

NEWTON & NOSS PARISH COUNCIL

~ Clerk to the Council: Mrs J Eschbaecher ~

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Mr A Lessware
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Planning Policies Division (2)
Zone 4/J5
Eland House
Bressenden Place
LONDON
SW1E 5DU

27th February 2006

Dear Sirs

Consultation: PPS3 Housing

This response to the Consultation is based on the experience of a rural Devon parish in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty within a short commuting distance of Plymouth. Our average house price is twice the national mean.

The Parish Council of Newton & Noss welcomes the overall objectives of the document but has the following observations:-

- a) The population of Devon continues to rise but less than 10% of the land is developed. Owing to inappropriate planning policies, there has been significant market failure in the provision of land to meet housing needs. In general, there is not a shortage of land on this island and a further 1% devoted to housing, outside the South-East, need not seriously detract from the beauty of our countryside. Much of our landscape is man-made, whether rural or urban.
- b) There has been a failure to provide sufficient housing in the South West of England for at least twenty years. Many people and families face serious problems now and whilst long-term solutions are welcome, immediate action is also required. Any changes to planning legislation should not provide an excuse for further delay by strategic and district authorities to the immediate provision of housing, of all types. For example, moving from Local Plans to LDFs has caused significant delay and confusion and resulted in the real issues of the lack of affordable housing being sidelined by the debates over the format of the planning process. Whilst changes to planning legislation – or the future of district or county councils – may be a government necessity, Central Government has a duty to ensure that in dictating any change, the short-term delivery of affordable housing is not further delayed.
- c) Some parishes have reached their natural maximum size and do not wish to grow any further. Others, like ours, recognise the need and benefits of re-balancing the mix in the community to secure long-term sustainability. To achieve this we would wish to encourage an appropriate growth of dwellings to address our housing needs and ensure an appropriately diversified, critical mass of full-time residents.

- d) Much emphasis is placed on the regional and sub-regional analysis of housing need. The evidence to date is that in the South Hams District this has been severely underestimated by the Regional Assembly, but there is no effective, democratic mechanism to influence the Assembly to ensure immediate as well as long-term housing requirements are met. There must be democratic accountability for all those determining housing targets – how else are they to be made to answer for their inaccurate forecasts and the plight of their citizens?
- e) Regional housing targets must be relevant and up-to-date – too much data for the South West's immediate needs is based on decade old assessments which failed to anticipate today's requirements.
- f) In determining new build requirements, an accurate assessment of available existing dwelling stock is required. For example, in this Parish.....
 - a. There has been a steady trend of enlarging property, thus removing smaller and less expensive properties from the housing market.
 - b. A significant number of smaller properties have been (and are continuing to be) purchased for holiday letting/second homes, thus further reducing the availability of smaller, less expensive properties for full-time occupation. (For example, in the past twelve months, three cottages on Newton Hill have been sold as second homes.) As a consequence we have an increasing number of homes of four bedrooms or larger, but our stock of smaller properties continues to dwindle. With base costs in excess of the District norm and an ever reducing stock of smaller affordable properties, young people and their families cannot afford to live in our Parish, thus threatening the long-term sustainability and balance of the community
 - c. Meanwhile, capital rich but income poor older residents are forced to downsize, as their health or wealth dictates. Moving away causes a severe dislocation in their social support networks, placing an increased burden on the State.
- g) Most importantly, we agree with the objective of developing mixed communities in rural areas by which we mean, socially rented, intermediate and wholly privately owned dwellings on the same sites. Ironically, the present rural exceptions site policy prevents such mixed development.

In rural areas such as ours, many parishes have been made the offer of land, provided the landowner can either build one or two properties for him/herself or develop one-third of the site for modest private housing. However, under the present restrictions governing rural exception sites, the land has not been released because of insufficient return to the landowner. Such landowners are not being unrealistically greedy; they realise they are very unlikely to be allowed to build large estates of private houses. All they want is some modest benefit for themselves, in exchange for a significant proportion of a site being given to the community.

Inevitably, those rural parishes defined as being in areas of ANOB such as ours, do not have much "brownfield" land and have their development boundaries tightly set. As a consequence, in order to maintain their sustainability by developing an appropriate mix of modest affordable and private housing, they have to consider "windfall" rural exception sites. Ironically, whilst we all welcome mixed developments, the present rural exceptions policy prevents such schemes and, in practice, has done little to encourage landowners to release land for rural housing.

The Parish Council's proposals

The Parish Council strongly recommends a change to the rural exceptions site policy to permit the following:-

- All properties within the site, whether affordable or open market, to be built to a homogenous design and identical standards.
- No less than two-thirds of the development must be affordable (social rented or intermediate housing) for local needs (controlled by section 106 agreements).
- Up to one-third for open private sale, provided it is of the same mix of dwelling sizes and types as those built for the "affordable" sector.
- There should be some effective profit sharing mechanism for the original landowner/community should any of the socially provided housing be transferred to the private sector, for whatever reason. This would act as a further disincentive for the removal of affordable housing from the social sector and would help to ensure its provision for a significant period of time. It would also help to protect the original philanthropy of the landowner.

We would welcome an opportunity to continue the dialogue and are anxious to assist in bringing changes to the current policy to enable the authority to implement its stated priority of affordable homes for local people. We have an exhaustive library of research and data to substantiate the needs of this Parish which may prove of use to others in this process, and are most happy to share our work.

Yours faithfully

J M Brown
Chairman
Newton & Noss Parish Council

