

TEXT OF EMAILS ON LOCAL LETTINGS INITIATIVES

Dear Mr Swan (30/3/09)

Your enquiry about local lettings schemes has been forwarded for my attention - I am sorry I have not been able to respond sooner.

I do not know the background to this development or which social housing providers in Aberdeenshire will be involved with this application, and so I can only respond in very general terms.

You are correct that housing associations and local authorities across Scotland have to work within the same legal framework, which places specific restrictions on residency or length of residence being taken into account in allocations. Guidance notes on the legislation are available on the Scottish Government website at the following link <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2002/02/10659/File-1>

At Albyn we take our commitment to maintaining balanced and sustainable communities very seriously. We recognise the current policy is an issue for rural communities where there is limited land available for development combined with a local housing need. However, as a housing association we have to make sure our allocations policy does not break the laws on direct and indirect discrimination. Under new Scottish housing legislation we are prohibited from prioritising an individual or family for the sole reason that they live in a village or town.

Although it cannot be the sole reason for making an allocation, we, along with other partners to The Highland Housing Register, want to ensure that an applicant's need to live in a particular area gets taken into account. Therefore, one of the factors used to score an application is a "recognition of local connection". To obtain these points people need to demonstrate their requirement to live in the area, such as because they currently live there or for employment, medical or support reasons. It is not as simple as residency alone, however. The new policy approach aims to provide a more even balance between meeting the needs of geographical communities against the pressures of addressing very high housing needs for individuals across all areas of the Highlands. I think it is fair to say that whilst the new points have generally been very successful in ensuring broader local needs are taken into account at the point of allocation, bearing in mind that local applicants with relatively low levels of housing need may still be outweighed by more urgent housing needs of other applicants .

The local connection points within the new allocations policy have largely superseded our former Local Lettings Initiatives. We are discussing with our colleagues on the Highland Housing Register group whether a common approach to Community Lettings Plans is now required.

It is likely that if a community simply identifies a number of unmet individual housing needs locally, this in itself will not lead to a community lettings plan, as these will be

met through the main Highland Housing Register allocations policy, in particular the application of the "community connection" points. However, if the community identifies an "imbalance" over and above the individual needs – a shortage of particular employment skills or a disproportionate balance of retired people, for example - a community lettings plan may then become relevant, subject to the evidence available through a community needs or local planning assessment.

You would need to discuss with the social providers in your won area whether this is an approach that they would be willing to consider.

We are aware that the Cairngorm National Park Board place great emphasis on new housing within the park being able to meet local needs. They have also devised their own 'toolkit' to assist communities in identifying their community (as distinct from personal housing) needs. The Housing Policy officer at the Park Board will no doubt be able to provide you with further information regarding this.

I hope this information is useful to you.

With regards

From: Phil Swan [mailto:pjswan@gmail.com]

Sent: 05 March 2009 17:19

To: yz office at Albyn

Subject: Message for Natasha Shearer re Local Lettings Initiative

Dear Ms Shearer,

We spoke earlier this afternoon.

I am a resident of Ballater, in Aberdeenshire, inside the Cairngorms National Park area. I am also one of about 20 registered objectors to the CNP Local Plan designation of land for the construction of 250 new houses, some of which are to be affordable, on the edge of the village. Our reasons for objection to this designation are wide ranging and not central to my inquiry.

One of our main concerns is the fact that, as we understand the current situation, both Aberdeenshire Council and housing associations in general are bound by the same rules for allocation of affordable housing, specifically that preferential treatment of "local people" is not permitted.

Having only very recently become aware of the concept of "local lettings initiative", I would like to know if you can help me to understand better if and how it might offer some way for the Ballater community to achieve its desire for more affordable housing for local people.

I would be very grateful for your urgent response as to whether you think there is any possibility of achieving this.

Please let me know asap if you need any further information about the Ballater situation. My contact details are:

013397-55345

07977-561035

pjswan@gmail.com

30 Monaltrie Avenue, Ballater, AB35 5RX

I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Regards,

Phil Swan

Helen Barton

Housing & Communities Director

Albyn Housing Society Ltd

98-100 High Street

Invergordon

Ross-shire

IV18 0DL

A Scottish Charity - No: SC027123

Phone: 01349 855970

Mobile: 07712 140 864

Fax: 01349 853 859

Email: helen.barton@albynhousing.org.uk

Web: www.albynhousing.org.uk

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