

West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041 (adopted June 2025)

Policy DM17

Rural Exception Housing

Small scale rural exception housing schemes will be supported adjacent to rural settlements to meet a local housing need. Such schemes will be expected to be in response to a need identified through a local needs survey for a parish or group of parishes. The affordable housing within the scheme will be required to remain affordable in perpetuity.

It is expected that rural exception housing schemes will deliver 100% affordable housing. In some cases, a proportion of market housing may be acceptable where this enables the closing of a funding gap for the delivery of the affordable housing within the scheme. The market homes should be integrated with the affordable homes to form a single scheme. Where market housing is being used to financially support a rural exception housing scheme, the following detailed evidence is required:

- a. A financial appraisal demonstrating the viability of the scheme and the financial relationship between open market and affordable housing;
- b. The measures being taken to ensure the use of the affordable housing is to meet local needs in perpetuity; and
- c. The relationship of open market housing to meeting local need, in terms of location, design, visual character, and type of accommodation.

Supporting Text

11.4 The rural exception housing policy relates to the provision of small scale sites to meet an identified local housing need associated with rural communities. There has to be a very strong case for allowing such development anywhere in the rural area, both inside and outside the National Landscape. The provision for other types of affordable housing is focused in the main urban areas alongside general housing development. Rural exception housing will not, therefore, be permitted in the countryside adjacent to urban areas.

11.5 Rural exception housing is allowed for within the terms of the NPPF as an exception to policy. The schemes are intended to be small in scale and meet an identified need established in a parish housing needs study for affordable housing for a settlement or parish (or group of villages) to which the proposal relates. Local need is restricted to meeting the needs of households that have a connection with the area in accordance with the Council's Housing Allocations Policy⁽¹²⁹⁾ and are unable to access housing without publicly funded financial assistance.

11.6 The Council encourages parish councils to have an up-to-date Housing Needs Survey. Rural exception housing is subject to all the normal planning considerations. In addition, schemes should be well related to the existing settlement and care should be taken to ensure they do not result in isolated development in the countryside because of the impact on the landscape character of the area and access for occupants to public transport, education and other essential facilities including for example, access to foul drainage infrastructure.

Supporting Evidence - Local Housing Needs Survey

11.7 Housing being brought forward on the basis of overriding local need must be accompanied by a statement setting out the evidence both of the need and to justify a particular location. The evidence must be sufficient to demonstrate that a genuine need exists, how the proposed development intends to meet that need and that all suitable alternative sites in the same locality have been considered that might have less impact and/or be more sustainable. The development must be designed and developed as a comprehensive scheme.

11.8 National planning guidance states that a rural exception site may include an element of open market housing to help with funding the scheme. However, this must be clearly justified. If a rural exception scheme requires an element of market housing, there is a presumption that the development will have the least amount of open market housing required to help finance the scheme. The number of market houses will depend on the individual circumstances and be assessed on a site by site basis. If open market housing dominates the housing mix, then the scheme no longer

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qualifies as rural exception housing and will be contrary to policy. The proportion of market houses should be small in relation to the overall number of housing units proposed on the rural exception site. The Council will require open book accounting as part of any approval.

11.9 Community-led organisations may be suitable as a means of delivering affordable housing on rural exception sites.

Supporting Evidence – Viability

11.10 The Council will require a detailed submission setting out why any open market housing element is necessary, how the scale of market housing proposed supports the funding of the rural exception housing and why alternative funding mechanisms have not been used, including Parish receipts from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments. The overriding consideration is the exceptional need for local affordable housing and it must be shown that the scheme provides housing for local households in perpetuity.