



Enabling the delivery of rural affordable housing in England

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ABSTRACT

In response to projections of future housing demand, public planning authorities allocate land for development within local plans. The process is top-down and public-sector led, corraling land value to selected locations in support of the infrastructure investments needed to progress development. But in rural areas in England, an unplanned, exceptional process of selecting land for affordable housing has existed since 1991. 'Rural Exception Sites' (RES) are not allocated in local plans and they are not (exclusively) public-sector led. Rather, they involve the granting of exceptional permissions for affordable housing on non-housing land. RES emerge from a devolved approach, with the public sector ceding power to non-state actors and to voluntary housing enablers. The rationale of this partnership process is to keep land outside of the allocation process, hence keeping it affordable for non-market housing that meets communities' needs. This paper examines the way that RES disrupt land market and planning processes in order to deliver the homes that rural communities need.

1. Rural housing affordability in context

Housing affordability has become an urgent social, economic, and political issue in many parts of the world (Wetzstein, 2017). Declining affordability is widely regarded as a condition of late neoliberalism (Rolnik, 2013) and, more particularly, a consequence of the assetisation of housing as a consumer good in the latter half of the twentieth century. That assetisation arose from the deregulation of bank lending and the reconditioning of land, to serve the accumulation of private wealth and welfare, through reduced tax and capital gains liabilities (Stirling et al., 2023a). At the same time, public housing programmes were dismantled as governments sought to promote asset-based welfare by advancing a greater distribution of private property wealth (ibid.). In the UK, taxes on residential property were scaled back in the 1960s and, in the decades that followed, credit controls governing building society and bank lending were substantially relaxed (Ryan-Collins, 2021; Gallent and Stirling, 2025). House price inflation became independent of underlying inflation, being viewed as a measure of economic growth and wellbeing (Hay, 2009).

But by the 1990s and into the 2000s, it was clear that the supply of new homes could not keep pace with the supply of mortgage credit (Ryan-Collins, 2021). House prices accelerated rapidly as banks, some in the UK but many in the US, embarked on the frenzied pursuit of sub-prime lending (Langley, 2008). Central bank borrowing rates descended to historic lows in support of advancing property ownership and to scaffold a new land/property based economic model (Bean et al., 2015). The bursting of the housing bubble in 2008/9, across North

America and Europe, had global repercussions (Forrest and Yip, 2011). But housing wealth had become so important to late neoliberal economies that governments and central banks took whatever measures necessary to restore the upward march of house prices (Stephens, 2024).

Over the last 15 years, prices in the UK have continued to climb, being calmed only by the Covid-19 pandemic and more recent geopolitical shocks. Government remains committed to fiscal measures - and to working with banks on more flexible lending products (as it has done for 50 years - see Gallent and Stirling, 2025) - that drive up price, in support of the mortgage market and financial services that depend on mortgaged home ownership (Aalbers, 2015).

These general patterns have a diverse geography. Low land and property taxes in the UK have attracted global investors to the housing market, whose scaffolding of that market is generally welcomed by policy-makers (Minton, 2017). These investors concentrate in London although there has been some dispersion of investment across other UK cities in recent years, encouraged at overseas property expos. There has also been growing interest in non-residential land-based investments. Farmland is generally a tax-efficient investment, especially in an era of environmental concern with investors cashing in on lucrative set-aside schemes and unitizing land for carbon-credits (Fairbairn, 2017).

However, a more specific factor affecting *rural housing affordability*, the backdrop for this paper, has been the accentuation of longer-term domestic counter-urbanisation trends over the last 10 years. From the 1960s onwards, the English countryside presented urban investors with an exploitable rent gap: vacant rural homes were plentiful and cheap (Gallent et al., 2005). Many were purchased as second homes and some

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became commuter-bases in near-urban ‘metropolitan villages’ (Masser and Stroud, 1965). Roll forward to the 2000s and the number of rural homes being used as second homes or holiday lets had ballooned. The countryside had also become a retreat for retiring households and, especially in amenity areas accessible to London and other core cities, home to many households commuting back to urban jobs. The price of rural land and property had become calibrated to urban salaries and exportable urban wealth (Gallent et al., 2022).

During the last 10 years, rural housing in England (i.e. in towns and villages in ‘largely’ or ‘mainly’ rural areas) has become less affordable than urban homes, when compared to in-area earnings (DEFRA, 2022). Counter-urbanisation trends have resulted in the pricing out of households who derive their incomes solely from rural economies. This squeeze on rural housing affordability has been exacerbated by a post-war planning rationality, of protecting and preserving areas of countryside, that is strongly associated with the arrival of more conservative and economically-inactive households to rural areas. All of this has been super-charged by the advent of platform-based short-term rental tools, by the flight from cities (in search of additional space) triggered by the pandemic, and by the consolidation of the staycation holiday market by geo-political events and by the cost of living crisis (Colomb and Gallent, 2022).

Counter-urbanisation pressures and planning constraints act on England’s private land market. Where ‘normative’ land-use planning allocates sites for new housing, in the way described in the next part of this paper, value is corralled to those sites, elevating house prices and making it difficult to deliver against the needs of households with lower earnings. This paper examines a tactical response to this challenge: the development of homes by non-profit actors on land not allocated for development in local plans. This response seeks to circumvent those private land market pressures rooted in counter-urbanisation and planning constraint, doing so through a process that is outside standard planning arrangements and through practices of coordination and enabling that are often voluntary rather than public-sector led. The paper presents ‘rural exception sites’ (RES) and their enabling as a response to the challenges of a private land-market, in which value is privatized and extracted through enclosure and private ownership. Its contribution is to understand how non-normative, localized and voluntary processes can challenge the contextual drivers of low housing affordability, which are practically expressed in the inability of non-profit housing providers (see below) to secure land at a price that supports the building of affordable homes. RES and enabling processes are central to rural housing delivery in England. They are also the principal means of supporting the development of rural homes by others groups committed to affordable housing delivery, including community land trusts.

Drawing on case study research in England, we show that RES are successful where different sectors and actors work in concert towards a goal that has an agreed value for the community. Our more practical aim is to cast a light on the local state-craft of enabling and its significance, in the context of a constrained and private land market, for rural affordable housing delivery: through evidencing the need and building support for small housing projects; securing affordable land for development; holding partnerships together, often for several years; and achieving outcomes that foster broader acceptance of housing development in lowest tier settlements.

The paper is structured as follows: the second part introduces RES and the enabling process in the context of regular land-use planning, clarifying its key departures from normative practice; the third part then introduces the case study research and its provenance; the fourth part details the nature of rural enabling whilst the fifth part reviews the small amount of research undertaken on enabling in the UK; the sixth part presents three case studies of enabling support and practice; and the paper concludes on the significance of enabling to affordable housing delivery, as an essential disruption to private land market constraints.

2. Normative land-use planning, RES, and the enabling process

Many English villages exhibit low levels of housing affordability and this issue has evolved during several decades of reduced public investment in affordable housing. Indeed, much of the rural public housing built after 1919, when local authorities were granted the loan sanction needed to embark on housebuilding programmes, has now been sold to sitting tenants, and subsequently sold on to other families and investors (Gallent et al., 2022). Most new affordable housing in rural areas has been provided by housing associations (now ‘registered providers’ of social housing) since 2000, and much of that has been concentrated in towns or other key service centres.

That concentration is due to the reliance of Registered Providers (RPs) on the planning system to support the delivery of affordable homes. Capital funding to RPs has been progressively reduced since the late 1980s (specifically, the Housing Act, 1988, which brought to an end the generous system of grant funding for RPs, introduced in 1974), replaced by an element of land subsidy and by recourse to commercial borrowing. Where sites are allocated for residential development, and where there is a proven need for affordable homes, the land-use plans drawn up by local authorities in England will stipulate that development must include a proportion of affordable homes. This will be a condition fixed in the planning permission, with a developer signing an ‘agreement’ to that effect – under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The rationing of land through the plan-making process corrals value to allocated sites, which is then unlocked through the development process – in support of infrastructure including affordable housing (see, for example, Crook et al., 2015).

This normative mode of planning provides essential context for this paper: it steers development away from those smaller villages that have been the focus of our research, and is predicated on a top-down site allocations process. That process involves evidence-gathering (making an assessment of objectively-assessed housing need), site selection and sifting (through a methodology agreed with government), plan-making and *site allocation*, and then development permissioning (with attached conditions, including Section 106 based conditions noted above). The public sector drives this process as part of its regulatory responsibility. A different, secondary, process has been in operation since 1991 (see below for a detailed explanation). Unplanned and unallocated sites can be permissioned for affordable homes. These are outside allocations for general (market) demand and are called ‘Rural Exception Sites’ (RES). Between 1991 and 2012 they were available exclusively for non-market affordable housing. Throughout that period, planning policy – initially in the form of government circulars and then ‘guidance notes’ and ‘policy statements’ issued to local authorities – had precluded the development of open market homes on RES. In 2012, revised policy set out in a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF – detailing how the local planning system should operate), greenlit an element of market housing on these sites, for the purpose of cross-subsidy in support of project viability. That policy has altered perceptions of what might be possible on RES, altering landowners’ expectations of land price and, in some instances, undermining the ability of Registered Providers to deliver genuinely affordable housing on RES (Stirling et al., 2023b).

RES work by negotiating the release of land for affordable housing at a price substantially below the full residential value attainable on allocated sites. These are not large sites that will require substantial investment to bring forward. Rather, they are for fewer than a dozen homes for local need.

Unlike the normative process described above, exception sites are not allocated in local plans but emerge from what might be characterized as a highly localized civil partnership between ‘the community’ (usually the parish council, but not exclusively), a partner RP, public officials based in the housing and planning departments of the local authority, a ‘rural housing enabler’, and a landowner. The contexts in which RES emerge are diverse but a common characteristic is the need for someone to drive the project forward, sometimes for several years,

and broker the relationships and agreements on which successful projects are built.

How affordable housing is supported on RES can be highlighted in some simple figures available from MHCLG (2020). In 2019, a hectare of farmland in South Cambridgeshire had an average value of £21,000. A hectare of land with residential permission had a value of £5,390,000, based on a valuation density of 35 dwellings per hectare (and assuming edge connectivity to infrastructure). RPs aim to pay £10,000 per plot for RES land. This is nearly 17 times more than agricultural value (£600 for an equivalent plot) but 15 times less than residential value (£154,000 per plot). RES work by securing land at a price that supports affordability. A lower land cost reduces necessary borrowing, enabling an RP to charge a social rent (typically 50% of open market rent) on the homes it builds - although an element of grant subsidy will still be required.

Securing land at this price, and in the context of soaring residential land values (linked to the wider housing market changes noted above, and driving the price aspirations of land owners) is no mean feat. This is the central task of the aforementioned civil partnerships and enablers. In the remaining parts of this paper, we examine the way these ‘unplanned’ housing sites are enabled in England, practical challenges around enabling, and enabling processes.

3. Research into RES in England

During 2023, the authors conducted research into the factors underpinning the successful delivery of affordable homes on RES. The research was supported by a number of RPs (English Rural HA, Hastoe HA, and Trent & Dove HA), national lobby groups (including the National Housing Federation), Homes England (which channels government funding to RPs), and the organisation traditionally supporting independent rural housing enablers in England - Action with Communities in Rural England. The research had four main components: a review of extant research into RES; interviews conducted with national stakeholders; a survey of rural planning authorities, which aimed to understand the level of resourcing available to support RES; and local policy and project level interviews in six areas in England.

This paper draws mainly on component 4, but takes some insights from 1 to 2. Interviews were undertaken for each of the six areas, at a ‘policy level’ (focused on the political and corporate priority assigned to rural housing delivery within the local authority, including the support given to RES) and at a ‘project level’ (focused on local relationships underpinning RES delivery). Three of the six cases had a substantive focus on the role of the enabler and the broader enabling function. Of these three, one – centered on North Yorkshire - was a special case, focused exclusively on strategic support, and local financing, for enabling without focusing on any particular project. The other two cases sought to track RES from corporate priority through to project delivery: these explored local enabling processes in the Derbyshire Dales and the interface between strategic and project-level enabling in Winchester. These three cases are presented as narratives of local enabling in Part 6 of this paper. The schedule of interviews is shown in Table 1.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed thematically. Particular attention was paid to the linkages between policy and project-level outcomes including, for example, the support given to local enabling and the role of enabling in shaping outcomes on the ground. The narratives produced from the interviews were subsequently discussed with participants, to ensure accuracy and to avoid the release of potentially sensitive information.

4. Rural housing enablers

Enablers have been described as ‘honest brokers’ (Duncan and Lavis, 2018): individuals who position themselves at the centre of the civil partnership that progresses RES. They work with communities on building the evidence needed for an exceptional planning permission; they connect the community with a registered provider that has the

Table 1
Schedule of case study interviews.

| Case Study | Policy-Level Interviews | Project-Level Interviews |
|------------------|--|---|
| Derbyshire Dales | DM Policy Manager; May 19, 2023 Housing Manager; May 22, 2023 | Taddington Parish Councillor/ NPA Member; June 6, 2023 PDRHA Board Member/former NPA Policy Officer; June 26, 2023 |
| | Peak District NPA Officer; June 5, 2023 | – |
| Winchester | Head of Planning; June 9, 2023 | Developer, RES; August 11, 2023 Housing Development Officer; May 19, 2023 |
| | New Homes Strategy and Development Manager; May 23, 2023 | – |
| North Yorkshire | Planning Leads at East Ryding (2); June 21, 2023 | – |
| | Housing Strategy Manager (YNYER); July 3, 2023 | – |
| | RHE at East Ryding; June 12, 2023 | – |
| | Yorkshire Dales NPA, lead officer; June 20, 2023 | – |
| | North Yorkshire Moors NPA, lead officer; June 22, 2023 | – |

desire and capacity to take a project forward; they will review site options, with the community, the RP, and the local planning team; and they will guide interactions with the landowner. This is not a fixed or statutory duty and there is some flexibility in exactly who plays this enabling role. Typical steps in a RES project are detailed in Table 2.

The ‘traditional’ rural housing enabler is engaged by Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE). They are independent of any key partner - the community, RP, landowner, or local authority - and can be readily identified as honest brokers: someone who is impartial and brings a relational energy to a project. But they are also knowledgeable, understanding the planning system, possessing the skills required to build evidence of need, and having the diplomatic skills needed to bring interests together. Funding for independent enablers has come from government, specifically the Department of the Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). It is periodic and time-limited. ACRE is occasionally successful in winning the argument that its enabling network adds value and impetus to rural housing delivery, and one or two year funding follows (see <https://acre.org.uk/rural-housing-enabler-programme/>).

However, not all enablers are independent. Some are staff members of local authorities. Confusingly, these authorities may have dedicated enabling or ‘rural housing’ officers whose task is to mimic the honest broker role of independent enablers (the network of these is patchy and there are many gaps). Because they work for the local authority, in the housing department rather than in planning, they are credited with a closeness to planning policy and knowledge. They are seen also as public officials that add capacity and provide a focus on rural delivery in smaller villages. But their independence, and hence their role as honest brokers, may be doubted. Besides these ‘enabling officers’, smaller RPs, with a very defined geographical coverage, may have an officer, or development manager, who champions small rural schemes. Some work with communities for many years, building connections and capacity, and becoming the *de facto* enablers. The research adopted an inclusive definition of enablers, whilst recognizing that independent enablers, working with the ACRE network, have particular attributes and more easily fit the definition of honest brokers.

5. Past research on RES and enablers

Whilst a number of studies have been conducted on the challenges confronting the successful delivery of exception sites since 1991, the role of rural housing enablers has been under-researched. The exceptions

Table 2

Typical steps in a RES project (from Stirling et al., 2023b).

1. Housing needs surveys are used to determine the level of need for affordable housing locally;
2. Site searches are performed to identify all potential sites in the area. This may involve a 'walkabout', where the enabler, parish council and RP officers walk around the local area assessing possible sites;
3. Once a site has been identified and a provisional agreement to proceed has been made between the landowner and RP (and preferably also the parish council), a pre-application discussion can be held with the local planning authority, ensuring they are broadly happy with the site and access, making further enquiries with statutory consultees, and making sure the requisite services (e.g. highway connection etc.) are available;
4. At this stage, the RP will also look to move forward with a more formal agreement with the landowner. The first step is the Heads of Terms, which is not legally binding, but sets out in principle the terms of sale. The Heads of Terms will establish that the landowner owns the land, providing a copy of the title deed to make sure there are no caveats or obligations that prevent development. The price is also established at this point;
5. After the Heads of Terms are agreed, a legally binding agreement will be set out in the Option Agreement, to sell the land subject to gaining planning permission.
6. If pre-application discussions are positive, this provides the security to move forward with a planning application, including a public consultation that garners the views of the local community;
7. If planning permission is granted, this represents a watershed moment in the project timeline. A contractor will be identified via a formal tender process that is managed by the RP;
8. The interviews and case studies undertaken suggested that successful projects are those with the most transparent and open dynamics between all parties. The enabler performs the key function of keeping all parties in touch and updated on all developments – at every stage of the project;
9. A nominations agreement will be drawn up to allocate the housing to local residents, to be included in Section 106 agreement;
- 10 At completion, the RP's housing management team will take over from the contractor.

approach was trialed in the New Forest National Park in the 1980s (Barlow and Chambers, 1992) as a pragmatic intervention that addressed the issue of affordable land for affordable housing. When the first version of Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 on Housing appeared in 1988 (i.e. guidance to local authorities on local planning responsibilities and practices), it made no mention of either RES or the use of planning agreements to procure affordable homes on allocated sites. This omission was rectified with the publication of DoE Circular 7/91 three years later (at this time, government periodically clarified planning responsibilities and approaches through the issuance of departmental circulars). The exception deals facilitated in the New Forest were instigated by local communities and supported by the local authority: but they required a *boundary crosser* who could understand the planning context, the motives of the land owner, and delivery options. Because there was no orchestration by the local authority, the importance of having a local champion, with a particular knowledge and skills set, was immediately apparent.

The early years of RES projects emphasised the critical role that would need to be played by rural housing enablers: these would seed the idea of a planning exception, assist the community in building the evidence base and identifying potential sites; they would have a role in persuading landowners to sell plots at an affordable price; and they would work with planning and delivery partners to get projects off the ground (Williams et al., 1991; Gallent and Bell, 2000). RES are successful where different sectors and actors work in concert towards a goal that has clear and demonstrable value for the community. Because they are on the fringe of normative planning processes, they are a form of disruption that seeks to overcome the constraints of a private land market and normal rent extraction and maximization behaviours. It is communities who must first be persuaded of the need for this disruption.

Building community support, centered on the elected 'parish council' in England, is a vital first step in a small rural housing project. Baxter and Murphy (2018: 23) have noted the way that enablers must become embedded within communities, working with them to gather evidence, find sites, and connect to landowners (see Table 2). These authors confirm the broad split between independent enablers operating within voluntary networks and those engaged by local authorities. Enablers are key to community capacity-building. They raise understanding of the task ahead and ensure that the ambitions of community members align, as far as possible, with planning and development possibilities – whilst acknowledging the inherent agonism of socio-spatial communities.

Past research has regularly drawn attention to enablers' dual responsibilities for capacity building and long-term relationship management, across sectoral boundaries. They have been identified as critical champions for RES, possessing the independence and experience needed to guide projects and act as 'honest brokers' between partners. Strong and durable partnerships are crucial to RES delivery. However, the partnership must reconcile different forms of knowledge: the local and

personal knowledge needed to build support for housing projects, which can include an awareness of the circumstances of individuals or families in need (RES address an identifiable 'local' rather than a 'general' need for affordable homes); and the specialist and technical knowledge needed to effectively interface with planning authorities and critical parties, including sub-contractors, in the development process (McDermott, 2010) and, of course, potential project funders, including central government ones (Moore, 2018). A durable partnership, in which knowledge is reconciled, is the essential foundation for RES. However, the 'activist' objectives of communities (achieving a specific outcome in a specific place for identified beneficiaries) may conflict with the 'technical' and 'normative' considerations of local policy and practice, sometimes derailing projects (Jacobs and Manzi, 2020). It is the task of enablers, within the context of a diverse partnership, to reconcile ambition with system constraints – to achieve a focused and deliverable disruption. Practically, this means facilitating early communication and managing expectations. Wider community support for RES, beyond a core group, may be brittle. Indeed, extending and solidifying support is a key challenge for small rural housing projects, which may be viewed, because of prevailing planning rationality, as misplaced in villages (Sturzaker, 2010). The prospect of development can evoke strong passions, with the Rural Housing Alliance (RHA, 2021) noting that patient 'alliance building' (numerous one-to-one conversations) on a strong evidence base can be a more effective means of growing understanding and support than holding confrontational public meetings in which emotion overpowers logic, and positions, for and against, become further entrenched. RES projects take time and require much patience. The support of an enabler, who can reconcile competing logics and different forms of knowledge, and who can stay the course, is acknowledged to be *sine qua non* for RES.

Interviews with national stakeholders (leading RPs, landowner representatives, other housing groups) confirmed the centrality of enablers in RES. 'Weak enabling' was cited as a key reason for the slow progress and eventual fizzling out of some projects. Other recent research has claimed that regional variations in the delivery of affordable housing on RES can be explained by the absence or under-resourcing of enablers (Brown and Bright, 2018) and therefore the struggle to hold together delivery partnerships. Recent data from the Department of Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC – renamed the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government after the 2024 UK General Election) show that homes on RES were delivered in only 17% of rural authority areas in 2021-22. The figure for the last five years (2017-22) rises to 50%, but there is little consistency in RES delivery from year to year in individual local authorities.

A shortage of enablers has been identified as a significant barrier to RES delivery in both England and Wales. Webb et al. (2019), for example, report a decline in the number of enablers and increasingly patchy coverage. Because RES projects are not fixed within the planning

cycle, and because they emerge through local negotiation and progress through an under-resourced local planning system (RTPI, 2018; Gallent and Purves, 2024), they may take several years to gestate. The slow-burn nature of projects increases the significance of enabling, which is needed to keep partners together, maintain their enthusiasm, and ensure sufficient momentum. Where there are no enablers (resourced by DEFRA or by local funding mechanisms – see case studies), it is left to other partners (a particularly enthusiastic member of the Parish Council or a champion within RP who takes a special interest in a project and is willing to exceed their contracted work hours) to hold partnerships together, regularly updating members, and ensuring that projects move forward. A lack of resourcing for enablers produces a fragmented pattern of project success that reflects socio-economic divisions. Substitute enablers (i.e. active citizens with some requisite experience and knowledge) are more commonplace in affluent rural communities, with their deeper store of social capital and their greater abundance of active citizens, than in more deprived or left-behind places, which may lack the requisite networks and capacities. Indeed, this same inequality of capacity has been noted in relation to community-led neighbourhood development planning in England (Parker, 2017). Wealthier communities, whose social capital is transmuted from their economic capital, have the time, inclination and skills needed to make plans and drive forward community projects. The absence of public funding for enablers hits poorer communities hardest, significantly undermining the supply of low-cost high-quality housing for local need.

6. Support for, and the centrality of, rural housing enablers

Interviews with national stakeholders, the second component of our research, identified enabling as an important platform for successful RES. As noted in the last section, ‘weak enabling’ was said to be a key barrier to the delivery of small rural housing schemes and a lack of systemic support for enabling, either in the form of central grant or a local funding mechanism, was judged to reduce the regularity of affordable homes for local need being delivered on RES. In the three case studies that follow, we explore.

- (1) enablers operating in the context of strategic housing partnerships, how they are resourced, and the value they bring to rural schemes – centered on long-term project management;
- (2) the operation of a local housing partnership and challenges arising from a lack of enabling capacity and function; and
- (3) enabling practices in a protected rural area, which provide the relational energy needed to sustain delivery partnerships over a number of years.

York, North Yorkshire & East Riding Strategic Housing Partnership – critical support for rural housing enablers.

The first case study focused on the unitary authorities of North Yorkshire and East Riding and, more particularly, on the ‘York, North Yorkshire, and East Riding Strategic Housing Partnership’ (YNYER SHP) and its support for rural housing enabling, which plays a crucial role in project managing RES pipelines and individual schemes. The study area includes two National Park Authorities. Between 2017 and 2022, 81 affordable homes were delivered on exception sites across the partnership area.

The YNYER SHP has existed for more than 15 years. Prior to the local government re-organisation affecting North Yorkshire - which became a unitary authority in April 2023 - the Partnership was overseen by a Housing Board comprising elected members from the former district authorities and the National Parks, alongside representatives from Homes England, RP partners, and the Home Builders Federation. The Partnership retains a broad focus on housing delivery, on a mix of allocated sites and RES. There is a specific RHE Partnership embedded in the wider partnership, which provided this case study with its main focus. The ‘North Yorkshire and East Yorkshire’ (NYEY) RHE

Partnership, including a team of dedicated enablers, is coordinated by the Housing Strategy Manager at North Yorkshire Council and extends across rural North Yorkshire and East Riding.

The NYEY RHE Partnership is funded by the local housing authorities, National Park Authorities and RP partners. In the absence of independent enablers, supported by DEFRA, co-funding *in-house rural enablers* has been a key part of the NYEY RHE Partnership from inception. A key aim of the Partnership has been to localize support for the housing enablers and tie it to actual delivery. This localized approach is a response to the uncertain and intermittent funding provided to independent enablers across England. Bouts of short-term government funding have not provided the long-term support that enabling needs in order to support and coordinate local projects that can run over several years. The NYEY RHE Partnership addressed this challenge through a co-funding structure that draws together contributions from the local authorities, national park authorities, and RPs who make an annual contribution (a ‘retention fee’) and pay a fee for each affordable home added to their portfolio through the programme (a ‘recharge mechanism’).

This shared funding arrangement provides significant continuity for the housing enablers, which are viewed as vital for project delivery. There are twenty-three RPs operating in the YNYER SHP area and sixteen of these pay retention fees and are involved in the recharge mechanism. There has been sufficient funding for three full time RHEs in North Yorkshire and one 0.5 RHE (2.5 days per week) in East Riding until 2023/24.

Across North Yorkshire, the majority of affordable homes are delivered on allocated sites through Section 106 agreements (see explanation in Part 2). Between 2012-13 and 2021–22, the NYEY RHE Partnership facilitated the delivery of 2224 affordable homes, with 266 of these completed on RES. Exactly 10% of affordable homes were completed on RES in 2021-22. The YNYER Partnership’s focus is broader than exception sites. It seeks to maintain corporate and political focus on housing delivery, with the NYEY RHE Partnership concentrating on delivery in rural communities across the patch.

Beyond the innovative funding arrangement for RHEs, the Partnership is concerned with sharing best practice, through regular events, training, and through the Partnership’s web-site. To understand the challenges faced by housing enablers across the case study area, and the on-the-ground benefits of the Partnership, the research considered contrasting experience of RES delivery in North Yorkshire’s two national parks: the Dales and the Moors.

The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority had considerable success with RES in the 1990s and into the early 2000s, but the number of schemes coming forward was said to have ‘dried up’ since then. The NPA aims to deliver 20 affordable homes each year, but is not currently achieving that target. Landowner reluctance was thought to be the key explanation for stunted delivery, especially in the northern and western sections of the Park. The situation had been more positive in the southern section until recently, but now all parts of the National Park are seeing a lack of land for affordable housing development. The Partnership, and support for enabling, was valued, but not viewed as a means of overcoming land barriers. The pivot towards allocated sites offered some hope, but a sense of ‘market failure’ led to the conclusion that a more muscular approach might be needed, extending to the compulsory purchase of sites outside designated settlement boundaries at a land price that would support affordability.

The experience with the North Yorkshire Moors National Park Authority appeared to be very different. It was noted that house prices in the Park are not as high as they are in other parts of the country, but earnings are low, driving a critical problem of affordability. Because the Moors contains only half of one larger town, Helmsley, the area is almost 100% dependent on RES and actively promotes their development. The NPA *does not allocate sites for housing* in its Local Plan, other than in Helmsley, and there is ‘absolutely no market housing’ allowed for the purpose of cross-subsidy on RES. However, in exceptional circumstances

it will allow for some Principal Residence housing which is restricted to occupation by those for whom this is their principal home. The Local Plan seeks to facilitate a plot price of £10,000 to support affordable homes on RES, with the interviewee asserting that National Park Authorities must 'hold the line' on land price in protected areas. The understanding on the part of landowners (which tend to be larger in the Moors) that nothing but affordable homes will be permitted in the Park supports delivery. The NPA provides a free 'pre-app service' (an advice service to individuals or groups formulating planning applications), which was said to be 'within the spirit' of the partnership. Delivery on RES in the Park was said to be possible because of the proactive work of the local RHE on the ground, guiding the process described in Table 2. The Moors works closely with the RHE and its RP partners. Close working means regular meetings between the RHEs and the Head of Strategic Policy; keeping the pipeline of sites under review; and proactively identifying villages where there is little activity, and seeking to catalyze it in those locations. The interviewee in the Dales referenced the Moors' 'project management' approach, centered on the enabling function, as an explanation for contrasting outcomes.

Housing enablers are important, ensuring longevity and shared learning across critical partnerships. The more deeply embedded the enablers, with partners and communities, the more successful they tend to be. Whilst this might be a factor in the Moors' relative success with RES schemes, it was pointed out that the Dales endures a more difficult geography, comprising smaller and less accessible villages. It was also said to have fewer delivery resources in comparison with the Moors, which also enjoys the advantages of an easier, more accessible geography.

But another critical difference lies in contrasting approaches to housing delivery, reflected in local plan policies. Some authorities allocate housing sites (see again Part 2) and some do not. The Dales has been leaning towards 'Section 106' on allocated sites (especially in the south of the Park where more options are available through allocations, although RES will feature in the Dales' Plan for 2025–2040 and will be pushed harder in the north of the Park where options for allocation are significantly lacking) whilst the Moors is 'all RES' (the only allocated sites are in the town of Helmsley: it was noted that whilst *the vast majority of LPAs allocate housing sites across their areas, some National Parks do not allocate sites outside their main town, instead relying on a RES approach*).

Landowners will not go down the RES route if there is a chance of their land being allocated for open market housing. Ebbs and flows in RES output track the planning cycle and the hope and prospect of planned allocation and therefore a land price that reflects 'full residential value'. The hope of allocation underpins the hope of achieving a higher land price, greatly reducing the chance of sites coming forward for affordable housing. Yet, against the backdrop of Local Plan support, rural housing enablers have a critical role to play in supporting the development of relationships, and the project management, that is crucial to the delivery of affordable homes, either on allocated or exception sites.

6.1. Winchester – long-term partnerships, de-risking of projects, and the absence of enabling

'Winchester City Council' (WCC) covers a 'largely rural' district in the South East of England. The council's local plan shares a core strategy with the South Downs National Park, part of which lies in the authority area. The council's housing department reported that 68 affordable homes were delivered on RES between 2017 and 2022. This figure includes a small number of affordable homes facilitated by the National Park Authority – although only one scheme has been (partially) delivered in the Park since 2015.

Winchester's largely rural geography makes rural affordable housing a clear priority, although officers emphasised that the council wishes to build 'the right housing in the right places', irrespective of whether

those places are urban or rural. The council therefore employs an in-house enabling officer whose focus is the broader provision of affordable housing and who has previously worked closely with the RHE network operated by Community Action Hampshire (see below – this is part of the independent ACRE network).

WCC has established its own RP and is pursuing a programme of council-led housing development. Although the council's corporate focus on affordable housing has remained strong, there was a reported 'weakening' of support for RP-led affordable housing at the county level. The Hampshire Alliance for Rural Housing (HARAH) was established in 2005. In April 2020, HARAH was wound down and merged with the Hampshire Community Housing Partnership to become the Hampshire Housing Hub (operated by Community Action Hampshire). This is a 'a partnership to increase the supply of rural and community led housing, primarily as affordable homes, to meet local needs in Hampshire.'

The reported 'weakening' may be due to the combining of community-led and RP-led provision, and certainly relates to a reduction in funding to independent RHEs, provided by Community Action Hampshire. It was suggested that, from the council's perspective, RES activity is now less *proactive*, with WCC reacting to the initiatives of parish councils (identifying need) and the desire of community groups to drive forward projects whilst, in the past, enablers had tended to guide the council to *earlier engagement* with communities and projects.

Potential RES projects come forward in a variety of ways. Parish councils often draw attention to sites once a needs survey has been completed and informal discussions have been held with local landowners (again, see Table 2). During the period of the HARAH programme (2005–2020), the RHEs worked proactively with communities on the identification of suitable sites. Short-lists were presented, by enablers, to council officers and walkabouts were arranged in which initial assessments of probable planning compliance and landscape impacts could be undertaken. Where few sites were coming forward through this community-led approach, the WCC tended to work with the enablers on area-wide searches that ran alongside the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment component of local plan reviews. But this more 'strategic' approach never sought to impose development; rather, it directed WCC to engage with particular parishes, to initiate the detailed dialogue that might result in parish councils supporting RES schemes.

Although WCC delivers some housing directly, it works closely with key RP partners – notably Hastoe and Hyde Housing – on the delivery of rural affordable housing. It also has a track-record of close working with Community Action Hampshire, especially its RHE network in which WCC's in-house enabling officer participated. As noted above, the RHE network was proactive in evidencing need and identifying sites. But the end of the HARAH programme, and the new arrangement with the community housing partnership, has meant some 'dropping off' of rural enabling activity. A reduction in funding, combined with a shift to supporting community land trusts (CLT), has resulted in a noticeable refocusing on enabling in particular places, where community-led housing is taking off. There is some concern that a lack of *rural* enabling capacity (provided by Community Action Hampshire) will deprive prospective RES of the energy and coordination they require.

Indeed, interviews frequently came back to the vital importance of collaborative working and enabling. HARAH was viewed as the programme that had spearheaded RES delivery, with its two full-time RHEs covering Hampshire, as well as a manager who dedicated half of their time to rural housing projects. The HARAH enablers interfaced effectively with WCC's enabling officer. Following the cessation/evolution of the HARAH programme, only the generic WCC enabling officer remains, reducing total capacity from 3 to 0.5 FTE. It is now much more difficult to build the community-level relationships that are key to the success of RES.

Policy-level interviews drew attention to a RES at Hook Pit Farm Lane at Kings Worthy, to the north of Winchester. The site was thought to illustrate a shift to larger sites, post HARAH, and local authority

delivery with a private partner. Housing had first been proposed on the site in the 1970s but it was not until 2005 that outline permission was granted for a RES development of 25 affordable homes on part of the site. The land was then sold to a local developer, Drew Smith, who developed the site in two phases, firstly for 25 homes of mixed affordable tenure, in partnership with Hyde Housing Association, and then for a second phase of 35 affordable rented homes in partnership with WCC.

During the period of the HARA programme, Drew Smith and Hyde Housing partnered on a number of RES schemes, guided by the RHE. The majority of those were small sites, with Drew Smith typically acting as building contractor and technical consultant to Hyde Housing. The Hook Pit Farm Lane scheme was atypical in several respects. Its origins did not lie in the HARA programme, and its evidence-gathering and enabling activities, but in the development opportunity marketed by the landowner, following receipt of outline permission.

The site comprised two parts: that part with exceptional permission for 25 homes (which Drew Smith and Hyde Housing were now seeking to develop) and an adjacent part that Drew Smith hoped would be allocated for mixed-tenure housing through the local plan process. Failure to secure that allocation led Drew Smith to promote this part of the site for additional affordable housing (in partnership with WCC, though its RP vehicle), the need for which had been established in the evidence base for the new local plan. WCC's in-house enabling officer was supportive and its 'New Council Homes' team assumed responsibility for community engagement and liaison with the Parish Council. In the absence of HARA, the council essentially assumed responsibility for this exception site.

The second phase of the project proved more challenging than the first. Land price was fixed at £25,000 per plot for the first phase, which was higher than HARA schemes but at least gave Hyde Housing some certainty – around required grant support and borrowing. The second phase, bringing together WCC's RP with Drew Smith, involved the development of homes on a 'turnkey' basis – i.e. completed homes to be transferred to WCC. Residents had bought into the first phase because of the 'independence' of Hyde Housing and the argument that homes for local need were being provided. The second phase appeared, to some residents, to be an unnecessary extension ('hadn't need already been met?') that was being foisted upon the community by the developer, which now appeared to be leading the project (it was no longer a contractor or technical consultant) and the council was perceived, within some quarters, to be pursuing a broader housing supply agenda. The community became fractured, with the parish council insisting that further homes were needed and a sub-set of residents refuting that claim. That sub-set launched a local campaign to block the development through the site's registration as a Village Green – which is a common blocking response in England (see Short et al., 2009: 20).

The development partners worked hard to assuage residents' concerns, with the New Council Homes team investing considerable resource in these efforts. The Village Green application ultimately failed, causing some splitting of opposition – between more hard-line opponents of Phase 2 and those who were brought on side by the Council's assurance that the homes built would address broader local needs.

There are two perspectives on the experience at Hook Pit Farm Lane. First, the RES was developer-led in both origins and eventual delivery process – and this reality did not disrupt delivery. Both Hyde Housing (Phase 1) and WCC (Phase 2) were brought into a process that was initiated by Drew Smith. For the developer, these linked RES projects were primarily commercial propositions, but satisfied mixed commercial and social goals. Although they were outside of the HARA programme, approaches developed through that programme were used to structure development agreements and enable the partners to more smoothly navigate both planning and community engagement processes. The projects were de-risked by early agreement around land and build costs; and 'intensive' engagement with community concerns resulted in the effective delivery of affordable homes.

The second, and slightly less positive, perspective is that *commercial*

rather than *community* leadership and interests led to a project that proved locally controversial. The development model was a hybrid, a compromise between a RES and a regular local plan allocation (which the developer had been pushing for), which prompted doubts over the affordability of homes and the need for the development, as proposed. The absence of independent enabling, which was lost with the transformation of the HARA programme after 2020, resulted in a different kind of project, perceived by some residents to be a back-door development allocation that was serving the vested interests of WCC rather than the particular needs of the Kings Worthy community. A key observation from this project is that 'honest brokering', which was lacking in this case, is crucial for unallocated housing sites, building evidence and support, and ensuring trust in eventual outcomes. Exceptions schemes, sitting outside the normative land-use planning process, with its parameters set by locally-elected members and agreed in a local plan, need careful shepherding if they are to secure necessary community buy-in.

6.2. Derbyshire Dales – the practices of local enabling

Derbyshire Dales is a mainly rural district in the East Midlands, a large part of which is covered by the Peak District National Park. Ninety-three affordable homes were provided on RES between 2017 and 2022. Significantly, the District Council is a 'transfer authority', having transferred all of its own housing stock to Platform Housing Group twenty years ago. Before the transfer, the council's corporate focus had been on housing management and repair, although it had been involved in supporting delivery on RES during the 1990s, working with neighbouring High Peak Council to set up Peak District Rural Housing Association (PDRHA) in 1990. After the stock transfer, and because of the level of need determined with partners, the council's corporate and political priority switched to the delivery of affordable rural housing.

That priority was said to be a source of 'officer confidence and capacity'. The support of elected council members gives officers the confidence to invest 3 or 4 years (or much more) in supporting individual RES, knowing that their efforts will not be fruitless.

One important expression of the priority placed on affordable housing at Derbyshire Dales District Council (DDDC) has been the longstanding appointment of an in-house rural housing enabler, now part-funded by the National Park Authority (although DDDC is the principal funder of this post). It was agreed that these are vital, bringing capacity and acting as the glue for projects. Enablers chase planners, work closely with parish councils, and they have the skills needed to engage multiple partners and deliver the '3 minute presentations' to the planning committee in which schemes must be sold to nervous, and sometimes resistant, communities and their political representatives. There is 'no RES without the enabler' – the independent brokers with the human skills to drive forward projects. As in other areas, DEFRA funding for RHEs was once channeled through the ACRE network, but then dried up. For a period, they were then co-funded with RPs. They were then brought in-house, sitting in the housing authority, which appeared not to have undermined their claims of independence, and has given them an inside track on planning, aiding their effectiveness.

The RHE will organise a walkabout in a village where the need for affordable homes is clear, with an RP development officer (usually from Peak District Rural HA) and parish council members. Initial long lists of sites are quickly whittled down to the few that are likely to be supported in principle by planning. Exploratory conversations with landowners will give the RP the confidence needed to seek a pre-app service view from Development Management planners, either in the National Park or DDDC.

The majority of RES in this 'nested' case are progressed in the National Park where there are no allocated sites for development (only 'indicative figures' for housing, and a view that all housing should be exceptional and affordable). Therefore the relationship between the Housing Authority and the National Park Authority is critical. DDDC

contributes significant capital grant funding to avoid having market housing on RES, often Section 106 receipts from allocated sites outside the National Park. This was said to be the major source of cash for RES, with DDDC often spending those receipts to support projects in the National Park. Another source of local funding is from capital receipts. Tenants of former council homes transferred to Platform Housing Group (see above) retain a 'protected right to buy'. When they exercise that right, the money raised provides DDDC with a 'capital receipt' rather than a 'right to buy receipt', giving the authority greater flexibility in how it is spent.

Policy-level interviews revealed that RES developments in the National Park are small (typically fewer than six units) and there is no use of cross-subsidy. They abide by strict design standards, adding to overall development cost. The selected project case study was a scheme of four affordable homes for rent in the village of Taddington. These were completed in 2020.

Taddington is an old lead-mining village set within a wider parish with a resident population of just over 450 at the 2011 Census. The story of the *Gregory Croft* development began in the mid-2000s, when those living in the village saw that 'there were local families in Taddington not living in the best situations'. A housing needs survey was undertaken by DDDC, led by the enabler, later in the 2000s and provided evidence of 15 local households in need. The survey was repeated in 2012 (8 years before eventual project completion) and confirmed this approximate level of need – 12 households on that occasion, requiring homes with 2 or 3 bedrooms for rent. The need figure suggested by a survey is 'divided by 3' to arrive at a required unit figure: hence the second survey supported the size of the scheme eventually progressed, i.e. four units. At the time of the two surveys, acceptance that there was a need for affordable housing in the village was almost universal, but it was known that an actual planning application would likely provoke a different response – contestation was said to always focus on sites and never on the principle that local people should have access to affordable homes. Hence objectors 'always understand the need' but the site is 'always wrong'.

The parish council has a key role in helping partners navigate this contradiction. Two years after the second survey, and following discussions between the housing enabler (based at DDDC), PDRHA, and the Parish Council, a meeting was hosted in Taddington to discuss the prospect of developing homes on a RES. A site walkabout had been conducted after the first survey, around 2009, but nothing was taken forward at that time. The new meeting however, in 2014, gave much greater momentum to the project, possibly because the two surveys – 5 years apart – had now demonstrated a consistent need for affordable homes in the village. From that point, the Parish Council became responsible for making the community aware of what might happen: the National Park Authority was strongly of the view that, as the representative body for the community, the Parish Council should be 'on board and supportive of any local development', although the housing enabler and the RP were thought to have critical roles to play in 'building understanding amongst the community beyond the Parish Council itself'. The contradiction between in-principle support for housing and site nervousness means that the Parish Council must be circumspect, not pushing too hard for any particular site, but appearing open to all options.

Leadership of the Taddington project was split between the enabler and the development lead at PDRHA. The Parish Council interviewee put the RP lead on an equal footing with the enabler, describing the former as having a pervasive influence on RES projects across the Peak District for a number of years. The PDRHA interviewee agreed, describing that person as a 'huge figure in the affordable housing space in the Park and beyond'. They agreed that the project benefited from the collective energy of the enabler, the RP lead, and the Housing Manager at DDDC. The latter was seen as one of the primary funders of the Taddington project. Indeed, there was the sense that funding had come personally from that officer – he was said to have been a 'major

supporter of all projects and, because of [him], the Derbyshire Dales part of the National Park has more RES than other parts'. However, it was noted that some disagreement had arisen within DDDC between those officers (in planning) who pushed for the use of cross-subsidy, arguing that local authority funding (from Section 106 and capital receipts from protected right to buy sales) is unsustainable and finite, and those (in housing), who argue that where the RP-LA partnership 'holds the line' (on 100% affordable and no cross-subsidy), price expectations can be suppressed and land prices will continue to support project viability. There is considerable alignment between the views of the housing authority, the National Park Authority, and PDRHA on this issue.

Indeed, the PDRHA Board Member noted that there was 'no inflation above agricultural value' and no incentive to the landowner for bringing land forward in Taddington beyond an appeal to civic duty ('this is your opportunity to help the community') and the offer of engagement with a 'reputable RP on the development of their land'. Land was, of course, not sold at agricultural value, but for £10,000 per plot (see calculation detailed in Part 2). It was noted that RP boards are always nervous about inflation by hope value. Hence the NPA has a 'hold the line' approach to no plan-led allocations and only exceptions. The scheme, and the dealings with the landowner at Taddington were said to be typical of this approach, which applies also to cross subsidy. The NPA logic is that permitting market housing as a means of unlocking affordable housing would simply accelerate the loss of acceptable sites to a form of housing for which there is no demonstrated need: 'when acceptable building land is hard to come by, why build what you don't need?'

Following the survey of local needs, the site walkabout, and the agreement with the landowner, a planning application was submitted to Peak District National Park Authority late in 2016. The critical features of the Taddington case are, locally, the circumspection of the Parish Council – leading but not pushing too hard ('bear in mind that even small schemes of four homes can feel significant for a tiny village like Taddington') and the collective energy expended on the project by the triad of the housing enabler, RP lead, and the Housing Manager in DDDC. The corporate features are the push for affordable housing within Derbyshire Dales, reflected in funding arrangements; and the shared antipathy towards putting market housing on rural exception sites in a protected area. The act of 'holding the line' in respect of cross-subsidy and land price is a defining feature of the Taddington project, as is the project-level enabling.

7. Discussion and conclusions

Amenity villages in the three case study areas, and especially in the National Parks, are amongst the least affordable in England, with house prices and private rents now frequently far beyond the means of households working in these local economies. The limited scale of development opportunities in many amenity villages makes them reliant on the RES mechanism, rather than the site allocation process detailed in Part 2, and on the energies provided by rural housing enablers. In the presented cases these were local authority embedded enablers (funded through a novel recharge process), a mix of independent and LA enablers, and more complex mix of RP leads and LA enablers. How the enabling function was supported and how embedded enablers were in local projects were issues of critical concern in all three areas. Those enabling small rural housing projects may achieve significant local fame, given the importance attached to affordable housing by many people in local councils and communities. That housing supports services and local business. Even small projects have the potential to deliver transformational outcomes in small communities. But despite their small scale, they can inflame passions and spark resistance amongst residents.

The YNYER SHIP case illustrates the critical role that enablers play in building enduring relationships. The corporate emphasis placed on housing delivery is realized through the strategic partnership, which, in turn, has established processes and mechanisms for supporting the enabling function. In the absence of consistent national funding for

independent enablers, which is a cause for consternation for many rural housing professionals, the RP-authority funding partnership has secured long-term support for enablers, through the combination of a retention fee and unit recharge mechanism. That long-term support has actualized a project management approach to RES delivery, maintaining a pipeline of projects built on the capacity of enablers to proactively seek and promote small project opportunities. However, the frequency of RES projects is not solely an outcome of effective enabling and project management. Rather, these projects emerge from a context of active rent-seeking by landowners, which means that RES outcomes cannot be ‘unhitched’ from the local plan. RES activity may therefore decline during local plan reviews if landowners perceive a chance of allocation via the normative land-use planning described earlier in this paper. It also means that local plans that allocate a significant number of housing sites *may* have less RES activity, whilst those with no allocated sites, outside of larger towns, *may* have much more. This is particularly true of protected areas.

The importance of a clear corporate focus on rural housing was reiterated in the case of Winchester where RES schemes have been supported, until 2020, by a combination of LA-based enabling officers and independent enablers, under the auspices of the HARA programme. A strategic approach to site search, blurring the boundary between normative land-use planning and the more organic and bottom-up way in which RES emerge, helped direct the local authority to conversations with particular parish councils and development partners. On the one hand, the case study unveiled the importance of pragmatism, in the approach to cross-subsidy and engagement with a private partner, in getting small rural projects off the ground, in building trust and in de-risking projects and smoothing the planning process. But on the other hand, it also revealed the risks of commercial objectives being put ahead of community interest and the difficulties that arise from a lack of independent enabling, which plays a critical role in building the support needed to realize exceptional housing projects.

Whilst emphasizing the same points around corporate priority, which seeds confidence amongst partners, and also result in local funding solutions, the Derbyshire Dales case focused attention on the everyday practices of enabling. Enabling is a hands-on undertaking, built on the development of strong personal relationships, during evidence gathering, site appraisal (during the ‘walkabout’), and during close working with the parish council. Those councils must navigate the very common contradiction between in-principle support for affordable housing and nervousness around specific sites – ‘yes, we need affordable homes, but not here’. Enablers help councils maintain the required objectivity, ensuring that personal knowledge and technical assessment guide eventual site selection. The Derbyshire Dales (and Peak District) case revealed the value of strong planning, ‘holding the line’ on the exceptional nature of RES, thereby achieving the required suppression of land price – closer to agricultural than full residential value.

Why are RES significant? They are a disruptive fix to the challenges of a private land market. It was noted in the introduction that ‘regular planning’ corrals value to housing sites allocated in a local plan. It does this intentionally, seeking to unlock development potential, and value, in a systematic way. Through the use of planning agreements, fixing conditions to development permissions, the normative system then seeks to divide that value between private landowners, developers, and the community. However, the greater part of it goes to landowners as rent and to developers as profit. What remains for the community, to mitigate impacts, and to fund infrastructure and affordable homes, may be insufficient. An arising imbalance in power between private actors (landowners and developers) and public regulators (the planners) has, in recent years, centered on the question of viability (see for example McAllister et al., 2016). Viability is the financial logic that underpins development (establishing that a new land use is more profitable than an existing one) and a measure of the capacity of a site to ‘carry’ that development, i.e. meet public obligations whilst delivering acceptable returns for private interests. Modern ‘calculative practices’ (ibid.) seek

to challenge the proposed extractions of public regulators: where rent and profit fall below a level that is ‘acceptable’ to private interests, extractions – including the proportion of affordable homes on market-led allocated sites – will be driven down by expensive consultants and lawyers.

In rural areas, RES offer a means of bypassing these disputes and procuring affordable homes. Land has not been allocated for housing in a local plan and there is, therefore, no intentional corraling of value. The price paid for land, by the RP, should therefore be a price that supports affordability. However, the recent marketisation of RES, through incentives to landowners (see Stirling et al., 2023b) and through the on-site cross-subsidy mechanism introduced in 2012 (see Part 2), presents a significant threat to the capacity of this mechanism to deliver its public benefit. It was noted at the beginning of this paper that public grants are available to support RES, and it is of course possible that grant rates could rise, allowing RPs (or taxpayers) to bear higher land costs. But the justice of such an approach (taxpayers effectively subsidising landowners’ rent extractions) is questionable, particularly if one agrees with the essential Georgist proposition (see George, 1935) that land values (rents) belong to the communities that have created them – arising from agglomeration effects and from investments in infrastructure over generations. A fairer approach, balancing the interests of landowners with communities, would be to fix land cost at a price that supports the affordability of housing. That fix could be achieved by setting a price limit on RES land (within the National Planning Policy Framework detailed in Part 2) or, as suggested in the Yorkshire Dales, by using simplified and remodelled compulsory purchase powers to bring land into public and community ownership where a landowner is unwilling to sell land at an affordable price, which, as we showed earlier in this paper, is already many times greater than current use value. The significance of RES lies in their disruptive potential, which seems to be worth protecting and enhancing.

What about the enablers? Within a process that sits outside normative land-use planning (and the steer that it gives to the private housing and land market) it is important that cooperation is promoted and project energies maintained. Enablers are not peculiar to RES. It was shown in the YNYER SHP case that they have a role to play on allocated sites. But it is in relation to RES that enablers are vital: ‘there is no RES without the enabler’. In a market economy in which housing and public welfare has been commoditised, and rendered unaffordable to a growing minority of households, land market disruptions of the kind that RES deliver are essential. Equally, the local statecraft in which enablers play a central role is critical to that disruption – ahead of the systemic changes that the UK, and other late neoliberal economies, so desperately need.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Nick Gallent: Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Andrew Purves:** Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Phoebe Stirling:** Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Iqbal Hamiduddin:** Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

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The data that has been used is confidential.

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