



Northumberland County Council

Exception Sites for Affordable Housing Guidelines

July 2024

This guidance note sets out further information about Exception Sites. Provisions are set out in Policy HOU 7 of the [Northumberland Local Plan](#) (March 2022).

Exception Sites

1. The NPPF provides for local authorities to support the development of 'windfall' Exception Sites. They use land that would not usually be used for housing development. Sites must be within or adjacent to, or otherwise well-related to an existing settlement. Exception Sites are specifically for the purposes of developing affordable homes where there is evidence of pressing local need. They must meet the Government's definition of affordable housing. This is set out in the glossary of the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF).
2. Exception Sites are provided for through the Local Plan in Policy HOU 7. Some Neighbourhood Plans also make specific policy provisions for Exception Sites.

Rural Exception Sites

3. Rural Exception Sites are defined in the NPPF and [Planning Practice Guidance](#) (PPG). They are specifically defined as being small sites. The Local Plan sets out that this corresponds to the threshold for being non-major development.
4. These affordable homes are for households who are either current local residents or have an existing family or employment connection to the particular area. For example, essential local workers. This is a more stringent test than simply identifying a need for affordable housing in the local area. The need should be clearly evidenced in a local housing needs assessment or other sufficiently robust local evidence.

5. A small proportion of market homes may be allowed on Rural Exception Sites. But only where the applicant shows them to be essential to facilitate the viable delivery of the predominant affordable element without the help of grant funding. Clear evidence should be set out in a detailed viability assessment. Where market housing is proposed on a Rural Exception Site, the appropriate number of market homes will be considered on a case-by-case basis but the affordable housing should always be the predominant element. Policy HOU 7 requires any market homes element to be restricted to occupation as a principal residence only. They cannot be used as second homes or holiday let accommodation. This ensures the new homes support the sustainability of the community and the viability of local services.

Entry Level Exception Sites

6. The Local Plan provides for Entry-level Exception Sites, providing affordable homes for first-time buyers and renters. This is set out in Policy HOU 7 (part 1) and in the supporting text at paragraph 7.47. The Government has now replaced the Entry-level Exception Sites concept with First Homes Exception Sites. The transitional arrangements period for submitting and determining planning applications for Entry-level Exception Sites has now expired. However, as the statutory Local Plan policy provides for them, proposals for this form of exception site could still be supported in some circumstances.

First Homes Exception Sites

7. First Homes are a form of affordable housing just for first-time buyers. Government policy on First Homes is set out in the [PPG](#). A separate Government resource about the [First Homes Scheme](#) includes stakeholder guidance notes, template sales documents and a model S106 agreement.
8. First Homes Exception Sites are supported in areas where the need for such homes is not already being met within the county through existing commitments and development plan allocations. They should be located adjacent to existing settlements. They must also be proportionate to the size of the existing settlement.
9. First Homes Exception Sites are not allowed in National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) or on Green Belt land. Nor can they take

place in other 'designated rural areas' (see Appendix A). Rural Exception Sites are the only form of Exception Site that can come forward in these areas.

10. Other affordable housing product tenures can be included in the housing mix on First Homes Exception Sites, but only where a significant local need exists for them. This should be evidenced in a local housing needs assessment, from the Council's Housing Register or other sufficiently rigorous local evidence. First Homes should still be the predominant form of affordable housing on the site.
11. First Homes Exception Sites can also provide a small proportion of market homes. But the applicant must show them to be necessary to help ensure the viability of the site in the absence of grant funding. Clear evidence should be set out in a detailed viability assessment.

Community-led Development Exception Sites

12. The [NPPF](#) now also provides for Exception Sites for community-led development. They should be adjacent to existing settlements and proportionate in size to them – they cannot be more than 1ha in size or exceed 5% of the size of the existing settlement.
13. They can provide one of more tenures of affordable housing. A small proportion of market homes may be allowed on such Exception Sites. For example, where essential to enable the delivery of the predominant affordable housing element. Clear evidence should be set out in a detailed viability assessment.

Self-build and custom-build housing on Exception Sites

14. Policy HOU 7 (part 3) supports self and custom-build homes and community-led housing **as part of the mix on Rural Exception Sites**. They could also form part of First Homes Exception Sites and Community-led Development Exception Sites. To be regarded as an 'affordable home' for planning purposes, a self or custom-build home must meet the Government's definition of affordable housing. See our separate note on Delivering Affordable Housing via Self-build and Custom Housebuilding.
15. **Exception Sites are not for solely self and custom-build homes that do not meet the NPPF definition of affordable housing.**

Appendix A: Designated Rural Areas in Northumberland

Designated Rural Areas are those designated by Order of the Secretary of State as 'rural' under [section 157 of the Housing Act 1985](#). Legal advice confirms that, for the purposes of these national policy provisions, these areas are only those designated within [The Housing \(Right to Buy\) \(Designated Rural Areas and Designated Regions\) \(England\) Order 1981](#) (Statutory Instrument 1981/397). The spatial areas covered by these designations is delineated as per the geographical mapped extents of their district, borough and parish boundaries at the time that this 1981 Order was made. This is irrespective of any more recent boundary changes, mergers, sub-divisions or renaming.

The 'designated rural areas' in Northumberland are listed below. They can be viewed on the interactive online [Local Plan Policies Map](#) (under the Administrative Boundaries layers).

- Northumberland National Park
- Northumberland Coast AONB (now known as National Landscapes)
- North Pennines AONB (now known as National Landscapes)
- In the former District of Alnwick, the parishes (delineated as per their 1981 boundaries) of:

Acklington	Glanton
Hauxley (boundary with Amble now amended)	Hedgeley
Netherton	Rennington
Togston	
- The former Borough of Berwick-upon-Tweed (with the exception of the parish and former municipal borough of Berwick-upon-Tweed) – i.e. the parishes (delineated as per their 1981 boundaries) of:

Adderstone with Lucker	Akeld
Ancroft	Bamburgh
Beadnell	Belford (now merged with Middleton and Easington)
Bewick	Bowsden
Branxton	Carham
Chatton	Chillingham
Cornhill on Tweed	Doddington
Duddo	Earle
Easington (now merged with Belford parish)	Ellingham
Ewart	Ford
Holy Island	Horncliffe
Ilderton	Ingram
Kilham	Kirknewton
Kyloe	Lilburn
Lowick	Middleton (now merged with Belford parish)
Milfield	Norham
North Sunderland	Ord
Roddam	Shoreswood
Wooler	Wark on Tweed (now merged with Carham parish)

[The Borough of Berwick-upon-Tweed was formed on 1 April 1974, by the merger of the previous municipal borough of Berwick-upon-Tweed with the former Belford Rural District, Glendale Rural District and Norham & Islandshires Rural District. But the former municipal borough of Berwick-upon-Tweed (now the parish of Berwick-upon-Tweed) is specifically excluded from the 'designated rural areas' Order. So it is just the areas of these latter three former districts that form these 'designated rural areas'.]