**Briefing Note from the Exmoor LCN Housing Sub Group Meeting (14th May 2026)**

The working group met on Thursday 14th May as a hybrid meeting, hosted by Exmoor National Park Authority and joined virtually by some members of the group.

Approved notes of the meeting shall be circulated to the LCN in due course. This note is intended as a quick briefing on some of the key points raised.

In the light of the Councils recently published **housing development strategy**, Duncan Smith from Homes in Somerset had been invited; he indicated he was unable to attend this time but would be pleased to come to a future meeting. In his absence, there was some discussion of the merits of Council housing being developed in deeply rural areas and recognition that this might not be as long term as Housing Association development because of the **Right To Buy**; however the group took some comfort from the knowledge that RTB is now further restricted (in terms of qualification and level of discount) and any Council investment protected by the 'cost floor'.

Colin McDonald, Rural Housing Enabler for Exmoor (Somerset)and Ruth McArthur, Policy and Community Manager (ENPA) gave an update on the **Exmoor-wide Housing Survey.** Key points:

- A collaboration between Somerset and North Devon Councils and ENPA.
- It ran online 1st February – 31st March 2026 with paper copies also available.
- c380 responses
- Early findings reinforce existing understanding of rural housing pressures; no major surprises thus far.
- Data analysis is complex due to cross-parish responses; headline results due later in 2026.
- Initial data for Timberscombe extracted early to inform an emerging project there, but still incomplete with more detailed work needed on affordability comparisons.

There was some discussion of the working groups report. Cllr Steven Pugsley will be reviewing the draft text and Colin McDonald had provided some **updated lettings data** to replace the earlier draft. He now had data for 193 lettings over the period 1st August 2021 (when the It platform changed, so earliest start date) to 31st March 2026. Key points:

- Dwelling type: c62% bungalows; very few flats.
- Rehoused applicants were roughly half in silver band; one third in gold.
- Just over half were 2 bedroom; only 3 lettings were 4 bedroom.
- 89% of lettings were 'open' (not subject to local connection criteria), although, caveat, those housed could still be 'local'.
- 88% of lettings were Magna with remainder split between four other HAs.

- High degree of overlap between the 89% & 88% above.
- Quarter of all vacancies in Dulverton; rest spread across 15 parishes.

It was noted that the Homefinder stats include parishes that ‘straddle’ the boundary of the National Park and some that are outside of the Exmoor LCN. It was also noted that there are a small number of other vacancies not captured in these stats, such as those with Caractacus who do not use Homefinder.

Wider discussion included the following points:

- Difficulties arise when those housed in rural areas **struggle with unexpected isolation** and lack of support.
- There is **an inevitable tension** between the need to fill vacancies quickly and the time needed to identify very local applicants. i.e. Commercial pressures on landlords can conflict with community sustainability.
- More **targeted local criteria** could help address rural allocation challenges but needs to avoid breaching certain legal requirements.

Cllr Pugsley raised the English Rural Housing Association report **“No More Excuses”** which looked at evidence in a national context, debunking some misconceptions about the costs. In particular, it notes that about 7% of affordable homes are built in small rural settlements, not proportionate to population.

There was also some discussion of a particular property which had been problematic to let and the relationship between earnings and the income thresholds applied by both Homefinder policy and individual Housing Associations. The underlying systemic issue of note here being that Local Housing Allowances remain frozen whilst earnings have risen, with the National Living Wage consistently rising above inflation. On the specific case in point, Cllr Pugsley subsequently wrote to the landlord who gave an exemption, allowing a local household otherwise deemed to be on too high an income to be considered as an exceptional case.