of bungalows issue. There are no developers at this meeting to report their view.

ACTION: TW to report update at next meeting.

3. South Lakeland Empty Homes Strategy – Julie Jackson and Lynne Campbell, SLDC.

JJ and LC presented the SLDC Empty Homes Strategy. A copy of the slide presentation is attached to these minutes.

Feedback was sought from the meeting following the presentation.

DH added that the number of interventions on empty homes was a good fit with the environmental and sustainability aims of the council. Bringing empty homes back into use also reduces the impact of green field development.

JB asked if the strategy could include awareness of elderly in care who had left a home empty, both owner occupiers and rented. JJ commented that social landlords already deal with length of non-occupation issues including people in care. The housing benefit system also works to ensure rented homes are not left empty for too long. PT agreed that this scenario did not tend to be widespread or long term.

TW asked if registered providers (RPs) have schemes to tackle empty homes. RF said that Eden has similar schemes to SLDC. EB commented that the cost and condition of empty properties is often the barrier for RPs to purchase and renovate empty properties.

PA queried the main barriers to bringing empty homes back into use. LC advised that owners often have emotional ties to properties and sometimes live a distance away. The costs of renovation and stigma of letting an empty property through the council's social lettings scheme or via the Housing Register can also be a barrier to owners wanting to go down this route.

PT suggested publicising a positive case study and promoting a 'happy landlord'. LC suggested that this might work well with the Devonshire Road scheme.

PA queried the role of town and parish councils. JJ said that their local knowledge can be of help. DP encouraged links with parish councils.

AMW queried compulsory purchase as a strategy but LC advised that this is not an approach used by SLDC mainly due to property values in this area. TW advised that the council can use Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) where the council appoints a management agent to repair and manage the property compulsorily for 7 years, although again repair costs can be an obstacle and repair costs have to be recovered over the 7 year period.

4. Affordable Housing Completions – Tony Whittaker, SLDC

TW reported good news that a press release is being issued to report that in the past 6 months 8 new housing association schemes have completed. This is the most completions in a 6 month period for many years. 157 new affordable homes have been built in this period, 145 of which are for rent.. The council has a target of 1000 new affordable homes for rent in the period 2014-2025. By the end of March there will have been almost 200 since January 2014 hence we are well ahead of target by about a year.

DH commented that these good figures have arisen before the vast majority of the allocated sites having been completed.

5. South Lakeland Housing Strategy and Cumbria Housing Strategy Statement– Tony Whittaker, SLDC

The Cumbria Housing Strategy is coming to the end of its life this year and is not going to be continued but will be replaced with a Statement.

The intention is for the Cumbria Housing Strategy Statement to provide overarching priorities for the region but each District will have their own strategies.

The SLDC Housing Strategy is due to be published by the end of this calendar year. The first draft will be shortly available for consultation. There will be opportunity to go through the strategy and consider new ideas at the next HAG meeting. TW requested that anyone contact him if they have any ideas they would like to see included in the new strategy. Parish Councils will also have opportunity to see and comment on the first draft.

6. National Rural Housing Policy Review – Tony Whittaker

TW had previously circulated the recommendations with the agenda. TW and Anne Hall attended the launch of the report where the recommendations are aimed at changing Government policy.

Recommendation 1. SLDC is giving greater weight to its Core Strategy rather than adopting the government recommendations on affordable quotas in the recent Ministerial Statement. YDNPA has stated an intention that it will collect commuted sums and pass to SLDC. PA said that the LDNPA is considering the proposals now. They are looking at no obligations on 0-5 homes, commuted sum on 5-10 and affordable housing on site above 10. They are setting up a process to administer commuted sums and the housing SPD is to be amended. Receipts will be used by LDNPA but they are not sure what this will be spent on at the moment.

Recs 3, 4 and 5. SLDC and the LDNPA already have Local Plans in place and is lobbying government with South Lakes Housing on behalf of other areas for change in the spare room subsidy (bedroom tax) and Right to Buy legislation, although there has been no success so far.

Rec 7. SLDC is looking to establish a £1m loan fund, to assist CLTs and small RPs, subject to a business plan.

Rec 8. SLDC has a policy that affordable rents should be at the Local Housing Allowance level where this is less than 80% of market rents.

Rec 9. SLDC and the LDNPA have been lobbying Government over second home issue and has made an application under the Communities Act. Still awaiting government response.

Rec 11. SLDC already rural proofs all policies.

Rec 12. SLDC funds support for Neighbourhood Plans and has recently agreed with Cumbria Rural Housing Trust to provide finance to support their work with CLTs and self build.

7. AOB

DH reported that the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) report has been inspected and returned after fact checking. The report will go to Council in May.

Affordable housing is exempt from CIL but developers/RPs must claim the exemption before start on site.

Training for the development industry is to be provided at Kendal Town Hall at 2.00pm on Monday 30th March.

ACTION: DH to ensure that invitations have been sent out to interested parties.

8. Date of next meeting

15 July 2015, 10.30am – Georgian Room, Kendal Town Hall.

Housing Advisory Group 17 March 2015

Empty Homes Strategy 2015 - 2020

The Empty Homes Strategy



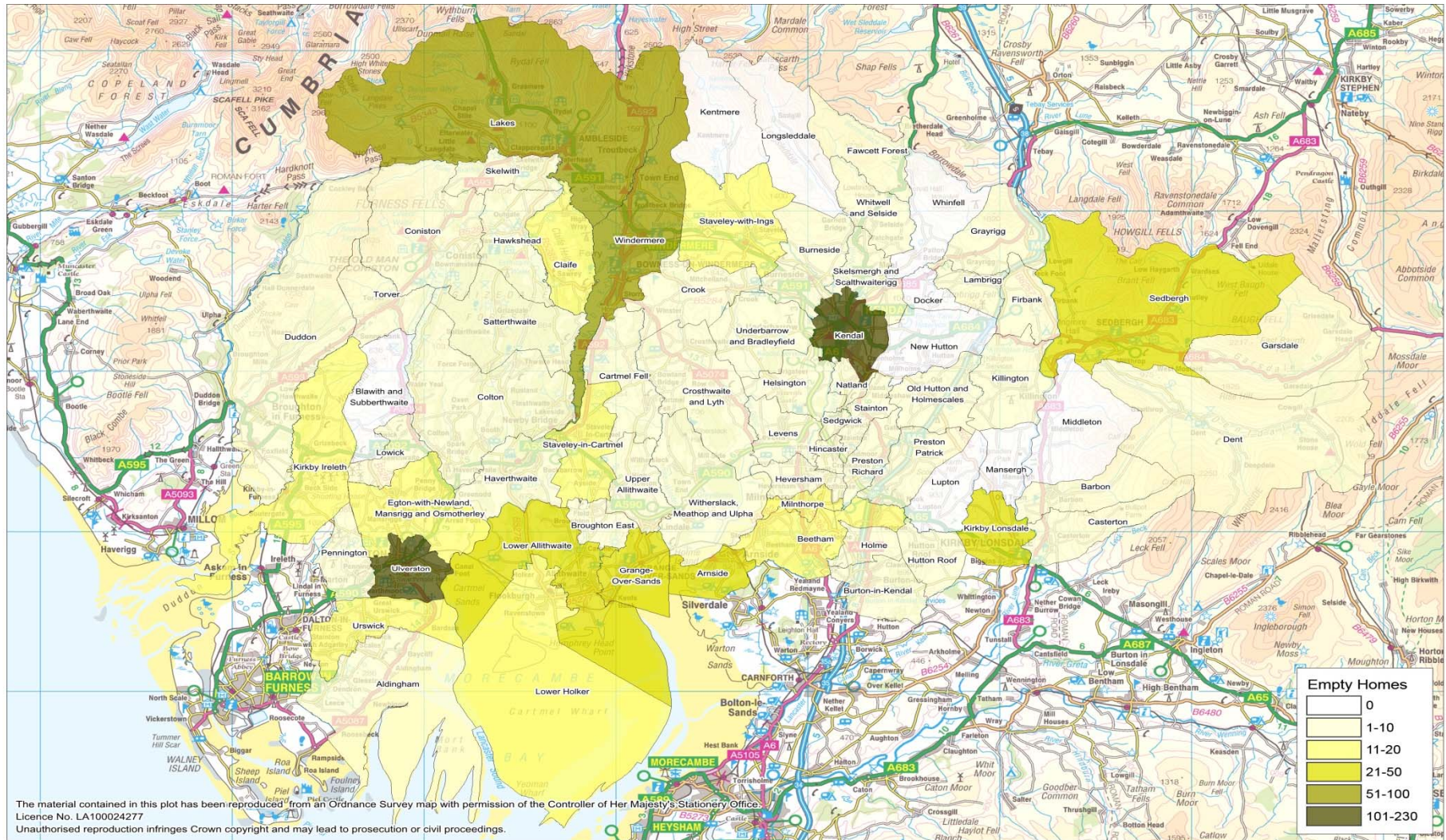
What is an empty home?



Empty Homes in South Lakeland

- * Represent 2% of total housing in the District
- * Around 1000 empty homes at any one time
- * Fluctuates on a daily basis

Empty Homes in South Lakeland



Vision and Priorities

- * **Vision** - *‘Bringing empty properties back into use as homes to meet needs and to help sustain communities making better use of existing housing.’*
- * **Priorities**
 - *Priority 1 – make best use of existing housing stock to provide homes to meet need*
 - *Priority 2 – target resources at areas of highest housing need*
 - *Priority 3 – monitoring and reporting*

Achieving the priorities

Priority 1 – make best use of existing housing stock to provide homes to meet need

Key Actions

- * Develop a target for bringing empty homes back into use.
- * Develop an accurate database of empty homes
- * An empty homes plan

Achieving the priorities

Priority 2 – target resources at areas of highest housing need

- * Target Empty Homes Grant Management scheme at those areas
- * Relaunch the Matchmaker Scheme
- * Target interventions

Achieving the priorities

Priority 3 – Monitoring and Reporting

- * Identify successful interventions
- * Working in partnership to ensure second homes are not classified on Council Tax as empty homes
- * Working in partnership to report empty homes and publicise successes and options to help empty home owners

Next Steps



Next Steps

- * Consultation on draft in March – April
- * Decision making process – Overview & Scrutiny 4.6.15, Cabinet 24.6.15, Full Council 28.7.15
- * Publish August 2015
- * Implement actions
- * Monitor and review

Your Feedback

- * On the Vision and Priorities
- * Suggested Actions
- * Any other feedback

Recommendations

Because more sites are needed:

1. Since the vast majority of rural schemes are on small sites, **Government's policy to remove from local authorities the power to require affordable homes on sites of less than 10 homes must be reversed.** Local Planning Authorities should require all sites, whatever their size, to make an affordable housing contribution. The level of this contribution – in cash or kind – will be determined by what works in the housing market of that area.
2. **Government should provide incentives to encourage land owners to develop rural affordable housing** to meet local needs or to release sites for these homes, e.g. through tax incentives or nomination rights, which would also stimulate the local economy.
3. Since local communities cannot properly influence what kind of development takes place without a Local Plan, **Government should require all local authorities to complete their Local Plan preparation within two years.**

Because new homes must be affordable to local people:

4. **Government should exclude rural areas from the "spare room subsidy withdrawal"** ("bedroom tax") because there are so few opportunities for rural tenants in houses to move to 1 or 2 bedroom flats in villages; these households should not be forced to move away from their long-standing social and support networks to urban areas elsewhere.
5. Where there are already problems from the low levels of affordable housing and limited

opportunities to build any more, **Government should give rural local authorities the power to suspend the Right to Buy.**

6. To provide a driver for action and delivery by housing associations of all sizes, **a new national minimum target for delivery of rural housing through the Homes and Communities Agency should be established of 13% of the HCA's national investment (in proportion to the population in settlements of less than 3,000 population).**
7. To address problems of accessing development finance, **Government should find ways of supporting the development funding of small and medium-sized builders and housing associations** that undertake smaller developments: e.g. recalibrating its loan guarantee scheme to cover schemes of less than 25 homes.

Because affordable homes need to be there for future households:

8. To ensure rents are affordable in 'low wage, high house price' rural communities, **Government should not require housing associations to charge "affordable rents" at 80% of market rents as a condition for receiving HCA funding.** Instead, as in Greater London, rents should be charged at a level agreed between the local authority and the housing provider as being affordable in relation to local incomes.
9. Where an area is experiencing high levels of second home ownership, **Government should endorse the approach taken by the Exmoor National Park Authority, and in other places, by requiring a proportion of new open market homes granted**

planning permission – up to a 100% in exceptional cases – on condition that they can only be used as principal residences.

10. The Council of Mortgage Lenders should now produce a standardised mortgage form for rural affordable home ownership, to ensure buyers can easily get a mortgage but the homes will be retained as affordable in perpetuity and cannot be sold on the open market by the lender if the mortgage defaults.

Because leadership is needed from national to community level:

11. **The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, as the champion for rural areas, should ensure "rural proofing" is continuously and consistently applied to national policies,** with specialist, rural technical expertise available to all Government departments.
12. Because Neighbourhood Plans are a vital means for rural communities to deliver affordable homes, yet require resources and expertise, **Government should increase and extend its support (beyond April 2015) for more communities to produce Neighbourhood Plans. And the Homes and Communities Agency should offer match funding to housing associations for the employment of Rural Housing Enablers** who can play the key role in bringing together parish councils, land owners, local authorities and housing associations to achieve affordable rural homes.