

## Community Action Norfolk

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Community Action Norfolk is the leading organisation for engagement with the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector in Norfolk. We work closely with VCSE organisations; Norfolk County Council and other partners to build the positive relationships needed to collaboratively develop strategy, policy and services.

For us, VCSE engagement is about gathering your ideas, issues and challenges and bringing them together with those of other VCSE organisations and stakeholders to create a positive dialogue, so we can collaboratively find ways to make Norfolk stronger and fairer.

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### Community Action Norfolk

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# Affordable housing for local people in rural communities

And how your  
Rural Housing Enabler  
can help



**Last year the government unveiled their Unleashing Rural Opportunity strategy, and included in this was an announcement to provide funding for a network of Rural Housing Enablers across England, until March 2025.**

As the strategy detailed,

**“We are:**

Supporting the provision of rural homes for local people through our Rural Exception Sites policy which allows for the development of small affordable housing sites in rural areas where housing would not normally be permitted, with the majority of housing on these sites being available to local people in perpetuity.”

And,

**“We will:**

Fund a network of Rural Housing Enablers across England with £2.5 million. This will boost the supply of new, affordable housing by identifying development opportunities, supporting site owners and community representatives to navigate the planning system and securing the support of local communities for developments.”

[You can read the full report here: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/unleashing-rural-opportunity](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/unleashing-rural-opportunity)]



**What is a Rural Exception Site?**

Rural Exception Sites are small sites located on the edge of existing rural settlements. They allow land to be provided below market value for residential development – provided it is used to build affordable housing for local people.

They are not allocated within local authority’s adopted development plans and would not normally be considered for residential development.

Their purpose is to enable the building of affordable homes in rural areas with the aim of addressing local housing need and sustaining rural communities.

The charitable organisation ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England), were given responsibility to deliver the programme, and in Norfolk ACRE member Community Action Norfolk successfully bid to complete the work locally.

Richard Quallington, ACRE’s Executive Director said: “The decision by the government to back Rural Housing Enablers is hugely positive news as it will mean many more communities across England can access independent support and advice to help them appraise the need for affordable homes locally, navigate complicated planning rules and work with more socially minded developers to bring forward suitable schemes.”

**The Rural Housing Enabler**

So, how exactly can a Rural Housing Enabler help support interested communities?

Well, they can help build community support, independently encouraging constructive engagement throughout the process,

- they can help communities understand what their housing need is, by carrying out surveys of local people on their behalf
- they can help identify suitable sites for development if there is a need and desire to do so, *and*
- they can help bring key partners together to turn plans into new affordable homes for local people.

**What next?**

If you think that your community could benefit from new affordable homes for local people then the next step to take is to get in contact with the Rural Housing Enabler, Simon Swanson, details as below. He’ll explain the process further to ensure you understand what’s involved and then you can decide what to do next.

**Simon Swanson**  
**Rural Housing Enabler**

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