



**Rural Housing Enabler  
Role Pack  
January 2024**

## 1. Introduction



**Dear applicant**

### **Rural Housing Enabler**

Thank you for expressing interest in our new team member role!

This is an exciting opportunity to join a small expanding team to help deliver much needed rural affordable housing across Sussex.

We hope you find this job pack helpful in making your application. In **Section 2** there is an outline of the work that we have done historically, and our plans for this new initiative, which has been made possible by funding we are receiving from The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) / Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE).

We want to hear from candidates who have an interest in rural communities, a passion for the delivery of affordable housing, commitment, and relevant project management skills / experience. The Job Description and Person Specification can be found in **Section 3**.

I hope that you will find enclosed all of the information you need to assist you to make an application. If you haven't already discovered our websites, I would encourage you to have a browse as they contain a range of useful information about AirS the organisation – please see: <https://www.ruralsussex.org.uk/> and our Housing Hub Service – please see: <https://www.sussexcommunityhousinghub.org/>

I want to emphasise that we operate flexible working arrangements - home / office and days by agreement. Days will be governed by external meetings to a large extent – which will include evenings and occasional weekends. We are keen to involve the successful candidate in other aspects of community led housing work, which we hope in time will enable more hours / days to be offered. The contract is a fixed term for one year initially, but the intention is to extend this.

Completed applications must be received by **9am on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024** – either by post or email. **Section 4** of this pack sets out the timetable for our decision-making process.

All applications must be submitted Tom Warder, Action in rural Sussex 16 Market Street, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 2NB OR by email to [recruitment@ruralsussex.org.uk](mailto:recruitment@ruralsussex.org.uk).

If you'd like to chat informally about the role, please give me a call on **07932 743403**.

I look forward to receiving your application.

**Tom Warder**

**Community Led Housing Manager & Interim CEO**

## **2. Our work and future plans**

Action in rural Sussex (AirS) re-instated a Rural Housing Enabling (RHE) service in September 2023, building on many years of successful RHE delivery and the current activity of the Sussex Community Housing Hub. The Service will cover the whole of rural Sussex and involve partnership working across seven District Councils: Rother, Wealden, Lewes in East Sussex and Mid-Sussex, Horsham, Arun, and Chichester in West Sussex.

### **Work to date**

AirS has a long track record of supporting rural communities with the provision of affordable housing to meet local needs, having been one of the first to employ a Rural Housing Enabler back in the 1990's. The RHE service was launched in earnest in 2006 with a Senior RHE and two part time RHE's working across East and West Sussex. This ran for ten years during which time the service enabled the provision of 17 rural affordable housing schemes and circa 275 homes, almost all of which were on rural exception sites.

During this time AirS also developed expertise in providing technical advice and support in relation to community led housing and in 2017 the Sussex Community Housing Hub was formed. The Hub has since provided support to some 30 groups and projects, mainly Community Land Trusts and two Cohousing groups. This work still encompasses rural housing enabling as detailed in the baseline data provided. To date, The Hub has enabled the delivery of one completed CLT scheme of 15 homes with two others currently on site and two more due to start on site early next year.

From September 2023 we have re-allocated existing staff resource towards the RHE programme by employing Graham Maunders as a part time Senior RHE for 2 days a week. This is in addition to the existing 10 hours a week given over to RHE work already provided by both the current Community Led Housing Adviser and Housing Manager / Interim CEO.

### **Future plans**

From April 2024 we intend to recruit an additional – new – RHE employed for 3 days per week to work alongside the Senior RHE and Housing Manager. At this time the Senior RHE will reduce to one day per week, through to the end of the programme period.

The role of the RHE will be focussed on the delivery of local needs affordable housing across the parishes of rural Sussex. This will be a distinct but complementary role to the technical advice and support provided in terms of community led housing within the Sussex Housing Hub. The team (Tom Warder, Graham Maunders, and Polly Eason) are fully accredited CLH advisers and have considerable knowledge skills and experience in rural housing delivery.

When engaging with communities about housing, our approach has always been to provide them with all the information they need to make an informed decision about what is best for them. This 'honest broker' role has always been central to the that of an RHE. We will continue to do this offering parish councils and others a range of options towards meeting local needs for affordable housing. We will now be in a much better position to be able to offer a more straightforward route for delivery with dedicated support from the RHE service.

There will be those who wish to go down the community led route by forming a Community Land Trust, Co-operative or Cohousing group and seeking to acquire land and bring it into community ownership. In this instance, the Hub will work directly with them to provide that specific technical advice and support. For the rest we will provide the full range of RHE support towards the delivery of rural affordable housing. This approach allows for maximum resources to be deployed in the early stages of engagement across the parishes whilst ensuring a clear delivery pathway is identified early on in the process.

## **RHE Service Delivery**

The service will include all aspects of rural housing enabling including the following:

**Raising awareness of the issues.** The chronic shortage of affordable housing in rural areas huge affordability gap here in the southeast and the knock-on effects for village life. These issues are well rehearsed and increasingly recognised but there is still a key role in overcoming local objections and securing support for rural housing as a crucial ingredient in supporting sustainable rural communities. This is in the context of how rural housing is considered and received at a community level. (There is also a wider awareness raising role amongst key stakeholders detailed below.)

**Increasing our capacity to deliver Housing Needs Surveys (HNS)** We have a well-established process for undertaking these surveys which provide the core evidence of need required to underpin a scheme. We produce around three a year currently, but demand is ever present for these invaluable reports. Having a senior RHE able to transfer this well-honed knowledge and skill set to an incoming RHE will enable an enhanced and seamless offer. Consequently we intend to scale up the number of HNSs undertaken.

**Identifying and appraising of sites.** This is about supporting landowners of various kinds as well as town and parish councils to both identify and then assess sites in their locality as to their suitability for a rural scheme. We have a site appraisal process tailored to rural settlements and rural exception sites in particular which has proved very effective. We will further develop this alongside our existing and new partners within the Sussex Rural Affordable Housing Partnership (SRAHP) and network of Local Authority planning contacts.

**Developing partnerships.** Central to the RHE service will be our renewed alliances with Registered Housing Providers (RPs) with whom we will collaborate to enable rural housing delivery. The RHE as central conduit in the process we know to be hugely valued by our RP partners, acting as the interface between community and delivery partner. All of the RPs we have engaged thus far have responded positively to our invitation to the SRAHP.

**Community consultations and effective communications.** Working with communities to build and maintain support for the scheme, ensuring the community is meaningfully engaged throughout the pre-development process. Engaging communities can be challenging given the emotive nature of local development but this very much comes with the role and is an aspect that requires clear and calm communications, early dialogue and regularly provided updates to ease concerns and reduce the spread of misinformation. It is also about confidently relaying the long-term community benefits of local needs housing.

**Support Neighbourhood Plan and Community Led Planning groups:** There has been a strong uptake of Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDP) in Sussex which AirS has been closely involved with for over ten years, having worked on some 45 NDPs during this time. The RHE service will make full use of these connections and working relationships to identify opportunities and to help implement NDP proposals and policies for delivering rural affordable housing. AirS is also embarking on a new Community Led Planning (CLP) offer which includes Neighbourhood or Parish Priority Statements. These are mini NDPs or Parish Plans which offer a light touch alternative towards the gathering of community priorities. Again, it is intended that these will serve as a means by which to engage communities in taking positive action to address local needs, including those for affordable housing.

**Promotion, publicity, and awareness raising.** Aside from community-based activity there is an ever present need to create a supportive planning policy framework and political environment for rural affordable housing. This will include promotional activity and regular engagement with all our local authority partners via briefing sessions and awareness raising events with both officers and members. To include authorities and organisations covering the protected landscapes of Sussex (South Downs National Park and High Weald AONB) as well as landowners, land agents and Registered Providers as and when appropriate.

## **Governance and Strategic Partnership**

Line management of the RHEs will be undertaken by Tom Warder, Interim CEO and Community Led Housing Manager. Governance of the RHE programme will rest with Tom and AirS as the employer as has been the case with all RHE and Community Led Housing (CLH) Adviser posts to date.

We will be re-launching the Sussex Rural Affordable Housing Partnership (SRAHP) as an advisory group which meets quarterly to review progress on RHE delivery, share best practice and advise on the RHE programme. We will facilitate the Partnership group to unlock local barriers at strategic or scheme level to ensure schemes progress to build and completion.

All seven local authorities: Arun, Chichester, Horsham, Mid Sussex, Lewes, Wealden, Rother, plus the South Downs National Park Authority, East Sussex Association of Local Councils (ESALC), West Sussex Association of Local Councils (WSALC), and Homes England have agreed in principle to join the new partnership.

The SRAHP originated in 2005 and later became the Sussex Housing Hub Steering Group up until 2021. Since this time, the Sussex Hub has engaged directly with Local Authority and RP partners on an individual basis to monitor progress instead of via a whole group structure. The revised SRAHP terms of reference are appended below. Membership of this group has been *sought* from existing and new contacts and is referenced in the same document.

## **Outcomes and outputs**

The key rural housing outcomes and outputs Action in rural Sussex are seeking to achieve are:

1. Progress towards completion for existing schemes in the 'baseline' pipeline.
2. An increase in the size of the delivery 'pipeline' of rural housing schemes.
3. Improved information on the national picture for delivering rural housing.
4. Better insight into 'blockers' to rural housing developments and how these might be addressed.
5. Evidence as to the value added provided by Rural Housing Enablers.

### 3. Job Description / Person Specification

**Job Description: Rural Housing Enabler**

**Grade: Starting at Scale Point 36**

**Salary Scale: Starting at £35,147 (pro rata)**

**Term: 1 year fixed initially (which we intend to extend)**

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**AirS Strategic Aim:**

**Purpose of the post:**

To provide a Rural Housing Enabling service across Sussex, offering advice, support, and identifying solutions for communities to deliver locally affordable housing.

Engage and work in partnership with communities / community leaders, parish councils, district and county authorities, landowners, developers, housing organisations, agents, planners, and other partners to bring forward rural affordable housing projects across East and West Sussex.

Working in conjunction with other members of the Sussex Community Housing Hub (SCHH) Team to deliver locally affordable housing – through rural exception sites, community led housing initiatives, Section 106 provision, existing property acquisition and regeneration.

**Accountable to:** Community Led Housing Manager / Interim CEO

**Staff responsibilities:** None

**Key Accountabilities:** The post-holder will be responsible as follows:

#### **Overview**

- Work with the Senior Rural Housing Enabler and Community Led Housing Manager in the delivery of rural affordable housing.
- Undertake rural housing enabling work with communities to raise awareness and increase the provision of rural affordable housing schemes across Sussex.
- Explain the range of rural affordable housing options available to communities.
- Build skills and capacity within communities by providing and /or facilitating training opportunities, support, guidance, and advice to communities in relation to rural housing.
- Carry out research including assisting with Housing Needs Surveys with local communities to assess and determine the nature and extent of local housing needs.
- Provide support to the Senior Rural Housing Enabler in the co-ordination of the Sussex Rural Housing Partnership / Hub Advisory group.
- Explore new and innovative housing initiatives particularly using sustainable and modern methods of construction, supporting community participation in the process.
- To work with the Sussex Housing Hub team to raise awareness and improve the profile of rural and community led housing across Sussex through management of the SCHH website, articles, case studies and organising events and activities as part of a communications and publicity programme.

- Provide presentations, support training and workshops.
- Maintain a database of enquiries, groups, stakeholders, and projects up to date.
- Monitor and review reports and updates as required for both internal and external stakeholder reporting.

### **Main tasks and responsibilities**

- To encourage and enable rural communities and their parish councils to provide more locally affordable housing.
- Work with the Senior Rural Housing Enabler to support, advise and steer communities and local councils from their initial interest in providing local affordable housing, through scheme inception and pre-development phases, to practical completion.
- Assist the Senior Rural Housing Enabler in undertaking housing needs surveys and present the results back to parish councils and community members so that they fully understand local housing needs in their parish.
- Support rural communities to choose a delivery option that best suits their capacity and in the knowledge of the availability of local technical support.
- Assist communities identify a deliverable site for development of affordable housing and/or secure affordable housing as part of market led schemes.
- Support the Sussex Rural Housing Partnership Work to enable the preparation and delivery of an annual workplan, providing quarterly partnership meeting progress reports to inform RHE work prioritisation.
- Raise awareness of the need for rural affordable housing by visiting communities and attending parish council meetings and events to provide information and give an overview of the rural housing enabling work to encourage support for housing.
- Work with, encourage, and enable rural communities, parish councils, landowners, developers, and other relevant agencies, including undertaking 'calls for land' to identify suitable sites for affordable housing to meet local needs.
- Work with RPs and communities to build and maintain support for development schemes, ensuring the community is meaningfully engaged throughout the pre-development process and during the scheme design by attend parish meetings and arranging for consultation to take place.
- Build collaborative relationships with key partners including communities / community leaders, parish councils, RP's, local authority housing and planning staff, land agents and developers to support effective partnership approaches to enabling work.
- Deliver training for local communities, parish councillors, local authority officers and councillors, landowners, land agents and RPs on delivery of rural affordable housing and the RHE service.
- Produce quality communications that raise the profile of rural affordable housing including keeping the website pages up to date, using social media, producing case studies, promoting key reports and best practice, effective consultations with communities and partners.

- Attend events organised by other Rural Housing Enablers, Regional Hubs, and national bodies such as ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) to ensure understanding, sharing and dissemination of good practice across the UK.
- Work with the Sussex Community Housing Hub team to actively seek and bid for additional revenue and capital funding for affordable housing schemes.

### **General duties**

- Provide an excellent service internally and externally.
- Maintain confidentiality of information acquired in the course of undertaking duties.
- Be responsible for continuous Learning. In particular to keep appraised of policy, legislative developments and best practice that are relevant to the post, updating AirS policies and practices accordingly.
- Undertake appropriate training, personal and professional development. (RHE Training will be provided by Action for Communities in Rural England - ACRE - periodically)

### **Health & Safety:**

- To uphold AirS Health and Safety requirements, particularly by following agreed codes of practice and safe methods of working.
- To fulfil personal responsibilities with regard to AirS' Health & Safety and Risk Policies.
- To comply with the Health & Safety policies and arrangements which are in place to ensure that staff and others are safe, and communication is effective.

### **Equal Opportunities:**

- To uphold AirS policies relating to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.

### **Statement of Flexibility:**

- Attend and participate in AirS (and associated bodies) events and staff meetings.
- This job description sets out the duties of the post at the time when it was drawn up. Such duties may vary from time to time without changing the general character of the duties or the level of responsibility entailed. Such variations are a common occurrence. The post holder will be expected to carry out other related duties and responsibilities as may reasonably be requested.
- Staff team-working and individual personal development are key to AirS' success in delivering its business aims and objectives. All staff will therefore be expected to have a flexible attitude in responding to new priorities and opportunities as they arise.
- The post holder will be expected to continuously develop their skills and experience.

### **Hours per week:**

21 hours a week

### **Location:**

- The post is based in Sussex with an office in Lewes. We operate hybrid home / office working.



## Person Specification: Rural Housing Enabler

Criteria	Essential	Desirable
<b>Education and qualifications</b>	Level 3 Qualification or above ideally a degree in a relevant subject - housing, planning, geography, community development or equivalent demonstrable qualification and work experience.	Post graduate degree or certificate in relevant subject - housing, planning, and community development.  Membership of the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) or Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS).
<b>Knowledge, skills and abilities</b>	<p>Knowledge and understanding of affordable housing issues, policies, funding, and delivery.</p> <p>Experience of community development and engagement to develop strong and productive working relationships with local communities.</p> <p>Experience of building and sustaining successful partnerships.</p> <p>Excellent written and verbal communication skills with the ability to communicate effectively with a wide variety of audiences.</p> <p>Strong social media skills.</p> <p>Ability to manage multiple projects.</p> <p>Strong numeracy &amp; IT skills (Microsoft Office, Word, PowerPoint, Excel) including use of databases &amp; spreadsheets.</p>	<p>Working knowledge of different forms of rural housing including Community Led Housing.</p> <p>An understanding of current policies and issues related to housing in rural communities.</p> <p>Knowledge of affordable housing funding and development.</p> <p>Marketing and promotions experience.</p> <p>Excellent administrative skills.</p> <p>Strong analytical skills.</p> <p>Political astuteness and sensitivity.</p>

<p><b>Experience</b></p>	<p>Minimum of 2 years working in housing – development or management, community development or similar areas of work.</p> <p>Experience of project management and delivery of projects within tight timescales.</p> <p>Experience of working with local authorities, parish councils, housing associations and similar organisations.</p> <p>Experience of working with community groups and, organisations.</p>	<p>Experience of housing development practice and process.</p> <p>Experience of establishing community groups.</p> <p>Experience of working in the not-for-profit sector.</p> <p>Experience of rural housing.</p> <p>Experience of Community Land Trusts or other Community Led Housing models.</p>
<p><b>Personal attributes</b></p>	<p>Proactive, enthusiastic, flexible, and committed to providing a professional service.</p> <p>High integrity with an open, honest, and objective style.</p> <p>Diplomatic, with excellent interpersonal skills.</p> <p>Ability to build relationships quickly and communicate effectively with a wide range of audiences, organisations, and individuals.</p> <p>Willingness and ability to work outside normal office hours and across multiple sites.</p> <p>Strong problem-solving skills and ‘can do’ attitude.</p> <p>An empathy with the housing needs of communities across the county.</p> <p>Ability to work as part of a team.</p>	<p>A commitment to sustainability in the context of housing and development.</p>
<p><b>Other</b></p>	<p>Driving licence or access to private means of transport or ability to demonstrate how they will meet this requirement</p>	

## **4. Selection and Interview process**

### **Timetable**

Job advertisement – 22nd January to 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Submission closure date – 19th February 2024

Short listing – week commencing: 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Shortlisting will be undertaken using the job description / person specification as the criteria.

Interviews – week commencing: 26<sup>th</sup> February 2024

### **Interview**

Interviews will be conducted by a panel comprising:

Tom Warder - Community Led Housing Manager & Interim CEO

Graham Maunders - Community Led Housing Advisor / Senior Rural Housing Enabler

To be Agreed – AirS Board Member

Candidates will be asked to undertake a 10-minute PowerPoint presentation at the start of the interview on a subject to be notified in advance.

## **5. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

We welcome applications from everyone and value diversity in our workforce.

To help us to monitor and review the success of our recruitment process we ask all applicants to complete our monitoring form which can be accessed via the following link:

[AirS Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Monitoring Form](#)