

**WYRE FOREST HOUSING PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT**

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# **WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL** **RSL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT**

## **Introduction**

This agreement sets out the defining principles that guide, shape and influence the practical application of this partnership between Wyre Forest District Council (WFDC) and those Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) who are signatories. It provides a framework within which the District Council in its role as a strategic enabling authority and RSLs as providers of affordable housing, will work together to provide housing and services that meet local needs and contribute to the well being of the community. RSL partners are key delivery agents for the Council's Housing Strategy.

The principal aim of the partnership is to achieve consistency in the quality and standard of the provision of affordable housing in the District, through both development and management activity.

This agreement outlines the roles, responsibilities and expectations of the partnership between the District Council and RSLs, to establish a sound working relationship and equitable management practice between the organisations.

## **Eligibility**

WFDC is committed to working in partnership with those RSLs who have signed up to this Agreement. Approaches by other RSLs who wish to provide housing and related services in the District may be considered, subject to the following:-

- Proposals demonstrate value for money and cannot be bettered by existing partners.
- The RSL is able to comply with the Partnership Agreement in full and demonstrates a long term commitment to the District.
- The RSL is able to facilitate significant development of affordable housing which would otherwise not be deliverable.
- The RSL is able to comply with any subsequent entry qualifications and conditions that are placed on RSL activity within the District.
- They are able to meet a specific need that cannot be met by existing partners.

## **Status and Operation of the Agreement**

The agreement is not legally binding, but the Council will encourage all parties to implement it. There may however, be supplementary contracts and agreements with regard to specific projects and these may include:-

- Contracts and agreements relating to the sale of Council land to RSLs;

- Planning agreements under S106 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (and any subsequent amendment)

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### **The Council's Strategic and Enabling Role**

The Council will continue to develop a strategic approach in assessing housing need and housing services in the District. This approach will be set out in the Council's Housing Strategy (or its successor), which is reviewed annually. In order to ensure that the objectives of this Strategy are fulfilled, the Council will consult with, promote and facilitate the work of RSLs and other statutory and voluntary agencies providing housing and associated services. The West Midlands Regional Housing Strategy and the delivery of its objectives through the South Housing Market Area Partnership will increasingly influence the Council's Strategic direction. RSL partners will need to fully engage in this agenda.

The Council recognises that the creation of new affordable housing and the efficient utilisation of existing housing stock is a key issue.

### **Strategic Role**

The Council will -

- Assess the operation of the wider housing market, and through ongoing research ensure that housing need across all sectors is assessed; review this data on an ongoing basis to ensure it is up to date.
- Participate fully as a Member of the South Housing Market Area Partnership in order to help implement the West Midlands Regional Housing Strategy
- Produce and co-ordinate a local Housing Strategy, and monitor its impact.
- Consider the needs of black and other ethnic minority groups.
- Conduct rural parish surveys, working with and endeavour to keep information up to date to provide RSLs with clear guidance on future development priorities.
- Consider the appropriate tenure split between affordable housing (rent and shared ownership/homebuy) and low cost market homes, based upon identified needs within the District.
- Encourage the best use and management of existing housing stock and pursue the creation of accommodation from vacant or under-utilised housing stock both in the public and private sectors.
- Liaise with the Housing Corporation, neighbouring local authorities, Worcestershire Primary Care Trust, the Police, Social Services, Probation Service and Voluntary Organisations regarding provision of housing, support and care, and the varying statutory responsibilities particularly under the Community Care Act 1990, the Children's Act 1989, the Worcestershire Supporting People Strategy and any subsequent legislation.
- Embed housing and related issues into corporate and Partnership Strategies with a particular emphasis on Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements.

### **Enabling Role**

In order to fulfil its enabling role the Council will -

- Maximise available resources for the benefit of housing in the District, including the Council's capital housing funding (Affordable Housing Grant) where appropriate.
- Identify, assemble and dispose of suitable land in its ownership.
- Utilise planning policies to maximise the provision of affordable housing where appropriate within the District.
- Ensure that submissions for Affordable Housing Grant Approval and grant claims are processed efficiently and within timescales set out in the relevant procedure guides.
- Promote the work of RSLs within the District.
- Seek to ensure there is no inappropriate competition between Partners

There can be no presumption by developers that funding will be available for the delivery of affordable housing on Section 106 sites. However the Council will endeavour to respond promptly to any request from Partners relating to funding availability, particularly on windfall sites.

### **Principal Responsibilities of RSL Partners**

The RSL partners operating in the District have established an effective track record both in the management and development of affordable housing. As signatories to the Housing Partnership Agreement, RSLs will work closely with WFDC and statutory and voluntary sector partners.

In fulfilling their role, RSL signatories to this Agreement will -

- Develop housing to Housing Corporation Scheme Development Standards (or higher where agreed with the Council) and request or notify the Council of any waivers granted by the Housing Corporation.
- Comply with and supply such information as is required by WFDC's monitoring requirements.
- Advise the Council of sites and property purchases under consideration so as to avoid duplication of effort and inappropriate competition.
- Discuss all proposals with WFDC at the earliest opportunity and deal with development opportunities in accordance with the Council's Developer's Guidance Notes and the Toolkit for Affordable Housing.
- Make best endeavours to complete all legal agreements and comply with all planning conditions in a timely manner.
- Comply with planning agreements drafted by WFDC and consider and notify them of the need for any necessary variations at the earliest possible stage.

- Work with WFDC's other RSL partners and enter into joint developments, and work in partnership with specialist RSLs and voluntary and statutory organisations as appropriate.
- Deliver WFDC and Housing Corporation funded development programmes within agreed timescales and in accordance with the agreed guidelines.
- Ensure that appropriate signage, including acknowledgement of WFDC appears on all development sites in receipt of Housing Corporation and Council funding.

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- Have a formal complaints procedure, which is published and freely available to customers.
- Ensure the views and requirements of tenants and customers are fully considered and provide the Council with information on customer satisfaction including new housing developments.
- Inform the Council of significant areas of new policy.
- Participate in liaison meetings with the Council and an Annual Review Process.

### **Planning Issues**

The planning system has an important role to play and the Council will actively seek the provision of good quality affordable homes to meet identified needs. The results are crucial in shaping housing policy, setting affordable housing targets and prioritising housing needs for the District. The following means will be used to maximise the provision of good quality affordable housing -

- Negotiation with developers and land owners for an element of social housing on allocated residential and windfall sites on suitable sites where there is proven housing need, in line with National, Regional and Local Plan Policies.
- Identification of rural exception sites for affordable housing to meet local need by carrying out parish surveys and liaison with parish councils.
- Provision of prompt advice on planning matters at an early stage and throughout the planning process.
- Housing Market Assessments will be carried out and updated to provide detailed information on housing needs
- Negotiating Section 106 Agreements which require the affordable housing provision on such sites to meet Housing Corporation Scheme Development Standards.

In policy formulation and planning application negotiations, reference will be made to the following and any subsequent new legislation or policy -

1. DTLR Planning Policy Guidance 3 Planning and Housing (draft PPS3 2005)
2. DTLR Planning Circular 6/98 Planning and Affordable Housing
3. Wyre Forest District Local Plan (adopted 1996) Wyre Forest District Local Plan (adopted 2004)
4. Worcestershire Structure Plan Deposit Draft 1999 and any subsequent reviews or alterations. Worcestershire Structure Plan 2001
5. West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy 2004.

### **Housing Needs**

The Council is participating in the South Housing Market Area (West Midlands), Housing Market Assessment which will provide a comprehensive assessment of housing needs in the Wyre Forest housing market area. This research will be updated at least annually and will inform both Planning Policy, Housing Strategies and specific development briefs for housing sites.

### **Homelessness Prevention**

The Council's Homelessness Strategy 2003 – 2008 sets out the Council's priorities for meeting its statutory homelessness duties. RSL partners will be required to support the

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Council in line with Housing Corporation guidance and contribute to the Wyre Forest Homelessness Forum.

A Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy and a SHMA.

### **Nomination arrangements and the letting of affordable housing**

RSL's will be expected to offer at least 50% of their new lettings and relets as nominations but it would be expected that 100% nominations would be provided on first lettings on new sites which have the benefit of Council funding. These percentages are to be net of mutual exchanges and internal transfers.

Supported Housing. The Council will work with its partners to develop Supported housing proposals in line with the priorities contained within the Worcestershire Supporting People Strategy and will work with the other agencies to assess housing need and allocating resources. RSLs wishing to develop supported housing proposals must either have experience with a good track record of delivery, or should work in partnership with specialist agencies. Support may also be given to specialist supported housing agencies that are not members of the partnership. Any proposals for supported housing schemes must clearly demonstrate robust funding proposals to the Council and meet identified needs.

RSL partners will assist and contribute to the policy and operational developments required to meet the Government's requirement to implement a Choice Based Lettings Scheme by 2010

### **Affordability**

Affordable Housing for rent must conform to the Housing Company's target rent regime as set out in the Corporation's document "Rent Influencing Regime: Implementing the Rent Restructuring Framework"

The Councils Toolkit for Affordable Housing is to assist RSLs in negotiating land and property values with developers in order to maintain them at affordable price levels. This is of significance to both social rented and shared ownership (Homebuy) schemes. The Toolkit will be kept under review.

The Council will take account of data held by the Housing Corporation an average grant per unit costs in the District when considering bids for AHG. The RSL must provide all the required information to the Council in a prescribed format.

In developing new schemes, RSL partners also need to consider the costs of living in the properties developed and the introduction of cost-effective and energy-saving measures that can reduce the running costs of properties. Estimated running costs will be required with any bid for WFDC Affordable Housing Grant.

### **Dwelling Space Standards & Design Issues**

A list of minimum floor areas required by the Council is included in Appendix 1, but these may be subject to certain exceptions by agreement eg

- Homes purchased as 'Existing Satisfactory Dwellings' and 'Purchase and Repair.'
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- Homes purchased 'Off the Shelf'
- Rehabilitation Schemes
- Shared housing under special needs / Supporting People provision

**It is expected that furniture layouts for all habitable rooms and internal storage facilities will be shown clearly on the plans.** This is to illustrate how the rooms can sensibly accommodate the necessary furniture and equipment associated with specific room activities and is suitable for the particular needs of intended user groups.

### **Development Standards**

All partners shall aim to provide innovative, well-designed, cost effective means of providing affordable housing. At the inception of a scheme, Partners will liaise with the Council's Principal Housing Officer to determine the suitability of the scheme and this line of communication should be maintained throughout the development process.

All schemes will, as a minimum, meet the Housing Corporation Scheme Development Standards 'essential items' (August 2000) and the minimum to meet the Housing Corporation's Housing Quality indicators for location, design and performance and National Housing Federation Guide to Standards and Quality in Development (revised). Care should be taken to ensure that the affordable housing blends in with the surrounding built environment. The partners will try to achieve the highest quality of internal and external design, using sustainable materials and meeting the enhanced standards set out below. However, the Council recognises that there may be overriding reasons that may exempt individuals from some of these standards, and this will need to be identified on a site by site basis. The Council will consider with its partners how best to maintain standards to SDS level for shared ownership (Homebuy) schemes and will explore the possibility of using planning conditions to achieve this. In relation to the space standards at Appendix 1 for shared ownership (Homebuy) these will be agreed with the Council when its AHG is being provided.

1. Lifetime Homes – It is expected that all new developments will meet the 16-point Lifetime Homes Standard set out by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in the publication 'Designing Lifetime Homes'. (Appendix 2) This will be a requirement for Council Capital funding. In circumstances where this is not possible because of design / physical or



financial restraints the Council may waive this requirement in exceptional circumstances. Any difficulties in meeting these criteria must be brought to the Council's attention at the earliest possible opportunity

2. Community Safety and Security – All schemes should seek to meet the objectives of Secure by Design Principles and the RSL will work with the Architectural Liaison Officer of West Mercia Constabulary to ensure it meets minimum standards in relation to designing out crime.
3. Energy Efficiency and Sustainability – New developments should address energy efficiency within the design of the dwelling and meet the recommended SAP rating scores set out in Scheme Development Standards. All schemes funded by the National Affordable Housing Programme 2006-08 are required to achieve a rating of Eco-Homes Very Good.

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The Council will be looking to RSLs to help deliver key elements of its Affordable Warmth and Sustainability Strategies with a particular emphasis upon how renewable energy systems can be developed in new and existing schemes where possible.

- 4 Egan Principles – Rethinking construction – In line with Housing Corporation requirements, RSLs will be expected to meet Egan Principles in LASHG developments as well as ADP funded schemes and to meet the specified timescales for its full implementation.

### **Key Monitoring Requirements**

The Council requires certain information with regard to its own capital funding and also wishes to be informed about the provision of housing services in the area. The Council will make full use of Housing Corporation and other public documents relating to RSL supervision and performance. RSL partners are therefore required to comply with monitoring requirements by supplying;

- Copies of key policies and procedures relating to housing management and development, and significant changes particularly if they affect the operation of a local scheme;
- A copy of the annual list of authorised signatories and relevant committee minute for development purposes;
- Quarterly updates on allocation and cash planning take up for Council funded schemes in an approved format;
- A copy of the Annual Report and Report to Tenants;
- Copies of any tenants newsletters circulated in the District;
- A copy of diversity and equality policies and policies relating to BME groups;
- Result of the analysis of any tenant satisfaction surveys undertaken in the District;
- Copies of the results of tenant satisfaction surveys on new developments, where applicable;
- Any other information that the Council may reasonably request. These documents are to be provided when available rather than the Council having to request them.

The Council will hold at least two RSL Partnership meetings each year for the purpose of a two way dialogue on policy, strategy and operational issues that affect the District with a particular focus upon the development of new affordable housing units.

An annual meeting will be arranged for each partner to enable a discussion to take place on performance, strategy, policy and other matters of mutual interest. The Council will ask partners to provide information in a standard format for the meetings.

### **Sustainable Development and the Community**

The conservation and sustainable use of natural resources and minimisation of environmental pollution are objectives that need careful consideration by all partners. The Council has statutory duties to improve domestic energy consumption and an environmental protection role, and has produced a Sustainable Development Plan and Affordable Warmth Strategy which addresses these issues.

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RSLs will assist in developing and implementing the Council's environmental and sustainability policies relating to housing as far as practicable; the principle of community sustainability is a core component of the Council's strategy for the development of new stock and improvement of existing stock. Also to have full regard to the Housing Corporation documents 'Affordable Housing: Better by Good Design' and 'Design Champions: Guidance for Housing Associations' and the Housing Corporation's sustainability toolkit.

### **Local Economy**

In the interests of developing sustainable communities, the relationship between capital investment in housing and job training, through new build, refurbishment or maintenance work, should be maximised.

To this end, RSL partners are required to consider the use of local labour and training schemes both in new developments and maintenance contracts. Participation in any programmes that encourage and facilitate the use of local labour and training will ensure that investment opportunities will be maximised through partnership working.



### Dwelling Space Standards

All schemes should seek to meet the following **minimum** standards.

Size of property	Minimum Area m2 (measured inside external walls)
1 bed 2 person flat	45
2 bed 3 person flat	55
1 bed 2 person house	50
2 bed 3 person house	65
2 bed 4 person house	71
3 bed 4 person house	75
3 bed 5 person house	81
4 bed 6 person house	96
1 bed 2 person bung	45
2 bed 3 person bung	56

These areas are a **minimum and do not allow for Lifetime Homes space standards**, which will require increased space dependant upon the design of the particular units

- Storage space must be maximised

The Council recognises that there will be exceptional circumstances where it will not be possible to meet these minimum standards because of physical restraints of a site. Exceptions may therefore be agreed eg homes purchased as 'Existing Satisfactory Dwellings' and 'Purchase and Repair', homes purchased 'Off the Shelf', Rehabilitation Schemes, Shared housing under special needs / community care provision

### **Lifetime Homes**

Lifetime homes are broadly similar to the Housing Corporation Scheme Development Standards and it has sixteen design features that ensure a new house or flat will meet the need of most households Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2001). Please refer to the documentation produced by JRF. The following summarises the 16 key features:

1. Car parking adjacent to the home, should be capable of enlargement to attain 330mm
2. The distance from the car parking space should be kept to a minimum and should be level or gently sloping
3. The approach to all entrances should be level or gently sloping
4. All entrances should be illuminated, have level access over the threshold and have a covered main entrance
5. Communal stairs should provide easy access and where homes are reached by a lift, it should be fully wheelchair accessible
6. Width of the doorways and hallways should conform to the specifications
7. There should be space for turning a wheelchair in dining areas and living rooms and adequate circulation space for wheelchairs users elsewhere
8. The living room should be at entrance level
9. In houses of two or more storeys, there should be space on the entrance level that could be used as a convenient bed-space.
10. There should be a wheelchair accessible entrance level WC, with drainage provision enabling a shower to be fitted in the future
11. Walls in bathrooms and toilets should be capable of taking adaptations such as handrails
12. The design should incorporate provision for the future stair lift, a suitably identified space for a through-the-floor lift from the ground to the first floor, for example to a bedroom next to a bathroom
13. The design should provide for a reasonable route for a potential hoist from the main bedroom to the bathroom
14. The bathroom should be designed to incorporate ease of access to the bath, WC and wash basin
15. Living room window glazing should begin at 800mm or lower and windows should be easy to open/operate
16. Switches, sockets, ventilation and service controls should be at a height usable by all (i.e. between 450 and 1200mm from the floor)

**Wyre Forest District Council**  
**Sustainability Issues**

The main factors for considering the sustainability and the suitability of development sites are set out below.

**Neighbourhood** - does the scheme form part of an existing neighbourhood with an established community – is the scale in keeping?

**Mix of Community** - does the neighbourhood contain a mix of community, tenures and house types?

**Community Facilities** - what access is there to community facilities for people to meet, and are there activities for different age groups? What is the availability of facilities within walking distance or accessible by public transport such as local shops, banks, post office, medical facilities, child care, play facilities, schools, places of worship, pubs, clubs etc?

**Education** - do the local schools have capacity for expansion and are they accessible by walking or public transport?

**Training** - what is the availability of opportunities for local employment training? Are any opportunities built into this scheme?

**Access to Jobs** - what is the availability of a range of employment opportunities appropriate to local people which are accessible by foot / cycle or public transport?

**Crime and Disorder** - is the scheme in an area where crime levels are above the local average? There may be a need for consultation with the police, community and tenant involvement – has this taken place or what mechanisms are in place to deal with this?

**Regeneration** - is the scheme part of a wider regeneration initiative with a range of partners and funding with coherent plans and if so, how does it plan to address local problems?

**Partnership working** - Is there scope for the involvement of local people in the design and management of the development? What are the arrangements for access to management staff and for tenant participation?

*The Council accepts that each Partner may have a different approach to consideration of these issues, and consequently, rather than introduce a further checklist for completion suggests that a copy of their internal assessment is included with any bid on a scheme by scheme basis. The Council will want to consider these specific issues with RSLs prior to supporting schemes.*

