



6 September 2011

Letter to the editor, The Guardian

Dear Editor,

I feel it is important when discussing the proposed changes to the planning system to hold the balance between the benefits of new developments and environmental concerns.

As Chairman of the soon to be abolished Commission for Rural Communities, I have spent a number of years working with disadvantaged rural communities and acting on their behalf as an independent voice within Government. Whilst the Government's priority in favour of growth has fuelled understandable anxiety from some that large amounts of the green belt will be handed over to developers, there is a danger that the tone of the current debate risks losing sight of some fundamental problems facing our countryside. England's villages need more housing if they are going to survive, and thrive as vibrant communities for the next generation. That is the best way to keep the ever decreasing number of rural shops, post offices and pubs, all of which provide a lifeline for local people, open. Not huge developments which dwarf the existing village, but small developments of perhaps ten or twelve dwellings, in keeping with the environment. Not just affordable houses, though that is essential in many areas, but some market too.

The current planning system has meant that in many rural areas, development necessary for the ongoing viability of communities has been prevented. The presumption in favour of sustainable development in the draft NPPF should help provide much needed housing in villages where the default position has all too often been "no". Through the Localism Bill, the government is making provisions to ensure that councils will be able to protect the green belt as part of their Local Plans. This important check, if carried out properly, will be crucial in ensuring that the countryside we all cherish so dearly is preserved, whilst also assisting the people who live in rural areas to survive and thrive.

Yours faithfully,

Stuart Burgess
Chairman
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