

A Tour of Rural Exception Sites in Cambridgeshire

An evaluation of the tour on Tuesday 3 July 2018

Cambridgeshire ACRE undertook its fourth annual 'Myth Buster Tour' of rural exception sites during Rural Housing Week. The event was run on behalf of the Cambridgeshire Rural Affordable Housing Partnership and as part of the Support Cambridgeshire programme. The event was also supported by Huntingdonshire DC and South Cambridgeshire DC.

Thirty four delegates attended the event. This included one County Councillor, five District Councillors and 13 Parish Councillors from across three Local Authority areas. Six of our partner Housing Associations attended at least part of the event to help answer questions and share experiences. There were also representatives from Huntingdonshire DC and South Cambridgeshire DC alongside Cambridgeshire ACRE staff.

Nineteen evaluation forms were collected including views from all District and Parish Councils present.

The event ran a waiting list. By the time of the event this was negligible but this may be partly due to the IT booking system which closed bookings when full and required potential delegates to phone up to be added to the waiting list. It seems likely that there remains unmet demand for the tour.

Meeting expectations

The event was rated very highly by delegates. The event scored an average 4.74 rating (scoring options ranging from 1 – 5). All delegates rated the event a '4' or '5'.

Expectations from the event were similar across delegates. Most focused on gaining a better understanding of the affordable housing system, appreciating design, scale and other issues in relation to rural exception sites in particular, and seeing how this approach could be applied to their community.

All delegates felt that their expectations had been met. Comments included?

- *yes, I now understand and appreciate the economics of affordable housing in rural context*
- *yes - pleasantly so, especially the scheme with the new 'barn'*
- *good opportunities to meet residents and professionals and learn how it has worked*

Most useful and least useful parts of the event

Views on the most useful parts of the programme were divided. Some commented on the benefit of being able to see 'real' schemes and appreciate how they fitted into their context.

- *seeing the great range of design solutions possible*
- *to see the range of 'looks' depending on site/ developer*
- *to see interesting design layouts*

Others commented on the opportunity to talk to staff involved in developing rural exception sites.

- *many very well informed people*
- *meeting people/ contacts*

- *being able to talk to experts from partner organisations*

No parts of the programme were considered to be of little value. A couple of respondents suggested that too many schemes were fitted into the programme. There were also a couple of comments that the inclusion of undeveloped sites added relatively little to the tour.

Taking action

Several of the delegates committed to reporting back to their Parish Council about the visit and/or raising the possibility of pursuing a rural exception site in their community. A couple of direct requests were made to the RHE about visiting Parish Councils to discuss matters further. Many of the Parish Councils present are already engaged at various stages of the pipeline for developing a rural exception site. The event has been useful for them by providing confidence that they can achieve a positive outcome. The event is also likely to produce some new leads for the RHE.

What could have worked better?

The limited negative comments received largely focused on logistical issues. The nature of the programme meant there was no coffee/ comfort break. Some delegates would have preferred a less bread/ carbohydrate based lunch. There was also an issue with the coach driver's sat nav which resulted in about 10 minutes being wasted on a detour around Huntingdon.

Planning ahead

The following ideas could address some of the issues raised and further exploit the strengths of the programme:

- change the timing of the event to include lunch in the middle of the programme. This would also enable a comfort break to be incorporated
- use the lunch venue to set up a display of a recent scheme so delegates can look at designs, space standards, sustainability issues etc
- this middle part of the tour could also be used as a 'market place' where interested parties could visit and meet members of the partnership
- reduce number of schemes on tour to four?

Summing up

The overall response was extremely positive. This is reflected in the following selected comments in response to the question – *'How would you sum up this event in a word or sentence?'*

- Educational
- definitely silenced some of the myths
- eye opening. Myths were busted!
- most worthwhile
- an enjoyable and informative event. Well worth the time spent on it
- very informative
- useful!
- interesting and very surprised at spaciousness of the small development

- informative and useful
- well worth attending - many thanks
- great encouragement to get affordable housing in the village for our children and their generation
- an eye opener on what can be achieved
- all members with involvement in planning should catch the next one

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Cambridgeshire ACRE

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