

Adoption of a Balanced Rural Lettings Policy

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Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to seek adoption of a rural lettings policy which balances the need for very local lettings and the council's wider statutory obligations.

Recommendation

The Executive are asked to formally adopt the balanced rural lettings policy.

Public Interest

This report covers the council's proposed approach to lettings of social housing for rent, owned or managed by a housing association or similar body, in the most rural locations in the district. A small amount of existing housing has been specifically built to meet very local needs in so-called 'rural exceptions schemes', but the majority of social housing in our villages is not subject to the same lettings criteria.

The balanced rural lettings policy will treat relevant vacancies in affected villages as if they were subject to the same rules as existing 'rural exceptions schemes' (i.e. giving preference to those with a connection to the local area), but without going through all the expense and effort of building a small number of new dwellings.

Addressing the need to protect rural vacancies for those with a very local connection has to be balanced against our statutory obligations to those in the greatest housing need (referred to in the legislation as the 'reasonable preference groups').

It will therefore be of interest to members of the public concerned about the letting of social housing for those in need in their local area and to members of the public interested in the wider community benefits of letting housing to more local people.

It will be of particular interest to any member of the public who is seeking assistance themselves, or has a friend or relative in need of assistance from the district council or one of the other related partner agencies, with a rural local connection.

Background

The take-up of the right to buy (and, since the transfer of former council stock to Yarlington, the preserved right to buy) has been disproportionate in rural settlements; at the same time, the opportunities for further provision have tended to be more limited. In many cases, we have spent years taking a 'rural exceptions scheme' from concept to reality in order to meet very local needs that otherwise are not getting served through letting the existing stock if and when it becomes available.

There are a number of 'rural exceptions schemes' across the district in villages with a population of 3,000 or less. Typically these are small developments of less than a dozen dwellings which have been built outside of the development limit that applied to the settlement at the time in order to meet an established local housing need. Allocations (lettings to rented dwellings and sales of shared ownership dwellings) are governed by a 'section 106 Agreement' (s106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended) which enforces a very local connection, without which planning permission would not ordinarily have been granted outside of the village envelope.

Usually the s106 Agreement allows for allocation to 'cascade' outwards, in the event that there is no eligible applicant with a local connection to the primary parish, in order to ensure that the Housing Association (or other landlord) does not have to keep a property empty indefinitely when a casual vacancy arises. Usually the second stage of the cascade consists of all those immediately adjoining parishes with a population of 3,000 or less, including neighbouring villages that happen to be outside of the district. This stage is commonly referred to as the 'doughnut ring'. Usually the third stage of the cascade is then, in the event of there being no eligible applicant with a local connection within the doughnut ring, to anybody with a local connection to the district.

As the various rural exceptions schemes have been developed at different times, and influenced by the wishes of different Parish Councils, philanthropic landowners (where land for the site has been gifted), Community Land Trusts and housing associations, there is some variation of the exact way in which the cascade works, although almost all follow the pattern outlined above. Similarly there is some variation in the definition used for local connection.

Most s106 Agreements governing a rural exceptions scheme define local connection in a very similar way to the definition used in the Homefinder Somerset policy (which itself derives from relevant legislation, Guidance and case law), albeit the locality to which the connection refers is greatly reduced. In general terms this restricts local connection to those:-

- Already living in the relevant village, usually defined as for 6 of the last 12 months, or 3 out of the last 5 years.
- Already working in the relevant village, usually defined as having permanent work for at least 16 hours per week.
- Needing to move to take up an offer of such employment and commuting from their existing home would be unreasonable.
- Having close family connections in the relevant village, usually meaning parents, siblings or non-dependent children.

Sometimes, but not always, the s106 Agreement will also consider children attending school in the relevant village as being a sufficient local connection.

One of the objectives of the Housing Strategy Implementation Plan is to make effective use of South Somerset's housing stock, and the possibility of a rural lettings policy was included in the draft strategy. Following formal consultation the Council adopted the Implementation Plan in December 2014, including the commitment to develop such a policy along the lines suggested.

The Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) requires that all local housing authorities have a written policy that determines the priorities and procedures to be followed when letting social rented housing. Reasonable preference must be given to defined groups as per section 167(2) of the 1996 Act and accordingly no policy can disregard this as it would be open to challenge.

However, section 167(2E) and section 167(3) enable local authorities to let properties to people of a particular description where there is a clear need for this approach. Given the lack of affordable housing in some more rural parts of South Somerset district, it is considered appropriate to make reasonable use of this exception in the form of this policy. Homefinder Somerset, on the other hand, operates across the whole county, and whilst South Somerset District Council can have a specific policy, it relies on the agreement of the various housing associations which have stock in the affected areas.

Yarlington Housing Group (provider of nearly 80% of social housing in South Somerset) has a provision in its policy in which it recognises the limited supply of rural housing and states that it is “committed to working with the local housing authority to implement a rural lettings plan” (page 12).

Mendip District Council adopted a rural lettings policy in 2012, which included a detailed consideration of the best methodology to use, given factors such as available resources, reliability of data and the principle of transparency. The Mendip approach was taken into account when considering our own methodology, rather than ‘reinventing the wheel’, adjusted to meet our local circumstances.

Development of the Balanced Rural Housing Policy: Process

A consultation draft of the Housing Strategy Implementation Plan was produced in July 2014 and widely circulated to a range of relevant stakeholders such as Parish Councils, Housing Associations and other partner organisations. The consultation draft was also made available on our web site. The formal consultation period ran for ten weeks, closing on 17th September. Embedded within the consultation draft were eight specific consultation questions at appropriate places within the text and a final catch-all question seeking comments on any other aspect. A web-based Survey Monkey questionnaire was also created using the same standard questions.

One of the regular Portfolio Holder discussion group mornings was set aside on to go through the nine consultation questions. This was open to all elected members and took place on 5th September. Question 7 was “Do you agree that we should implement a rural lettings policy? If so, would you support a single cut-off point or a tiered approach?” During the discussion, concerns were raised about affordable housing in rural areas, especially smaller dwellings (either as starter properties or for downsizing). It was agreed that a balanced rural lettings policy would be the best way forward, using the tiered approach to stock levels.

Finally, the document was discussed at the Equalities Steering Group meeting on 21st October 2014. The possible clash between local families and reasonable preference groups was considered, but it was concluded that, due to the small number of vacancies affected (around 2%), there would be no discernible impact on equalities.

A draft policy was drawn up in January 2015, with copies sent out to parish/town councils, district councillors, relevant housing associations, internal consultees such as the operational housing team, and the community land trusts for Norton Sub Hamdon and Queen Camel. A seven-week consultation period then took place, ending on 12th March 2015, with a number of responses from interested parties. These were often requests for clarification of the status of a parish or feedback on wording (rather than content); there were also queries about the impact of the policy on procedures. On the whole, however, the policy was welcomed and agreed by the parish councils, landlords and others who responded.

Development of the Balanced Rural Lettings Policy: Content

The proposed balanced rural lettings policy for adoption is attached as Appendix 1. In determining which parishes would be affected by the policy, it is proposed to adopt Mendip District Council's principle of stock level per parish. Some small rural parishes (for example, Ilton or Odcombe), have a relatively high level of social housing stock, and it is considered that in such parishes there is therefore a reasonable chance that local housing needs will be met without any intervention necessary. It is for the rural parishes with relatively low stock levels that this policy is intended.

In order to ensure that our statutory obligations are met, this lettings policy has been drawn up with the intention that it will affect no more than 6% of the overall stock, thus retaining 94% of housing stock for all other applicants. It is also noted that being in one of the defined reasonable preference groups and having a local connection are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Two options were considered to achieve this: either using a single cut-off point (below which all parishes would come under the policy) or using a tiered approach (two cut-off points, with only 50% of vacancies affected in the parishes with slightly higher stock levels).

Single cut-off point:

An analysis of total housing association general needs dwellings in parishes with less than 3,000 population suggests that a cut-off point of 20 dwellings (or fewer) would currently encompass 60 parishes and represent 5.3% of all general needs stock (although probably a lower percentage of vacancies as these tend to arise less frequently in rural locations; current analysis suggests around 2.3%).

Tiered approach:

This option includes all vacancies arising where there are 10 general needs dwellings or fewer (which would currently cover 43 parishes) and every other vacancy where there are 11 or more but fewer than 25 dwellings (which would currently cover a further 19 parishes). This would be equivalent to 5.8% of general needs stock (again, current analysis suggests around 1.6% of vacancies).

Following responses to the consultation on the draft housing strategy implementation plan, the tiered approach became the preferred option. This option gives some degree of local lettings to a wider area than a single cut-off point, but without completely excluding these extra parishes from other ('reasonable preference group') applicants.

The approach to be taken regarding local connection is to use three levels, following that commonly used in rural exception schemes. The order of preference will be:

1. to those with a proven local connection to the parish in question;
2. to those with a proven connection to the 'doughnut ring' (of immediately adjacent rural parishes);
3. to anybody with a connection to the district.

This method prioritises applicants with a local connection to the parish but also recognises those applicants who, through proximity, have a connection to that part of South Somerset. It also protects the landlord from having an empty property at a time when a vacancy arises but nobody with a local connection to that village is currently eligible for a property of that size or type.

In the event that the above local connection filter does not provide a successful applicant, normal Homefinder Somerset lettings rules will apply.

For the purposes of defining local connection it is proposed to use the categories that appear in the Homefinder Somerset policy, which are broadly the same as those usually

appearing in existing s106 Agreements for rural exceptions schemes, but being referenced to the relevant parish.

Below is a shaded map of South Somerset, showing which parishes are affected by the policy according to current stock levels (which are, of course, subject to change).

Those parishes shaded green have ten or fewer general needs dwellings and it is proposed that all vacancies will be subject to the policy.

Those parishes shaded yellow have between eleven and twenty-four general needs dwellings and it is proposed that every other vacancy is subject to the policy.

Those parishes shaded blue are affected by the policy by virtue of being adjacent to a parish shaded green or yellow and thus being within the 'doughnut ring'. However, vacancies within these parishes will not be subject to the policy either because there are no general needs dwellings or because there are twenty-five or more.

Those parishes shaded white are unaffected by the policy because they are not immediately adjacent a parish shaded green or yellow and either there are no general needs dwellings or twenty-five or more.

Those parishes shaded grey are unaffected by the policy because the population exceeds 3,000 (including two pairings - Langport & Huish Episcopi and Castle Cary & Ansford – which are being treated as a single settlement).

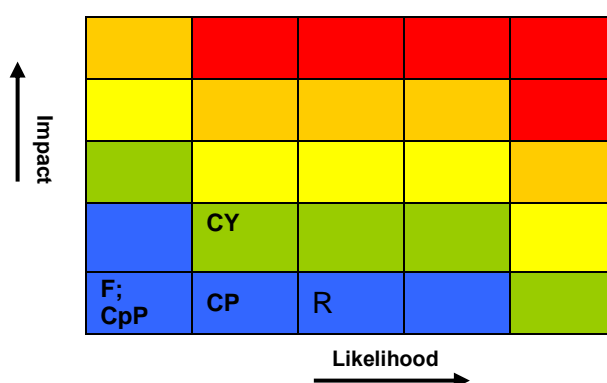
Implications for the District Executive Forward Plan

It is suggested that this policy be reviewed in the light of outcomes after three years; a review report thus needs to be scheduled on the forward plan.

Financial Implications

There are no specific financial implications arising from the proposed policy which is about the better use of existing resources in the form of future available vacancies rather than any financial expenditure.

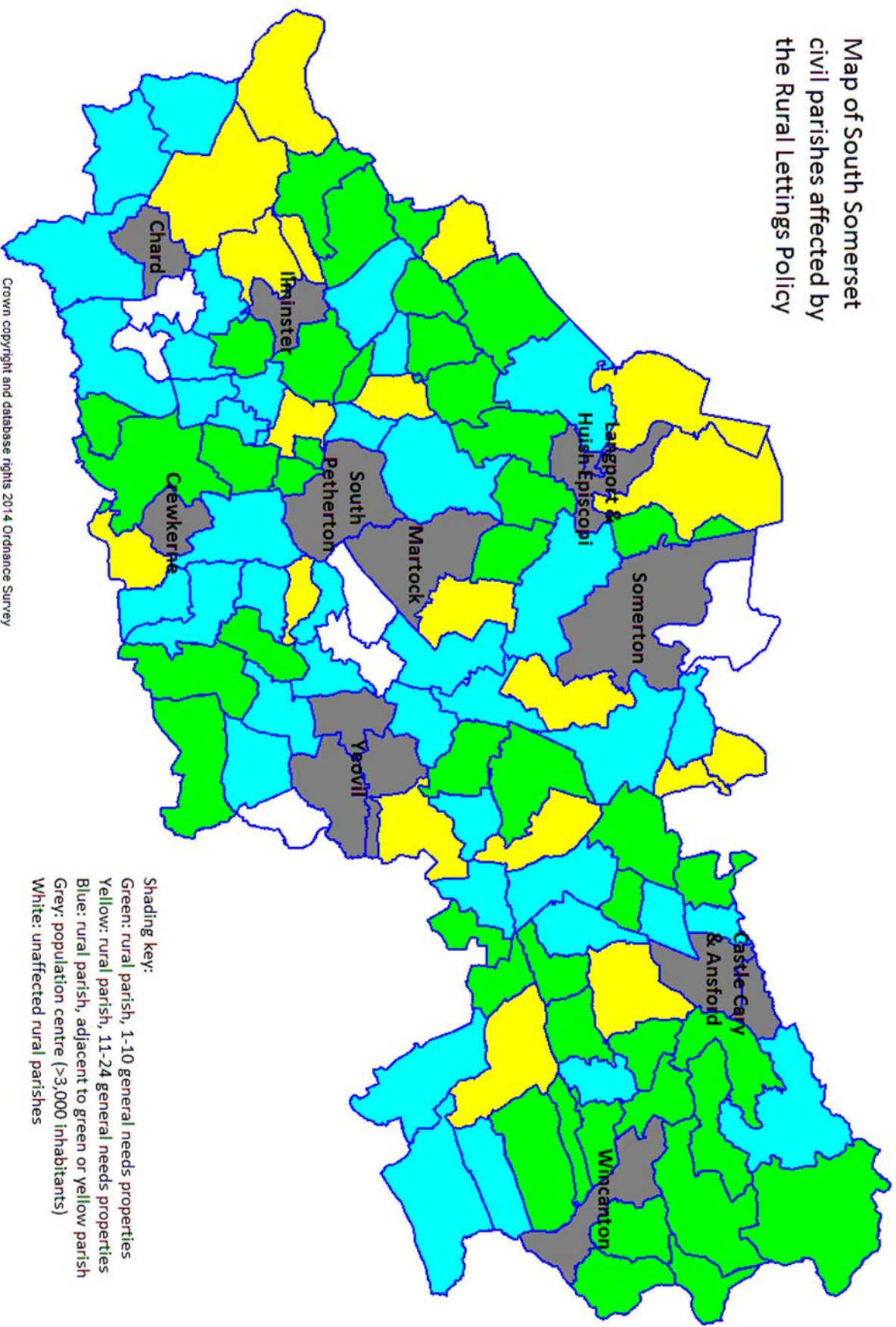
Risk Matrix



Key

Categories	Colours (for further detail please refer to Risk management strategy)
R = Reputation	Red = High impact and high probability
CpP = Corporate Plan Priorities	Orange = Major impact and major probability
CP = Community Priorities	Yellow = Moderate impact and moderate probability
CY = Capacity	Green = Minor impact and minor probability
F = Financial	Blue = Insignificant impact and insignificant probability

Map of South Somerset
civil parishes affected by
the Rural Lettings Policy



Shading key:
 Green: rural parish, 1-10 general needs properties
 Yellow: rural parish, 11-24 general needs properties
 Blue: rural parish, adjacent to green or yellow parish
 Grey: population centre (>3,000 inhabitants)
 White: unaffected rural parishes

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Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

It is not considered that there will be a measurable impact – positive or negative – on our carbon emissions targets. However, in allowing more people to be rehoused locally, some travel needs may be reduced and this could lead to a marginal contribution to our overall objectives.

Equality and Diversity Implications

An equalities analysis has been carried out and will be published alongside the document. It is attached as Appendix 2.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

The proposed framework document clearly assists in addressing “Focus Three – Homes” and the major statement in the Plan:

“We want decent housing for our residents that matches their income”

Privacy Impact Assessment

This report does not directly impact on any data held of a personal nature. Personal data held on the Homefinder Somerset system is already subject to appropriate checks and controls. This policy will involve using some of that data, but not in a way fundamentally different from previously.

Background Papers

Adoption of Housing Strategy Implementation Plan - District Executive, 6th November 2014
Adoption of Housing Strategy Implementation Plan - Full Council, 11th December 2014

Housing Strategy Implementation Plan

<http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/strategic-housing/>

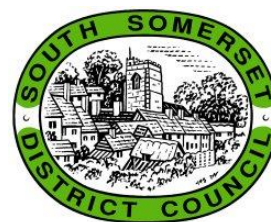
Yarlington Housing Group Lettings Policy

<http://www.yhg.co.uk/downloads/Policies/Lettings%20Policy%2023%2009%2013.pdf>

Appendix 1 - proposed balanced rural lettings policy

South Somerset District Council

Rural Lettings Policy



Aims & objectives

This policy covers all rural¹ general needs² social rented housing properties in South Somerset. It does **not** cover those properties which are governed by relevant section 106 planning agreement restrictions³.

The aim of this rural lettings policy is to enable people to remain in or return to a locality to which they have a local connection. The local connection eligibility criteria are defined later in this document.

One of the objectives of the Housing Strategy Implementation Plan⁴ is to make effective use of South Somerset's housing stock, and the possibility of a rural lettings policy was included in the draft strategy. Following formal consultation the Council adopted the Implementation Plan in December 2014, including the commitment to develop such a policy along the lines suggested

In October 2014, there were 446 households expressing demand in rural parishes in South Somerset.

A draft policy was drawn up by the strategic housing unit in January 2015, with copies sent out to parish/town councils, district councillors, relevant housing associations, internal consultees such as operational housing, and the community land trusts for Norton Sub Hamdon and Queen Camel. A seven-week consultation period then took place, ending on 12 March 2015.

Finally, the revised draft was considered by the district executive on 2 April 2015.

Background

Homefinder Somerset choice-based lettings

The Homefinder Somerset choice-based lettings scheme is the means by which the majority of social rented housing in South Somerset is allocated.

¹ For the purposes of this policy, 'rural areas' means civil parishes which have a population of less than 3,000; that is, excluding Yeovil, Chard, Crewkerne, Ilminster, Martock, Somerton, South Petherton and Wincanton. Additionally, Castle Cary and Ansford are considered to be a single urban settlement, due to the contiguous nature of their residential areas, and (with a combined population of 3,361) are therefore excluded. For the same reasons, Langport and Huish Episcopi are also excluded.

² General needs properties make up about 80% of all social housing in South Somerset. In contrast, sheltered or supported accommodation is housing with special design, facilities and/or features targeted at a specific client group requiring support and due to their exclusive nature do not suit the purposes of this policy.

³ 'Section 106' refers to section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Relevant section 106 agreements give preference to people with a connection to a particular village/parish when letting/reletting properties built outside the normal development limit.

⁴ <http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/strategic-housing/>

Homefinder Somerset Common Lettings Policy section 22.4 (local connection) refers specifically to restricting applicants' eligibility to apply for specific properties unless they have a local connection to that particular area:

"Although the banding system reflects housing need and subsequently the priority of each application, there may be occasions when it may be appropriate to protect housing for local people."

The way in which the registered provider (usually a housing association) labels their vacant properties at the public advertisement stage is agreed mutually between the registered provider and the relevant local housing authority. The Homefinder policy, however, does not clearly define which properties should be subject to a restrictive label for local connection applicants only.

This rural lettings policy clearly sets out the circumstances in which restrictive criteria (known as labelling) will be applied to vacant property adverts in rural areas of South Somerset where properties are **not** subject to a relevant section 106 agreement. This policy is designed to further complement the Homefinder Somerset policy.

Rural exception schemes

The take-up of the right to buy (and, since the transfer of former council stock to Yarlington, the preserved right to buy) has been disproportionate in rural settlements; at the same time, the opportunities for further provision have tended to be more limited. In many cases, it has taken years to take a rural exception scheme from concept to reality in order to meet very local needs that otherwise are not getting served through letting the existing stock if and when it becomes available.

Rural exception schemes⁵ typically give local preferences as follows:

1. to those with a proven local connection to the target village;
2. to those with a proven connection to the 'doughnut ring' (of immediately adjacent parishes);
3. to anybody with a connection to the district.

Where there is more than one household with a need for the size and type of property on offer and a local connection on the same tier, the normal Homefinder rules apply⁶. Usually the logic of the 'doughnut ring' of immediately adjacent parishes is to include all adjacent parishes (with a population of less than 3,000) even if they happen to be in a different district because the target village lies on the district border. This order of preference is well established and thus will also apply to this policy (see 'defining local connection', below).

Planning policy & section 106 agreements

In rural areas planning conditions are applied to new affordable housing developments built outside of the village envelope to ensure that the homes provided remain available and affordable to local people. As these conditions are

⁵ A rural exception scheme is where affordable housing is permitted, as an exception, outside of the usual development boundary for the settlement on the basis that the local needs of the settlement for affordable housing cannot otherwise be met within the same settlement.

⁶ That is, the vacancy will be let to the household with the highest banding and, if in the same banding, the longest effective date.

set under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 they are usually referred to as section 106 agreements.

Under the Homefinder choice-based lettings scheme, applicants can express an interest in available properties during each weekly lettings cycle. However, on some housing development sites (due to the section 106 agreement), applicants with similar levels of need for a particular property or type of property are also assessed according to their local connection (as defined in the section 106 agreement). Those with a local connection who have the greatest need are given priority for consideration for the vacant property.

This rural lettings policy does not replace any section 106 agreements on new or existing properties. Properties which were developed with specific section 106 agreements in place are allocated in accordance with these agreements. Therefore this policy does not override any property being advertised through Homefinder Somerset that has a relevant section 106 in place. Any such properties will be clearly labelled on the property advert stating they are to be let under section 106 conditions.

Given the above it is unlikely that any property built before 1990 will have a section 106 agreement in place and thus this policy sets out to clearly define how those rural properties will be allocated in the future.

Methodology

Mendip District Council, in drawing up their own rural lettings policy, considered a number of options for determining which parishes would be affected by the policy; it was concluded that stock level per parish was the most appropriate given factors such as available resources, reliability of data and the principle of transparency. The details can be found in their policy document (see footnote 7). In South Somerset we intend to follow Mendip's example of basing the policy primarily on existing stock levels.

We have considered two options, based on the above principle of stock level per parish, for the implementation of South Somerset's policy.

1. Single cut-off point:

An analysis of total housing association general needs dwellings in parishes with less than 3,000 population suggests that a cut-off point of 20 dwellings (or fewer) would currently encompass 60 parishes and represent 5.3% of all general needs stock (although probably a lower percentage of vacancies as these tend to arise less frequently in rural locations; current analysis suggests around 2.3%).

2. Tiered approach:

This option includes all vacancies arising where there are 10 general needs dwellings or fewer (which would currently cover 43 parishes) and every other vacancy where there are 11 or more but fewer than 25 dwellings (which would currently cover a further 19 parishes). This would be equivalent to 5.8% of general needs stock (again, current analysis suggests around 1.6% of vacancies).

Data collected for the purposes of this methodology is based on the combined parish-level housing stock of all registered social landlords in South Somerset.

Data on housing need is not available at individual village level where there is more than one village in the same parish.

Upon careful consideration of the two options, including responses to the consultation on the draft strategy document, we have decided to base our methodology on the tiered approach to levels of stock in each parish, as described in option 2 above. This option gives some degree of local lettings to a wider area⁷ than a single cut-off point, but without completely excluding these extra parishes from other (non-local) applicants.

During the development of this policy we concluded that turnover of stock could not be considered due to the further complexities it would create. Considering turnover would create increased workload; in addition, it was felt that reviews of the policy would need to be more frequent to take into account annual turnover and as such it was felt the council does not have the resources to administer this – the cost of doing so would be disproportionate to the benefit gained. Stock levels can change, and every time an empty property became available the council would have to check stock levels in the relevant parish; this is a resource the council does not have. Also, we need to be mindful of the timescales required via Homefinder in respect of reletting empty properties.

In determining this we must be mindful of our obligations to ensure that any choice-based lettings scheme is transparent and open to scrutiny, whilst ensuring the council meets its legal obligations in terms of giving reasonable preference to defined groups (see below).

Stock levels

There are 121 parishes in South Somerset over 96,000 hectares with a total of 11,025⁸ social housing properties, of which 8,904 are general needs properties. The balance comprises shared ownership properties, sheltered/supported housing and temporary accommodation.

Reasonable preference

The Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) requires that all local housing authorities have a written policy that determines the priorities and procedures to be followed when letting social rented housing. Reasonable preference must be given to defined groups as per section 167(2) of the 1996 Act and accordingly no policy can disregard this as it would be open to challenge.

However, section 167(2E) and section 167(3) enable local authorities to let properties to people of a particular description where there is a clear need for this approach. Given the lack of affordable housing in some more rural parts of this district the council wishes to clearly define under what circumstances restrictions would apply. This rural lettings policy identifies those parishes where it will apply for any future general needs vacancies within the district (excluding new builds or those subject to relevant section 106 agreements).

⁷ That is, affecting 62 parishes rather than 60. More significantly, this wider area means that a further 1,100 rural residents of South Somerset will come under this policy.

⁸ Compiled from housing stock data supplied by all registered social landlords in South Somerset.

In order to ensure that the above obligation is met, this lettings policy has been drawn up with the intention that it will affect no more than 6% of the overall stock, thus retaining 94% of housing stock for all other applicants. It is also noted that being in one of the defined reasonable preference groups and having a local connection are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Parishes affected by the policy

In the 62 parishes currently affected by this policy (see Appendix 2), there are 515 general needs properties in total, an average of eight per parish. The average stock level per parish is five units in those parishes with 10 or fewer dwellings, and 17 units in those parishes with 11-24 dwellings.

It is appropriate to note that a threshold for this policy based on stock levels is applied rather than applying the policy to all rural parishes in the district, which would potentially account for some 18% of vacancies and may conflict with reasonable preference.

Therefore, the rural lettings policy will currently be applied to a total of 62 parishes, all of which have at least one general needs property⁹.

Rural parishes with 25 or more general needs dwellings have not been included as part of this policy. This is partly because it is assumed that higher stock levels mean greater availability and partly because of the council's obligation to reasonable preference groups (see above).

Defining local connection

The 'doughnut ring' approach

In order to benefit local residents as fairly as possible, we have decided on a three-tiered approach to local connection. As is also often the case in rural exception schemes, the order of preference will be as follows:

- to those with a proven local connection to the parish in question;
- to those with a proven connection to the 'doughnut ring' (of immediately adjacent¹⁰ rural parishes);
- to anybody with a connection to the district.

This method prioritises applicants with a local connection to the parish but also recognises those applicants who, through proximity, have a connection to that part of South Somerset. It also protects the landlord from having an empty property at a time when a vacancy arises but nobody with a local connection to that village is currently eligible for a property of that size or type.

Please note also that the logic of the 'doughnut ring' of immediately adjacent parishes is to include all adjacent rural parishes, even if they are in a different district.

⁹ There are currently 16 parishes in South Somerset with zero general needs housing stock.

¹⁰ An adjacent civil parish is one which shares a boundary with (ie is contiguous to) the target parish. The term 'doughnut ring' is used to reflect the (approximately) circular shape created on a map when looking at all the adjacent parishes to the target parish.

In the event that the above local connection filter does not provide a successful applicant, normal Homefinder Somerset lettings rules will apply.

Examples

Example 1:

Every other vacancy in the parish of Aller (current stock: 16) would be advertised as being subject to this policy. Priority would be given initially to those applicants with a local connection to the civil parish of Aller. If nobody with such a connection expresses an interest in the property, preference would then be to those applicants with a local connection to an adjacent rural parish. In this case, the 'doughnut ring' includes:

- High Ham (in South Somerset);
- Curry Rivel (in South Somerset);
- Stoke St Gregory (in Taunton Deane);
- Burrowbridge (in Taunton Deane);
- Othery(in Sedgemoor);
- Greinton (in Sedgemoor);
- Ashcott (in Sedgemoor).

Despite the immediate proximity of Langport and Huish Episcopi, a local connection to these parishes would not give priority to an applicant due to their combined size exceeding 3,000 population.

Example 2:

Every vacancy in the parish of Lopen (current stock: 7) would be advertised as being subject to South Somerset's Rural Lettings Policy. If there are no applicants with a primary connection (to Lopen itself), priority would go to applicants with a connection to

- Seavington St Mary,
- Seavington St Michael,
- Merriott or
- Hinton St George.

South Petherton, due to its population exceeding 3,000, would be excluded from the 'doughnut ring'.

Example 3:

Every vacancy in Babcary (current stock: 2) would go initially to those with a local connection to Babcary. If no one applied, then it would go to those with a local connection to

- Lovington (in South Somerset);
- North Barrow (in South Somerset);
- South Barrow (in South Somerset);
- Queen Camel (in South Somerset);
- West Camel (in South Somerset);
- Charlton Mackrell (in South Somerset);
- Keinton Mandeville (in South Somerset);
- Lydford-on-Fosse (in Mendip)

Definition – Homefinder Somerset

The eligibility criteria for an applicant to satisfy local connection in order to be considered for properties covered by this policy is set out clearly within the Homefinder Somerset policy¹¹. For the purposes of this policy those criteria will be applied to parish level. Partner registered providers have mutually agreed that these criteria will be the means by which they determine priorities for any future vacancies covered by this policy.

The main or joint applicants

- are normally resident in the relevant parish. Local Government Association guidelines define this as having resided in the relevant area for 6 of the last 12 months, or 3 out of the last 5 years, where residence has been out of choice.
- has work in the relevant parish. The Local Government Association guidelines define this as employment other than of a casual nature. For the purposes of this policy this will be defined as having had permanent work with a minimum of a 16 hour contract per week for the previous 6 months, and without a break in the period of employment for more than 3 months..
- needs to move to take up an offer of permanent employment (over 16 hours and evidence will be required) within the relevant parish and commuting from their existing home would be unreasonable.
- have family connections in the relevant parish. The Local Government Association guidelines define this as immediate family members (parents, siblings and non-dependent children) who have themselves lived in the area for 5 years and with whom there has been frequent contact, commitment or dependency.
- can demonstrate a need to move to the relevant parish to give or receive essential and critical medical or other support where significant harm would result if this was not provided.

Advertising and reletting

All properties owned by Homefinder Somerset partner registered providers advertise all their vacancies via Homefinder Somerset. Any property which becomes vacant and is subsequently advertised via Homefinder Somerset, and which qualifies for reletting under the rural lettings policy, will be labelled as such to clearly identify this to applicants.

Once a shortlist of applicants has been created, it remains the responsibility of the registered provider to verify the applicant's local connection to the parish and their eligibility to be allocated the property.

Whilst local connection takes precedence, the applicant must have a need for the property (in terms of size and type) as defined by Homefinder Somerset's policy. For example a single person with a local connection to the primary parish, but with

¹¹ Homefinder Somerset Common Lettings Policy section 22.4

a one bedroom need, would not be considered for a 3 bedroom property. The successful applicant would be the household who had both a local connection and the highest need for the property.

In the rare circumstances where there are no applicants for a vacancy with a proven local connection under this rural lettings policy, the registered provider reserves the right to re-advertise or let the property to any other applicant – but this must be done in line with the Homefinder Somerset policy.

Shared ownership and low-cost home ownership

These properties are not currently dealt with via Homefinder Somerset and accordingly will not be subject to the rural lettings policy.

Monitoring of the policy

Homefinder Somerset is monitored via the county-wide Homefinder Somerset monitoring board. Any impact this policy has on trends will be monitored where appropriate by this board.

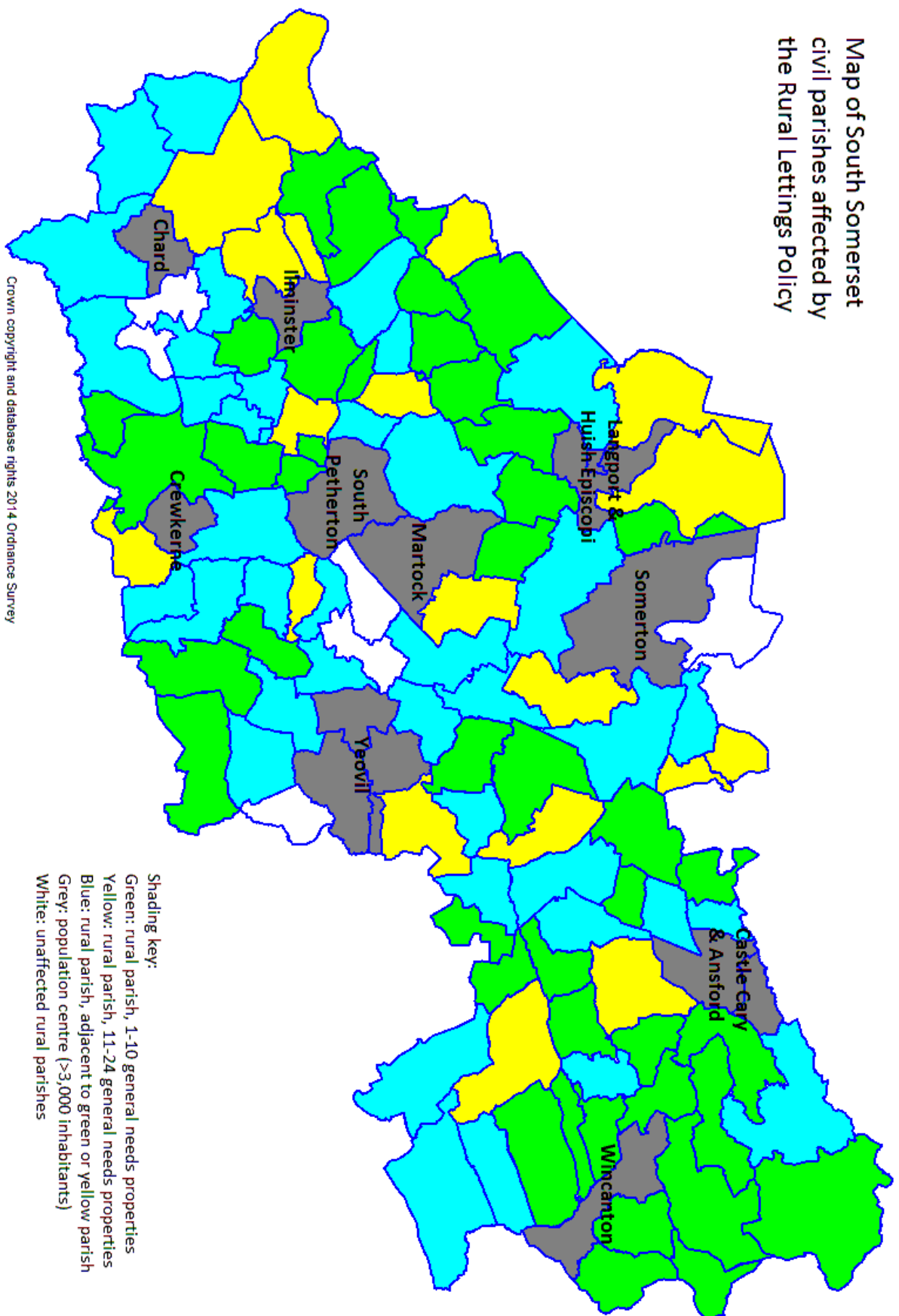
Review

The impact of this policy will be reviewed by the council's scrutiny committee three years after implementation.

It is not anticipated that any further reviews will be required. This policy will apply to the accommodation (which has no section 106 agreement in place) within the defined parishes in accordance with the policy's criteria. However, the list of affected parishes may alter as and when stock levels change and, thus, Appendix 2 is subject to change. It is anticipated that the council's Strategic Housing Unit will review relevant stock levels at least annually.

Appendix 1 – map of parishes affected by the policy

Map of South Somerset
civil parishes affected by
the Rural Lettings Policy



Appendix 2 – list of parishes by general needs stock level

[as of 18/03/2015 – subject to review]

Listed in order of stock level, lowest to highest; colour coding as per Appendix 1.

Parish	Population ¹²	General Needs Stock
Alford	88	0
Chaffcombe	229	0
Chillington	164	0
Chilton Cantelo	445	0
Cricket St Thomas	64	0
Cudworth	49	0
Dinnington	61	0
Kingstone	103	0
Kingweston	75	0
Knowle St Giles	244	0
Maperton	140	0
North Barrow	233	0
North Perrott	246	0
Puckington	117	0
Wambrook	184	0
Whitestaunton	256	0
Bratton Seymour	104	1
Closworth	220	1
Corton Denham	189	1
Stoke Trister	313	1
Yarlington	123	1
Ashill	529	2
Babcary	248	2
Compton Pauncefoot	139	2
Holton	238	2
Muchelney	195	2
Pitney	374	2
Seavington St Michael	127	2
Hardington Mandeville	585	3
Hinton St George	442	3
Whitelackington	209	3
Yeovilton	1,226	3
Brewham	441	4
Broadway	740	4
Charlton Musgrove	398	4

¹² Taken from the 2011 Census. Source: Somerset Intelligence, <http://www.somersetintelligence.org.uk/census-datasets/>
Population figures in ***bold/italic*** are, due to lack of 2011 Census data, from Office for National Statistics' mid-2010 parish population estimates.

Parish	Population	General Needs Stock
Isle Brewers	150	4
Shepton Montague	208	4
Stocklinch	154	4
Wayford	115	4
Beercrocombe	134	5
East Chinnock	479	5
Isle Abbots	205	5
Pitcombe	532	5
Rimpton	235	5
South Barrow	162	5
Hambridge And Westport	514	6
Horsington	571	6
Lovington	141	6
West Crewkerne	631	6
Drayton	379	7
Lopen	260	7
Cucklington	173	8
Dowlish Wake	277	8
Long Load	332	8
North Cheriton	208	8
South Cadbury	284	8
Limington	203	9
Penselwood	273	9
Fivehead	609	10
Buckland St Mary	521	11
Keinton Mandeville	1,068	11
Chiselborough	275	12
Donyatt	347	14
High Ham	909	15
North Cadbury	950	15
Aller	410	16
Kingsdon	303	16
West Camel	459	16
Ash	626	17
Curry Mallet	306	18
Seavington St Mary	384	18
Combe St Nicholas	1,373	19
Horton	812	19
Misterton	826	19
Barton St David	561	20
Charlton Horethorne	591	20
Barrington	438	21
Mudford	696	23

Parish	Population	General Needs Stock
Compton Dundon	705	25
Shepton Beauchamp	728	28
Long Sutton	833	31
Marston Magna	523	31
Winsham	748	32
Chilthorne Domer	574	35
Sparkford	617	36
Queen Camel	908	37
West Chinnock	592	37
Norton Sub Hamdon	743	38
Charlton Mackrell	1,073	43
Kingsbury Episcopi	1,307	46
Tintinhull	902	46
East Coker	1,667	47
Odcombe	759	50
Ilchester	2,153	51
Brympton	7,308	53
Haselbury Plucknett	744	53
Ansford	1,085	55
Ilton	854	65
Montacute	831	69
Tatworth And Forton	2,660	70
West Coker	2,018	80
Merriott	1,979	83
Huish Episcopi	2,095	85
Curry Rivel	2,148	95
Abbas And Templecombe	1,560	101
Barwick	1,221	107
Langport	1,081	112
Stoke Sub Hamdon	1,968	118
Milborne Port	2,802	122
Castle Cary	2,276	126
Henstridge	1,814	130
Bruton	2,907	144
Somerton	4,697	203
South Petherton	3,367	243
Yeovil Without	6,834	247
Martock	4,766	288
Ilminster	5,808	331
Wincanton	5,272	333
Crewkerne	7,000	375
Chard	13,074	1,172
Yeovil	30,378	2,916



More information is available from:

Strategic Housing

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🌐 www.southsomerset.gov.uk

☎ 01935 462462

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