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Busting Myths About Rural Affordable Housing

Affordable housing in rural County Durham is often misunderstood, leading to concerns and resistance that could prevent much-needed developments. By separating fact from fiction, we aim to encourage community leaders and residents to consider the benefits of affordable housing and how it can help their communities thrive.

Here are some common myths – and the truths behind them:

Myth 1: “There’s already plenty of new housing being built in County Durham. We don’t need more.”

Fact: There is approximately 10,000 people on the County Durham housing register but only 3,000 housing lets per year. The number on the register has increased by approximately 25% since 2020 as demand for social housing has increased due to cost of living pressures and there being less cheap private-rented accommodation.

While housing developments are happening, they often don’t address the affordability crisis, or are in urban areas, leaving local families without options to remain in their communities.

Myth 2: “There’s plenty of private rental housing for people to choose from.”

Fact: The private rental market isn’t always a viable solution. Many residents are **struggling to afford rents set by private landlords**, often inflated by the high demand caused by second homes and holiday lets. Affordable housing provides a more stable, reasonably priced alternative for local families.

Myth 3: “New homes will go to people from outside our area.”

Fact: On **Rural Exception Sites**, priority is given to people with strong local ties. This includes those who live, work, or have close family connections in the area. County Durham’s housing allocation system, **Durham Key Options**, follows government guidance to ensure that affordable homes in rural areas benefit local people first.

Myth 4: “Any new homes built will eventually be sold for profit.”

Fact: Homes built on Rural Exception Sites are **protected from the Right to Buy scheme**, meaning they will remain affordable in perpetuity. Housing Associations retain ownership, ensuring these homes continue to serve local communities for generations to come.

Myth 5: “Only people claiming benefits will benefit from affordable housing.”

Fact: Affordable housing is for a wide range of households, not just those claiming benefits. This includes key workers and people on lower wages, ensuring a mix of residents who contribute to the local economy and community.

Why Affordable Housing Matters for Rural Communities

The lack of affordable housing in rural areas doesn't just affect individuals – it threatens the vitality of entire communities. When families can't afford to stay, schools, shops, and services struggle to survive. Affordable housing ensures local people can live, work, and raise their families close to their roots, keeping villages vibrant and connected.

As a community leader, you have the power to guide discussions and planning that support sustainable development. Affordable housing isn't just a necessity – it's an investment in the future of rural County Durham.

Take Action Today

If you're interested in exploring affordable housing options for your area, consider:

- Engaging with Durham Community Action's **Rural Housing Enabler** Susan Tron MBE.
- Contact Durham Community Action to **review recent data** on housing needs in your community. (**Parish Profile**)
- Consider undertaking a **Housing Needs Survey** in your Parish to find out the extent of need in your area.
- Learning more about **Neighbourhood Plans** and how they can guide local development.

Together, we can ensure rural County Durham thrives for generations to come.