

Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan 2011 to 2029 Public Examination Hearings

Issue 4: (Q8-10) Other Housing Matters Policy SS6 – New Housing in the Countryside Wednesday 14 October 2015

Submission by CPRE Hampshire

1. CPRE is concerned about the ability to control new housing in the countryside. It has promoted a new approach to considering development which emphasises the need to use brownfield sites first. This brownfield first approach avoids the need to release significant amounts of greenfield sites in favour of reusing previous sites for housing. It also avoids the need to release new sites in the countryside and concentrate development where it is most needed, in the older urban areas, where regeneration issues and potential are to the forefront of policy.
2. Settlement Policy Boundaries have long been a feature in local plan preparation. These may encircle a settlement, either allowing room for expansion or coming close to the edge of development itself. The merits of this approach can be divisive because of the need for some smaller settlement to grow over time. These smaller settlements do vary in size and function, and a single approach may not always be appropriate across the board. Overall this policy is of great importance in considering pressure for housing.
3. CPRE also recognises that brownfield sites may well be inaccessible or remote, and therefore subject to other sustainability considerations. The surroundings of previously used sites may also have significant environmental disadvantages. Each site must be considered on its merits and the wider environmental conditions assessed.

Housing in the Countryside

4. In regard to rural exception sites for affordable housing, CPRE can acknowledge that many sites have been successfully completed around rural villages and have become an accepted part of the local community. Once built, they blend in. CPRE would agree that there is much scope for such development, often on the edge of smaller villages, and would encourage this approach. Each application has to be considered carefully in relation to any additional pressure and impact that it may create.
5. Providing new sites in the countryside for housing is always going to be difficult. CPRE believes these problems are best avoided, but acknowledges that sites will come forward. The reuse of redundant sites and buildings is often an advantage so long as criteria are met. In these cases, redevelopment is possible so long as it does not significantly extend the existing footprint, or require another building in replacement. An element of flexibility is required in judging such development schemes, so that they might be seen as sustainable and are addressing local needs. If such redevelopment can result in a positive contribution to the environment through enhancement or general improvement, then it can be an advantage that should be supported.
6. In such cases, it is important that the local rural community is properly consulted and is supportive of the proposals. This can apply both to affordable housing schemes and to market housing proposals that are of a smaller scale and can be accommodated. In some cases, the proposals may be driven by the local community, as with parish councils or partnership groups working with rural social housing groups.

7. When replacement dwellings are considered, care must be taken that there is no further or added environmental impact. In such cases, the size of the plot is of importance in determining viability, and likely impact of the proposal on the surroundings. Visual intrusion in the landscape may prove to be a downside for any emergent proposal, and overall physical assimilation will be an important factor.

8. CPRE can acknowledge the need for a living countryside, and indeed it is a recurrent campaign theme over a number of years. For this to take place there may be a need to allow for some further development in villages and smaller settlements. This concession may be open to abuse and this would be a major concern. The problem is to find the right balance between allowing reasonable additional development and opening the flood gates that would lead to unbridled expansion and unwelcome development in the most attractive and environmentally sensitive rural areas.

9. The development of neighbourhood planning as an effective tool for planning control is to be welcomed. This can help to identify suitable criteria and indeed sites for future development within smaller settlements in the borough. CPRE has promoted this form of community-based planning in the hope that it can secure and release suitable new sites for housing while protecting the environment and countryside of the area. There is much to be gained from wider community involvement if done in a positive manner, and with a clear aim of avoiding a rush of unsuitable development schemes.

Need to protect the Countryside

10. It is understood that some development will take place outside development envelopes given the pressure for growth. However, this should not be encouraged by the local plan which needs a more restrictive approach to development in the countryside. The avoidance of coalescence is major factor in rural areas where adjacent communities may reflect different periods of growth and different attitudes. The policies so far incorporate an element of flexibility and this is to be welcomed. They should seek to avoid proposals for isolated housing in the countryside.

11. The replacement of rural buildings or their conversion may be appropriate if their impact is limited, and there is overall public support. If this helps to promote greater vibrancy in a rural community then the local plans should not stand in its way. However, whether the original building is temporary or not, it is the overall environmental impact that matters most, and it should be the determining factor in the planning process.

Conclusions

12. New housing in the countryside is to be avoided unless it can be shown to be making an overall positive contribution to the environment. While smaller scale development can be seen as harmless, these may over time add up to a problem. Isolated houses in the countryside are generally undesirable and should be discouraged through appropriate planning policies. This not to indicate that smaller settlement may not be in need of some new housing to accommodate local families.

13. The ability of villages to grow in a natural and organic fashion is a separate consideration. This is different to an acceptance of influxes of outside development pressures and these should be resisted through suitable planning restraint measures. Such a flexible approach is essential if the reasonable development aspirations set out in the local plan are to be met over the forthcoming period.