

**BALLATER HOUSING PARTNERSHIP GROUP  
MEETING ON THURSDAY 11 MARCH 2010 AT 1PM AT THE GEORGE  
BEATON ROOM, VICTORIA & ALBERT HALLS, BALLATER**

**Present:**

Gordon Riddler (**GR**), Ballater Resident and Ballater (RD) Ltd., Phil Swan (**PS**), Ballater Resident, Mike Preston (**MP**), Ballater Resident, Emma Binns (**EB**), Aberdeenshire Rural Housing Enabler, Fiona Munro (**FM**), CNPA Housing Policy Officer, Gillian Sinclair (**GS**), Ballater (RD) Ltd, Cearda McGregor (**CM**), Housing Manager Tenants First Co-operative, Ron Drever Ballater Resident and BOVOF (**RD**), Helen Barton, Albyn Housing Society Ltd (**HB**), Ronnie Macrae, the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust (**RB**), Judith Sutherland, Grampian Housing Association (**JS**), Brian Cumming and Lorraine Stewart , Aberdeenshire Council (**BC, LS**), Alan Harrison, Ballater resident and BRD Ltd (**AH**), Victor Jordon, Ballater Resident (**VJ**), Gail Robertson , Castlehill Housing Association (**Gail R**)

**Apologies:** Elaine Reid, Strategic Development Officer (Housing Strategy) Aberdeenshire Council, Alan Grant, Langstane Housing Association, Fiona Murray, Director of Development Castlehill Housing Association, Ed Taylor, The Prince's Foundation, Stuart Leslie, Colin Hawkins , Aberdeenshire Housing Partnership. Stuart Leslie, Ballater resident

	<b>Agenda item</b>	<b>Summary of discussion</b>	<b>Who</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Welcome and Introductions</b>	Gordon Riddler chaired the meeting and everyone introduced themselves.	All
<b>2</b>	<b>Minute of the 15 December 2009 meeting</b>	The minute was referred as the actions 1 & 3 related to this meeting which had been called to discuss maintaining sustainable communities using allocations policy or other means. FM explained that this meeting had been arranged as part of the actions emerging from the community action planning process in Ballater. The BOVOF action plan for Ballater has now been published and there are 5 actions for housing under the aim of 'to increase housing for rent and low cost home ownership over the next 5 years'. 1. To hold an open meeting to raise awareness of what is/could be available – a meeting was held on 2 July 2009. 2. To set up a Ballater housing partnership group and encourage local residents to be part of this – Phil Swan and Mike Preston volunteered for this along with	

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		<p>the agencies/partners. 2 meetings have been held 23<sup>rd</sup> September and 15 December 2009. At this meeting it was agreed that the next meeting would be held regarding maintaining sustainable communities relating to allocations policies. Action 3 – the community to look at researching the possibilities of setting up a housing trust with credible feasible options for development was why the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust was invited to attend both the open meeting and the meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> March. Action 4 – to approach local estates to identify opportunities for affordable housing for sale or rent with or without public subsidy. The Aberdeenshire Rural Housing Enabler, Emma Binns is working with Fiona Munro to identify these potential projects and land bank opportunities before discussing them with partners.</p>	
3	<b>Matters arising not on the agenda</b>	None	
4	<b>Discussion on different options for allocations policies</b>	<p>FM had circulated a paper written by PS the day before the meeting. FM suggested PS raise any issues within this document at the meeting especially if it related to allocations. A copy of the paper is attached. It includes a wider range of concerns than allocation policy alone, such as problems with affordable housing supply and definition of “need.”</p> <p>FM asked that each agency that had come along could tell the residents what they offered and the residents could ask questions. BC from AC began and explained that everything the local authority and registered social landlords (RSLs) or housing associations could do was based on 1987/2001 Housing (Scotland) Act. This meant that their housing policy was based on objective need and priority to preferential groups. The length of time for which an applicant has resided in the area cannot be taken into account. The LA can’t differentiate between 2 months and 2 years.</p> <p>The AC is going to be reviewing its allocations policy within the next 12 months and will be consulting with the</p>	

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		<p>relevant stakeholders. There will be a press release in 9/10 months time. BC would inform FM when this starts to that the Ballater group/community that can look at the policy as part of the process.</p> <p>CM explained that Tenants First Housing Co-operative operated a choice based lettings system in partnership with Castlehill HA. They have 5 houses in Ballater and have just allocated a new development in Aboyne. CM explained that RSLs may give a different amount of points for different types of need from the LA but they are bound by the same legislation. This includes a higher amount of points for homelessness or gold award in their system.</p> <p>CM has discussed with the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations the legality of local lettings initiatives. In doing so Tenants First looked at who they had housed and 60/70% had come from the local area ie within a 10 mile radius. CM gave the example of Aboyne where they were not just taking people from the top of the list but 50% nominations from the LA and 50% from the normal allocations policy. Within their 50% they had taken people from the high, medium and low categories and even some with no recognised need to ensure a good mix of people were housed. There is not one straightforward solution.</p> <p>JS explained that Grampian operate a different allocation policy which had high points for homelessness and overcrowding and went on to explain the new supply shared equity scheme. This is where a prospective owner can own part of a house with 51-80% mortgage, the government owned the rest. This depended on person circumstances and the criteria were different to those of social rented housing. JS also explained that local lettings initiatives can be agreed with communities for allocation to key priority groups like teacher in Aboyne Academy as they had had particular difficulty in finding accommodation. The shared equity schemes main criteria were first time buyers, those on lower incomes but they would have to have a detailed financial assessment to ensure they qualify. Also if there was an oversupply that there was a housing</p>	

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		<p>need.</p> <p>VJ asked the difference between a Local Lettings initiative and local connection. Local lettings dealt with separate criteria for a balanced community; local connections lies within a radius.</p> <p>Gail R explained that the SG was particularly unhelpful on this within the legislation in promoting balanced communities. RSLs had to satisfy the Housing Regulator that they were acting properly.</p> <p>HB explained that Albyn worked in many small rural communities and had monitored the outcome of allocations and the legislative constraints over the years with both the communities and THSCHT. Identifying local need cannot simply be about residency and only going to people in a local area. The LA and housing associations in Highland took a leap of faith and decided to have one allocations policy and a common housing register. This indicates what categories and allocates by preference and as previously stated can't allocate by length of residency. In Highland they don't have choice based lettings but a more traditional pointed based system. One of them includes a need to live in an area. This includes key workers, people who have had a leave an area and want to come back, give or receive support from someone in an area. Points for this do not override other priorities such as homelessness, high housing need and relate to zones (clusters of settlements). The housing supply is limited and the LA/RSLs want to try and get a reasonably balanced community. The Highland Council and RSLs are currently reviewing their allocations policy and allowing for special lettings plans – particularly in pressured areas. The 'Need to live in area points may be removed' as analysis of lettings had shown that 90% of allocations are to people who already live in the area. It is crucial how you look at the zone and the fact that someone is living there doesn't mean they need to live in the area. This also doesn't always pick up community development need (different for each area). Community lettings plans are sometimes more specific eg need school age children to</p>	

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		<p>keep the school from closing; key employers eg doctors, teachers. The plans are generally connected to some sort of employment, working age families and broad community sustainability. Highland partners are trying to develop a consistent common lettings policy with a quota system; where there is a minimum % in a scheme to meet a particular criteria. There won't be 100% lets to that one criteria. The Regulator seems quite comfortable with that and the Scottish Govt position is starting to shift given the work of allocations.</p> <p>Castlehill, Tenants First, Grampian and Langstane all give support for work reasons in policies its not a new criteria to award priority for that.</p> <p>BC stated that the relets from April 2006 – January 2009 indicated that 90% of allocations had previously had an address in Ballater or Marr. 5% of addresses in Aberdeenshire and 5% outwith Aberdeenshire. 62% were within the village and 28% in Marr.</p> <p>PS stated that the issue of “local need” had been incubating for some time in Ballater. There is a need to avoid confusing “need” and desire. Also, the needs of a sustainable community are distinct from individual needs. There need to be figures which stand up to rigorous scrutiny. PS estimated the current credible demand backlog is 30, with 12 affordable units annually and these figures come from Aberdeenshire Council and the CNPA's Heriot watt study. There is also a need to create sustainable communities and create a supply of housing with allocation of housing not just to people on welfare benefit. There should be freedom to allocate housing to key people or immigrants and that needs to be balanced with social need for access to affordable housing. We need to maintain a sustainable community. MP agreed and Ballater needed a supply of housing and new housing but that had to be within a framework.</p> <p>FM explained that the CNPA had had a local inquiry into the local plan which had reported in mid December 2009. There was an allocation in the deposit local plan for 250</p>	

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		<p>houses on site HI. This had raised objections from the residents and these had been discussed as part of the inquiry report. FM explained that there would be modifications going to the CNP Board in May 2010 and the timetable for this was on the CNP website. FM was unable to discuss individual cases.</p> <p>RD added that what he wanted was new business as well as new housing. The BOVOF project had highlighted what else the community needed such as dentist, doctor, housing and jobs. RD thought that perhaps the way forward was to look at the Trust type model. FM suggested it was time for RM of the THSCHT clarify their role.</p> <p>RM stated that the Trust was a small scale organisation which dealt with community needs, housing surveys and enabling people to access housing as well as lobbying RSLs and others. The local lettings initiative around 4/5 years ago had allowed the trust to provide 18 houses for key workers or those with special needs. Sometimes the houses are managed by RSLs and are for a range of needs rented, shared equity (similar to the low cost housing purchase scheme LIFT) but uses the rural housing burden to retain equity along with the government. Currently the Trust does provide plots for housing for sale without public subsidy. The land and all associated fees are at cost (needs to be below market value) to make it an affordable housing plot. The Trust has its own allocations guide depending on the needs that are defined. There can be a more specific allocation for each community and operates more like a private developer and landlord and give more scope outwith the area. The Trust is not subject to the right to buy or the legislation relating to the Housing Act. They are a Rural Housing body and are self sustaining. Funding comes through the Scottish Govt, Cairngorms National Park Authority, rural Housing Service and funding from charitable trusts. THSCHT does charge a development fee for work.</p> <p>JS pointed out that Kirkgate Holdings the private arm of Grampian HA and Langstane's Next Step Homes can do</p>	

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		<p>similar things.</p> <p>MP asked if the Trust thought that second/holiday homes should be omitted from developments. RM responded that it would not be advised as these homes fulfilled an economic and tourism benefit to areas especially those of a national park.</p> <p>There was a short discussion on the benefits of using infill sites and the threshold of percentages of affordable housing in different areas.</p>	
<b>5</b>	<b>Possibility of managing and maintaining empty/second homes</b>	<p>FM explained that as part of the BOVOF exercise a number of empty properties had been identified. RD had suggested approaching the owners to try and bring them into the affordable rented sector. EB pointed out that the question was asked as part of the survey however there were only 2 responses. RD had suggested trying to find alternative accommodation for the owner if they still wanted to visit Ballater to allow longer let times. JS pointed out that the Scottish Homes quality standard was coming into force in 2012 and properties have to be brought up to a certain standard this may make the costs prohibitive. HB suggested lead tenancies however these did have an onerous legal side. VJ asked if the RSLs bought existing properties? CM said that Tenants First did if the costs were appropriate and there were funds available to do so. GR said that Castlehill did not buy existing properties. BC explained that Aberdeenshire Council was looking for properties for a new private sector leasing scheme which would be launched soon.</p>	
<b>6</b>	<b>Future actions</b>	<p>The group felt that what was really important was the residents knew what they wanted. It was agreed that future actions were to find suitable land, what housing was really needed and funding options.</p>	
<b>7</b>	<b>AOCB</b>	None	
<b>8</b>	<b>Date of next meeting</b>	tba	All

### Action List prior to next meeting

No	Action	Who	When
1	PS suggested he circulate the link to a paper written by Shelter on compulsory lettings.	PS	completed
2	Hold a grant awareness seminar after RHS conference (REPG, RHR, no public subsidy)	EB/FMM/ Scottish Rural Property Business Association	March 2010
3	Contact Abergeldie Estate regarding renovating properties	PS	ASAP
4	Contact Glen Tanar regarding Inchmarnock	EB	ASAP
5	Any questions on the grant mechanisms please contact	EB or FM	As necessary
6	Approach Charitable Chiels, Becky Astle and Mr & Mrs Leslie to join BHP	GR, PS	Completed
7	Circulation of the finalised masterplan report from Princes Foundation to library, post office and members of the group	ET	Completed
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