



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
EAST OF ENGLAND

Affordable Rural Housing Seminar 8th July 2005

A number of issues were aired at the CPRE East of England Seminar on Rural Affordable Housing this is a brief summary of some key elements, they do not necessarily reflect the views of CPRE as an organisation but were issues/point arising from the discussions

A commonly used definition of affordable housing is:

Housing that is provided, with subsidy, for households whose incomes are insufficient to enable them to purchase or rent accommodation locally on the open market.

The problem of right-to-buy and low cost market housing

Is it appropriate for rural exception sites to be allocated when:

- There is leakage of housing for rent, due to the right to buy. This works against the provision for long term rented housing,
- Is low cost market housing simply subsidising the first purchaser, as the house will leave this market at second sale, unless it is shared equity? Making it a problem to retain smaller homes in the market place for low income house purchase?

Suggested way forward

Homes built on exception sites must be kept in perpetuity, no right to buy. Market affordable homes must be shared equity, thus retaining control outside of the market.

Problem of regional targets for affordable homes as percentage of market homes.

Whilst it seems laudable at first sight to go for a regional target for affordable homes as a percentage of total housing build, it may be an unsustainable approach. Simply having a target may be likely to result in many market houses being built where the affordable housing element is not built (as happens now) or there is unnecessary build. Indications are that in some places there are no overall housing shortages, but only in the provision of homes for rent.

Possible way forward.

Targets may work in urban areas but due to threshold issues (smaller sites) they are unlikely to be useful in rural villages. Local targets need to be set based on needs assessments.

Issues around extending village envelopes

Here we examine some of the problems associated with the policy of extending village envelopes and using a rural exceptions policy to provide homes for rent and retain small homes for purchase in rural areas, especially where there is a 'second home' market, or demand for extending small homes.

- Exceptions sites are not always where you would choose to have them. Rural housing should be planned very carefully into village development. It may be necessary to take more than one village into account.
- Exceptions sites often take valuable amenity land, e.g. corner of the playing field, the allotments, a piece of amenity land in conserved areas, or good agricultural land not really appropriately placed.
- Exceptions sites need be suitable for the needs of the likely residents, e.g. too far out of the centre for young mother to walk with baby, or down a narrow road without footpaths, neither is a good option nor sustainable.

Joined up planning

There is a need to have joined up planning so that:

- Permissions to extend do not remove smaller homes from the market place or the pool of rented accommodation.
- Planning prevents the demolition of modest dwellings and replacement with something larger and the conversion of two small dwellings into one larger unit.
- There is a need to evaluate the numbers of houses being lost by 'leakage' in the system of rented homes being sold to tenants and to plan this in.
- Number of second homes purchase. Are there policies to limit this available to LAs should there be a "tax" which goes to help provide new affordable homes.

Delivery mechanisms

Section 106 are not appropriate for rural affordable homes. Few village sites are very large no more than two or three houses. It is therefore unlikely that affordable rural housing needs can be met by S106 agreements.

Of the larger schemes where permission is being granted, very few are actually getting built and those that are built, are they being placed in the least attractive part of the site and often designed irrespective of nearby character? In Suffolk in 2003/4 of the 2,766 houses completed only 311 (or 11%) were affordable. This is nowhere near the 30% target in the draft East of England Plan.

Questions arising from the seminar.

If we are to examine how main stream planning can provide for housing for rent, which it cannot at the moment, and for those on low incomes, what has PPG3 to do to bring this about?

The recent change to allow the allocation of sites in rural areas for affordable housing in local plans will help to reduce hope value sites, but its implications needs examination. There is no incentive for builders to provide affordable housing.

What would be the implications of LPA's allocating more sites in excess of identified need – a market trigger over-riding other planning considerations?

Surely we should be ensuring that government has an integrated approach on policy? At present it is fragmented and is failing to deliver affordable homes.

Feedback on any of the issues mentioned in the notes would be welcomed.