

Wyre Forest District Council Local Connection Policy

Local Connection

Generally it is considered that local connection would comprise of one of the following:

1. Existing residents in unsuitable housing living within the local area
2. People currently living within but requiring separate accommodation in the local area, for example, those living with parents or in tied accommodation
3. People who work locally but are unable to afford housing locally
4. People who currently live elsewhere, or are homeless, but have firm links to the local area, for example, elderly people returning to an area to be close to relatives for support.

For the purpose of this Policy, 'local area' would normally be considered to comprise the parish or adjoining rural parishes within the Wyre Forest area.

What does the Home Choice Plus Allocations Policy say?

The Home Choice Plus Allocations Policy provides the legislative background to 'local connection' and explains that local connection is defined in Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 as:

- Those who are normally resident in the area. Local Government Association guidelines define this as having resided in the area for six of the last twelve months, or three of the last five years, where residence has been out of choice.
- Those who are employed in the area – the Local Government Association guidelines define this as employment other than of a casual nature. Employment is defined as a permanent contract or being self employed and to satisfy the connection criteria their place of work or work base must be situated within the parish.
- Those who have family connections – the Local Government Association guidelines define this as immediate family members who have lived in the area for five years. Family connection will be close relatives living in the parish. A close relative is a parent, grand parent, adult sibling, adult child or grand child.

Affordability Criteria

Applicants who qualify under the Local Connection Eligibility Criteria will then undergo an affordability assessment to establish that they are not in a position to afford an open market dwelling in the area. (This process will also establish an applicant's ability to afford shared ownership and fixed equity options).

Completed forms will be assessed in accordance with:-

- Current data on house prices and rents in the Parish
- Financial requirements of average mortgage lenders and their lending policies
- The availability of appropriate properties to meet identified needs e.g. accommodation to meet disabilities or health issues and tenure required.

Applicants who fit the relevant local connection and fit the affordability criteria

Where applicants have both a relevant local connection and fit the affordability criteria, their housing will be prioritised in accordance with the housing need banding awarded and the effective date of this banding under the Home Choice Plus allocations policy, with the exception of:-

- Any housing need banding that was awarded for needs which will not be met by an offer of a dwelling in the Parish e.g. medical or welfare needs which would not be improved by living in the Parish;

Applicants will be nominated for dwellings in priority of need as identified by the banding award to applicants under Home Choice Plus Scheme and where applicants have been awarded the same banding, the effective date (time spent on the waiting list) of the banding will determine the priority of applications. In the unlikely event of cases having the same banding and same effective date applications will be further prioritised in accordance with household size to property type/size, however to promote sustainable communities, a degree of under occupation may be allowed subject to agreement with the District Council.

In the event that no households can be identified from the above criteria within 3 weeks, allocations will be made to the households in neighbouring rural parishes as agreed with the parish council and specified in the Section 106. As in the previous paragraph, allocations will be made primarily on the basis of households Home Choice banding and effective date. However, in the unlikely event that cases have the same banding and effective date, applications will be further prioritized by the best match between household size to property type/size.

What do Section 106 Agreements say?

Taking into account all of the above, on qualifying rural sites, Section 106 Agreements are put into place to secure that priority is given to persons with a local connection to the Parish. Below is an example of the wording within a Section 106 that would help secure this:

“Qualifying Resident” shall mean a person who is on the Home Choice Plus register and administered by the Council and who is approved in writing by the Council and:

1. who is ordinarily resident in the Parish of (Bewdley and Arley), or
2. whose family are ordinarily resident in the Parish of (Bewdley and Arley)

3. Who is employed by the Parish of (Bewdley and Arley), or
4. Whose family are employed in the Parish of (Bewdley and Arley)

If no person qualifies pursuant to (1) – (4) above a person who is on the Home Choice Plus register administered by the Council and who is approved in writing by the Council and:

5. Who is ordinarily resident in any of the Parishes of (Kidderminster Foreign, Lickhill, Ribbesford, Areley Kings, Wolverley and Cookley)
6. Whose families are ordinarily resident in any of the Parishes of (Kidderminster Foreign, Lickhill, Ribbesford, Areley Kings, Wolverley and Cookley), or
7. Who is employed in any of Parishes of (Kidderminster Foreign, Lickhill, Ribbesford, Areley Kings, Wolverley and Cookley), or
8. Whose family are employed in any of the Parishes of (Kidderminster Foreign, Lickhill, Ribbesford, Areley Kings, Wolverley and Cookley)

If no person qualifies pursuant to (5) – (8) above, a person who is on the said Home Choice Plus register administered by the Council and who is approved in writing by the Council as being in need of Affordable Housing.