



to build new homes amid concern over a shortage of affordable rented

*Picture, above, shows Churches Together worship at Finchale Priority, Durham.*

North East Churches Acting Together (NECAT) – with members including the Church of England, Roman Catholic, Baptist, URC and Methodist churches as well as independent churches – has commissioned consultants to advise on potential sites for affordable housing development.

Schemes being considered include supported accommodation for groups including older people and people with learning disabilities.

The move comes after the group held two conferences on housing and homelessness in the region in recent years.

Revd Joanne Thorns, a Church of England priest and Regional Officer for NECAT, has been working with Chris Beales, a member of the Church of England's Housing Executive Team.

“We know that in comparison to London and other areas, house prices are not as high here in the North East,” she said.

“But there are a lot of low paid and insecure jobs and people on zero hours contracts - and that makes it very difficult to get a mortgage.

“The need for good quality affordable community based rented accommodation is huge.”

So far experts have found 10 potential sites on church land including rural and urban areas, with a shortlist of three sites to go forward initially for further exploration.

Rural areas are also affected by the housing crisis especially in holiday areas where holiday lets have increased prices.

“We have had conversations with local churches and tried to find something that they can engage with in the long term – we don't want to just build accommodation and then walk away,” Joanne said.

“Living in a community is as important as having a bricks and mortar home and people need to feel they have community around them.”

**More information:**

- The work researching potential housing sites on church land has been funded by [Big Society Capital](#).

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