Introduction

This note is intended to provide guidance to parishes considering developing a neighbourhood plan, specifically on the affordable housing element of these plans. It is important to consider the district requirements for affordable housing and AVDC’s policy position on the allocation of social housing when drawing up a neighbourhood plan.

Current Policy Position

When developing affordable housing policies for neighbourhood plans, there are two key strategic documents that need to be considered:

- Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan (AVDLP) (2004) General Policy 21; and
- The County-wide Allocations Policy (2014).

Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan

On all planning applications for housing development with 25 or more dwellings (or 1 hectare and above), there is a requirement to deliver a percentage of affordable housing; currently 30% of the total development (as set out in the AVDLP: General Policy 2). Further information on this is set out in AVDC’s Affordable Housing Policy Interim Position Statement (June 2014)2.

County-wide Allocations Policy

The County-wide Allocations Policy (2014)3 should be considered when drawing up provision for affordable housing in a Neighbourhood Plan. The relevant part of the Policy is the section on ‘Local Connection’ (page 9).

An applicant is deemed to have a local connection with a district if the applicant:

a) Is living and has lived in a district continuously for at least 2 years immediately preceding the date of the application and/or

b) Is working and has been in continuous employment in a district for at least two years immediately preceding the date of the application and has worked for a minimum of 24 hours per week throughout that period. Employment is described as having a permanent contract, or working under contract as temporary member of staff. The applicants’ normal place of work must be based in the Council’s area; the existence of a company office based in the Council’s area will not by itself meet the criteria.

There are some minor exceptions to this rule, concerning for example those aged 55+, those in care and those in the armed forces.

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What this means for a neighbourhood plan

The Allocations Policy does not allow for lettings of affordable homes that are localised to specific towns or parishes, and it would therefore be incompatible to include this requirement in a Neighbourhood Plan.

There is however a local lettings policy in Aylesbury Vale for ‘sub-groups’. There are four sub-groups within Aylesbury Vale; Greater Aylesbury, Aylesbury South-East, Aylesbury South-West and Aylesbury North. A list of parishes within each sub-group can be found in the Local Lettings Policy 4.

In 50% of all new-build allocations and 25% of all re-lets 5, people with a local connection to each of these sub-groups are given priority, before the properties are offered to people with a local connection to the wider district. Although these sub-groups include several parishes/wards, this will provide flexibility for those wanting to move around the district.

The Allocations Policy does not otherwise distinguish between different towns in the district when making nominations to properties on the social housing register, Bucks Home Choice. AVDC would not agree to enter into a Section 106 agreement that included the provision to restrict new affordable housing to a Neighbourhood Area, other than in the case of a Rural Exception Scheme 6. The overall impact of including this requirement in a Neighbourhood Plan may slow the development and delivery of affordable homes.

There are some alternatives to delivering affordable housing that should also be considered.

**Rural Exception Schemes** will deliver affordable homes for a local, rural community, with the housing provided in perpetuity. Only communities statutorily defined as rural can access this method of housing development. This is a separate process to a neighbourhood plan as Rural Exception Schemes by their very nature cannot be allocated in a planning policy document. For more information and for further discussions, please contact Jean Fox, Buckinghamshire’s Rural Housing Enabler, by phone on 01844 348837 or by email at Jean@communityimpactbucks.org.uk.

**Community Land Trusts** are a further method of delivering affordable housing for a local community. A trust is established by a local community, with the intention of acquiring land/property to develop with the community in mind. This is usually with the purpose of providing housing in the area, but can also include the development of local facilities. CLTs are non-profit, community-based organisations run by volunteers. For more information and for further discussions, please contact Jean Fox (as above) or Henry Allmand, AVDC’s Housing Development & Strategy Manager by phone on 01296 585320 or by email at hallmand@aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk.

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5 Re-lets’ are those properties contained on a development which are re-advertised for letting following the initial occupant moving out.
6 Eligible parishes for a Rural Exception Scheme: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1997/625/schedule/1/made