

SELLING OUT

The impact of housing land supply requirements on Oxfordshire's countryside



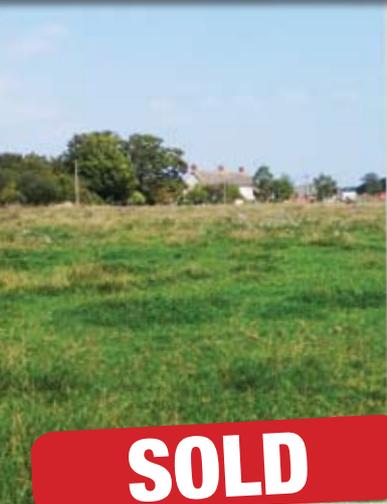
lands, Great Coxwell,
200 houses



North of Highworth Rd, Humpty
Hill, Faringsdon, Vale 94 houses



Shipton Road, Wood
West Oxon 5



on, Uffington, Vale
36 houses



Fernham Fields, Great
Coxwell, Vale 200 houses



South of Highworth R
Faringsdon, Vale 126

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The impact of housing land supply requirements on the Oxfordshire countryside

- New research by the National Office of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) *Targeting the Countryside: The impact of housing land supply requirements*ⁱ shows that a 'loophole' in national planning guidance is allowing developers to bypass local democracy and gain planning permission for large housing developments in the countryside.
- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published by the Government in March 2012, places an emphasis on the need to 'boost significantly' the supply of housing.
- CPRE agrees that we need more new housing and particularly affordable housing which meets identified local needs, but development on greenfield should be a last resort, not the 'default' as CPRE's research shows is currently the case.
- The CPRE report illustrates how the NPPF 'puts greenfield sites at risk by forcing local authorities to demonstrate that they have a supply of housing sites which are economically viable for a developer, and which can meet market demand for the next five years'.
- Paragraph 49 of the NPPF states that housing applications should be considered in the context of 'the presumption in favour of sustainable development' and that relevant policies for the supply of housing should not be considered up to date 'if the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites'.
- However, local authorities can only make land available for housing; they rely on private developers to actually build the homes at the required rate.
- If developers fail to deliver enough homes, it is the local authorities who are required to address the shortfall by allocating even more land for housing – often less sustainable, but more profitable greenfield sites.
- Without a local plan in place local authority decisions to reject housing on greenfield sites can be overturned by a Government Inspector.
- A local plan can also be disregarded if it doesn't show 'a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years' worth of housing'.
- The consequences are proving catastrophic for the countryside – the CPRE report states:
'In the past two years 26,840 houses on greenfield sites have been given planning permission at appeal when the local authority was not found to have enough housing land supply to meet its requirements'.
- The CPRE report concludes: 'it is clear that the NPPF is making the five-year land supply the major factor in deciding planning applications'.

To stem the unrelenting tide of housing developments in the countryside, CPRE is calling on the Government to amend paragraph 49 of the NPPF so that there is not an automatic presumption in favour of granting planning permission where the local authority is unable to demonstrate a five-year land supply.

Oxfordshire – a case study

- The Oxfordshire branch of CPRE has done some preliminary research into how the NPPF's housing policies are being interpreted locally.
- **Our research confirms that the effects of paragraph 49 of the NPPF are proving disastrous for the Oxfordshire countryside.**
- The Oxfordshire SHMA – Strategic Housing Market Assessment (March 2014), proposes that we need 100,000 new houses in Oxfordshire by 2031. This would represent a 40% increase in total housing stock in the County in just 17 years, an almost unprecedented rate of growth. An independent planning consultant concludes the figures are grossly overstated by a multiple of two due to serious flaws in its methodology.ⁱⁱ
- We believe local authorities should not be treating these figures as a target, but as one part of the evidence base upon which to determine housing need; however, those local authorities that do not have up to date local plans in place (the Vale, West Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Councils), are currently trying to accommodate the SHMA figures without question.
- Our research shows that in those districts where a local plan is not in place local authority decisions to reject housing on greenfield sites are being overturned by Government Inspectors at appeal.
- **In those local authorities in Oxfordshire without an up-to-date local plan, we have identified that at least 800 houses on greenfield sites have been given planning permission at appeal in the last two years, primarily because the local authority has been found not to have enough housing land supply to meet its requirements.**ⁱⁱⁱ
- Our research also shows that the same local authorities are permitting housing developments on inappropriate greenfield sites which they had not identified in their local plans; a major factor being the likelihood of losing at appeal because of a lack of five-year housing land supply, as well as the cost of going to appeal if a refusal is granted. This is counter to a fundamental principle of planning in England, namely the plan-led system.
- **We have identified almost 600 houses that have been permitted on inappropriate greenfield sites in the Vale, West Oxfordshire and Cherwell Districts over the past two years, where a major factor has been the likelihood of losing at appeal because of a lack of five-year housing supply.**^{iv}
- **We have also identified planning applications for more than 500 homes on greenfield sites that are currently under consideration in the Vale of White Horse District; in the light of recent precedent they are very likely to be approved, with the lack of a five-year housing land supply being a primary factor.**^v
- In these Oxfordshire districts, the absence of a local plan, the requirement for an up-to-date five-year housing supply and the need to find extra developable sites because of the uncritical acceptance of the excessively high SHMA figures, is clearly prevailing over policies restricting development on open countryside or existing greenfield.
- The Oxfordshire SHMA is already resulting in developments on inappropriate locations not identified in local plans. This situation is likely to worsen in future as it will make it even more difficult for local authorities to demonstrate a five-year land supply. This will have irreversible and highly damaging consequences for the environment of the County. It will also put its already strained infrastructure, notably its transport network, under such pressure that it is hard to see how it will cope. The inevitable result will be to reduce the quality of life of Oxfordshire residents.
- We need to make changes to the current policy and guidance to ensure that environmental sustainability carries the appropriate level of importance in all planning decisions in the County.

Recommendations

To stem the unrelenting tide of housing developments in our countryside, the Oxfordshire branch of CPRE is calling on MPs to influence the Government to make the following changes to the planning system:

- Amend paragraph 49 of the NPPF so that there is not an automatic presumption in favour of granting planning permission where the local authority is unable to demonstrate a five-year land supply. It should also be made clear in these cases that developers should still be expected to meet local policy objectives, such as using brownfield sites before greenfield.
- Immediately suspend the requirement in the NPPF to allocate an additional 20% 'buffer' of 'deliverable' housing sites because it is exacerbating already unrealistic housing requirements.
- Amend paragraph 14 of the NPPF so that meeting housing demand does not have greater weight than environmental and social sustainability in plan making and decision taking.
- Amend the NPPF to ensure that where an up to date Local or Neighbourhood Plan is in place, development of inappropriate and unallocated sites will not be permitted at appeal.

October 2014

END NOTES

i. CPRE National Office *Targeting the Countryside: The impact of housing land supply requirements*, September 2014.

ii. *Unsound & Unsustainable: Why the SHMA will increase greenfield use but not meet housing needs - A critique of GL Hearn's April 2014 Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), Urban & Regional Policy*, May 2014 (commissioned by CPRE Oxfordshire).

iii. Since 2012, 839 houses on greenfield have been given planning permission at appeal in Oxfordshire because the local authority has been found not to have enough housing land supply to meet its requirements. Of these, 239 homes have been approved on greenfield at appeal in the **Vale**, largely because of the 5-YHLS rule, including: 21 in East Hendred (Wood Farm Road), 200 in Great Coxwell (Fernham Fields), and 18 in Wantage (Manor Road). An application for a further 94 houses in Faringdon (Humpty Hill, North of Highworth Road) went to appeal in July of this year; a decision is expected from the Secretary of State in January 2015. In **Cherwell**, 600 houses have been allowed by an Inspector on appeal since 2012 (160 in Bloxham, 70 in Hook Norton, 145 in Banbury, 65 in Adderbury and 85 in Deddington). In **West Oxfordshire**, a planning application for 116 houses on greenfield in Bampton (Aston Road) is currently at appeal.

iv. A total of 583 houses have been permitted on greenfield sites in Oxfordshire over the past two years. Of these, 155 homes have been approved in the **Vale**, these include: 103 houses in Shrivenham (68 at Colton Road and 35 West of Highworth Road), 36 in Uffington (The Common, Station Road) and 16 in Watchfield (Mac's Paddock off Major's Road). In **West Oxfordshire**, 228 homes have been approved on greenfield, these include: 160 in Bampton (New Road) and 68 in Woodstock (off Shipton Road); this is likely to be the tip of the iceberg with applications for 3,666 more homes on greenfield sites awaiting decision or in the pipeline. In **Cherwell**, 200 homes have recently been approved by the District Council on greenfield in Ambrosden; the Council permitted the development despite not being in their draft Local Plan.

v. Planning applications for an additional 517 homes on greenfield sites are currently awaiting approval in the **Vale**, these include: 222 in Great Coxwell (200 at the Steeds and 22 at Fernham Gate), 135 at Shrivenham Golf Course, 70 in Faringdon (South of Highworth Road) and 90 houses in Challow (50 at Windmill Place and up to 40 at Challow Road). These new housing developments are mostly on the fringes of towns and rural villages and are resulting in the coalescence of towns and villages – a situation which the Vale's draft Local Plan seeks to avoid.