

were LID to strive for stronger economic performance its environmental benefits would be compromised.”⁴

5.3 The report’s analysis was based around the four key principles of sustainability as laid down in PPS1 and in paragraph 1 of PPS7: social inclusion, protection of the environment, prudent use of natural resources, and high and stable levels of economic growth. This can be viewed in the box on the page opposite.

5.4 The UWE report was followed up by a further report commissioned by Pembrokeshire Coast National Park authority from Baker Associates, and subsequently a Low Impact Policy 52 in the Pembrokeshire and National Park Joint Unitary Development Plan.

5.5 Unfortunately, there has as yet been no similar independent research report commissioned for England. However a number of Local Authorities have inserted LID policies into their development plans or LDFs. And the Countryside Agency in their submission to the revision of PPG7 pointed out that the draft “does not address low impact development in the countryside” and continued:

“These types of subsistence-based developments are an intrinsically sustainable form of development and can make a limited but positive contribution to sustainable development in rural areas. They currently do not fit neatly within the scope of planning policies for agricultural or other types of rural development.”⁵

LACK OF POLICY, LACK OF PROVISION

6.1 The last sentence in the Countryside Agency’s statement brings us to the fundamental problem which the UWE report outlined as follows:

“LID scores positively against the three parameters of sustainability — environment, community and economy — but we face a paradox whereby development of high intrinsic sustainability is being rejected by a planning system that is centrally concerned with sustainable development.”⁶

6.2 This paradox is reflected in West Dorset as it is across most of England. National guidance and local authority plans are full of support for sustainability, for example:

- PPS7 starts with the states that “Sustainable development is the core principle underpinning land use planning”.
- The Revised Deposit West Dorset District Local Plan states that “the concept of sustainability is emphasised in Regional Planning Guidance and underlies the overall strategy of the Adopted Structure Plan”.
- Policy 2.9 of the local plan states that its main objective is to secure a balance between the need for conservation and the need to adapt to changing circumstances.
- The local plan’s Objective 5 makes references to maintaining a healthy local economy and recognizes in Policy 2.29 that “land will need to be made available to meet the future economic needs of the area”, and that “it needs to be provided in a way that is compatible with environmental objectives”.
- The West Dorset Partnership Community Plan 2004-5 (2004) identifies sustainability as one of its three crosscutting priorities.

6.3 Yet despite the support for sustainable development, the planning authority in West Dorset, as in most parts of England and Wales, instead of encouraging and welcoming such applications, has greeted them with suspicion. For example Fivepenny Farm, near Wootton

Fitzpaine, only gained permission after a public inquiry at which the Inspector stated that the enterprise was “consistent with government advice on matters such as agricultural diversity and sustainability”. Ourganics, based at Litton Cheney was given permission at committee, but in the face of a recommendation for refusal from the officers. A couple running a horticultural holding at Upper Sydling Farm are currently facing an enforcement notice.

6.4 These examples — all retrospective applications — reflect a minority who take a risk. There are many more who are deterred from ever developing their enterprise or pursuing their dream by the fact that their proposal does not conform with existing policy. Chapter 7 frequently receives enquiries from people who are interested in starting new projects, but who don’t feel that they will be able to gain permission for the dwelling which they need to fulfil their objectives. They are told that this is a “personal preference”, when they view it as the best way to set about making their way of life more sustainable. Many have difficulty understanding why the planning system, and the majority of planning authorities, are so implacably opposed to them establishing a simple and sustainable rural living on their own land when:

- (a) their proposed projects offer solutions to problems such as carbon emissions (by providing local organic food and using renewable energy); and
- (b) there is a large unmet demand for many of their products, which they are producing in consonance with objective 4 of PPS7: “to promote sustainable, diverse and adaptable agricultural sectors... that provide high quality products that the public want”.

6.5 The reason for this paradoxical situation, the UWE report continues,

“is because LID is not evaluated in terms of its sustainability attributes, but rather according to

whether, it satisfies policy expectation for agricultural workers dwellings . . . The planning system and LID thus finds itself in a quandary where manifestly environmentally sustainable rural development is being opposed by a planning system which lacks the means to appreciate it and properly control it.”⁷

6.6 This was echoed in the Baker Associates report which began its introduction with the following:

“The requirement to accommodate LID within the planning system begins with agreement that there may be something that it would be desirable to accommodate that is not generally being accepted under current policies. This is the position set for the project by the Brief.”⁸

6.7 Our view is that although sustainability may be the core principle underpinning planning policy, un-

til local producers are given space in a living, working countryside, it will be difficult for Dorset to have a truly sustainable and vibrant local economy.

6.8 We are not suggesting overnight changes throughout Dorset. We would like to see the new local development framework moving away from this paradigm, not suddenly, but by gradually allowing room for the kind of projects we describe to proceed without such excessive obstacles. Over the next five or seven years this would give us a better picture of the pattern of demand for this kind of rural activity, the benefits it could bring to the rural economy and society, and the ways in which it can be regulated so as to enhance rather than undermine the rural landscape and environment.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE AONB

7.1 We believe that development outside the development boundaries and particularly within the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) should be highly sustainable and conform to the character of the landscape, but that doesn't mean that people should be excluded from the landscape.

7.2 Seventy-three per cent of West Dorset is designated as an AONB. Some voices from both the general public and planning department work upon the assumption that no development should fit into the landscape of the AONB, and that the undeveloped nature of the landscape should be safeguarded for its own sake.

7.3 Yet, the Countryside Agency states that while its policies on the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are first “to conserve and enhance natural beauty”, in pursuing this primary purpose:

“account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment”.⁹

7.4 At the Fivepenny Farm planning appeal (where these issues were discussed in depth) a former countryside commissioner, Gerard Morgan-Grenville stated:

“It was never intended that AONB's should be ‘frozen’ in their existing state in perpetuity. It was always accepted that a certain renewal of farming activities and related structures would not only be realistically inevitable in a changing market, but also essential if the areas were to remain economically viable especially at a time when the farming industry in this area is under severe strain.”¹⁰

7.5 The Management Plan for the Dorset AONB plan states:

“The Dorset AONB is a living landscape, shaped by human activity over the centuries. The need to support a wide range of activities whilst managing the very assets on which so many of these aspects depend requires an integrated approach. This is particularly apparent when the demands on our landscape resources are increasing. These include tourism, agriculture, recreation, transport and many other rural based industries - the social and economic activities that underpin vibrant communities. The aim of the ‘multifunctional landscape’ approach is to ensure that the functions of the AONB landscape contribute to the AONB and, in turn, the functions benefit from a high quality environment. This requires promoting sensitive activity that enhances the many values and qualities of the AONB. Living landscapes embrace the concept of sustainability as set out at the Rio Summit in 1992, providing an integrated approach to management. Difficult decisions will have to be made to balance the needs of landscape conservation and ensuring continued economic and social benefit.”¹¹

7.6 Low impact building developments connected to projects that manage the land in a sensitive and productive manner have the potential to be the “sensitive activity” that the AONB area needs. The Policy Framework outlined by the AONB report sets out numerous policy objectives for farming and agricultural land management which would be promoted by quality low impact projects.

7.7 At the moment, any developments of this nature which have taken place in the AONB, have been on an ad hoc basis, with mixed results. Developments have appeared sporadically with no real support and guidance. On the whole they have been successful, but sometimes the developments are not landscaped as appropriately as they could be or they are located in inappropriate zones.

7.8 A well defined low impact policy would allow the

AONB team and the planning department to take an active role in shaping projects, landscaping them, zoning them and ensuring that housing designs were not only sustainable, but also fit in with local styles. A clear policy would also allow the council to support projects through grants and advisory services and similar programmes.

7.9 Applicants would be able to submit applications following guidelines set out in supplementary planning guidance. Advisory bodies from the AONB could review these applications, and then applicants and advisors

could work together to develop landscaping and management plans for the land which could be tied to planning permission.

7.10 There may also have to be some new housing in the AONB. Sites have to be identified around towns and key settlements for new houses, and some settlements, notably Bridport, are completely surrounded by the AONB. Low impact housing schemes (with low impact service roads) offer a way of expanding housing into the AONB with a minimum of impact upon the environment and landscape.



Processing room for local food at Fivepenny Farm, Wootton Fitzpaine; a timber frame building made from local Douglas fir.

LAND BASED PROJECTS

(1) Smallholders

8.1 The number of smallholders (including small-scale woodland managers) in Dorset appears to be growing, partly because many farms are being fragmented, and partly because there is a demand for this lifestyle. West Dorset in particular seems to attract people wanting to start smallholdings, not only because of the popularity of the River Cottage television programme, but also because of the networks of smallholders which are being established. In fact, the smallholder scene has become a defining characteristic of rural life in Dorset.

8.2 Small-scale farming activities are well-suited to some forms of organic production, and to providing produce for local and niche markets, all of which have

a higher demand than supply in West Dorset. The skills required to make a living off small acreages of farmland and woodland are being relearnt, while the markets for local, traditional and niche products are expanding rapidly.

8.3 The AONB Management plan mentions as “key opportunities”, that “organic farming generally has the support and confidence of the public and can provide opportunities for some farmers”, and that “increasing interest in smallholdings and part time farming offers opportunities for maintaining skills and diversity of local produce”.¹²

8.4 The three main areas ways in which smallholders aim to earn their livelihood are:

- Organic agriculture and permaculture
- Sustainable forestry and associated products such as charcoal, firewood, sawn timber
- Rural crafts such as basketry, hurdle making, furniture making

8.5 Many smallholders see living on their land to be essential to the livelihood that they wish to build up, partly because of the demands of the holding and partly because the returns from the enterprise, although they may provide a livelihood, are not sufficient to meet the inflated cost of housing in a nearby village. Many also have the skills and desire to build a traditional type ecological home, because it fits in with their lifestyle and beliefs.

8.6 The West Dorset Partnership Community Plan 2004-5 identifies as specific issues: “decline in landscape quality, wildlife habitat and range of wildlife species, due to harmful land uses and management and states that the decline in agriculture threatens the local landscape”. Key objectives are to “support and help the development of a viable agricultural sector that protects and enhances our unique heritage, promote and develop communities in ways that enhance our heritage, raise awareness of greener lifestyle choices”.¹² Supporting smallholders would be a concrete way of fulfilling these objectives.

8.7 The problems that smallholders experience with gaining planning permission stem from a lack of understanding within current policy of the needs of smallholders. The guidance which most frequently causes them this problem is Annex A of PPS7, particularly the functional test.

(ii) Diversifiers

8.8 There are some other types of low impact projects for which a countryside location might be appropriate, that aren't related to agricultural or forestry, though most would incorporate elements of both. These types of projects fit into local plans promoting diversification of the rural economy. Here are three examples,

(a) Eco-friendly camp sites

8.9 A low carbon emissions society will entail fewer people travelling abroad for holidays (avoiding long distance travelling, especially flying) and creating a demand for domestic provision of holiday.

8.10 Eco-friendly campsites could range from very simple low cost provision for comfortable services offering catering and luxury yurts/treehouses. All would be characterized by:

- Temporary, low impact accommodation ranging from pitches for campers' own tents to yurts, geodomes or treehouses
- Water conservation through use of compost toilets/earth closets, recycling of grey water from showers
- Use of renewable forms of energy (wood fuelled/solar showers, campfires, wind generated electricity)

The Functional Test

The Functional Test, as outlined in paragraph 16, specifies as examples of reasons to live on the land: the need to attend to the care of animals at short notice; and the need to attend to emergencies relating to the climate control of crops. Both these examples relate to unpredictable “emergencies” and no other possible reasons for living on the land are specified.

4.12 Many smallholders do sometimes have to deal with emergencies such as these. But they also, and more commonly, cite a number of other reasons for living on their land, connected with the day-to-day running of the site:

(1) That the holding requires frequent attention, throughout the day, at highly dispersed times of morning, evening and even night, often for small tasks (such as putting away animals, dealing with pests, or attending to the climate control of greenhouses). This is particularly the case when a number of different activities are undertaken. This makes commuting from another house highly impractical, particularly when child-care responsibilities must be carried out at home

(2) That many of the subsistence benefits of living on the land, particularly water, electricity, building materials and firewood, cannot be obtained when residence is elsewhere.

(3) In the case of permaculture projects and similar, that human domestic activity (including production, consumption and waste generation) is viewed as an integral part of the ecosystem on the holding, and hence integral to its functioning.

(4) In short, managing the holding is a way of life, rather than a “nine-to-five” job.

From *Sustainable Homes and Livelihoods in the Countryside*, by Chapter 7, 2003.

- Dependence on home grown or local produce for food
- Encouragement to minimize car use (eg lower price for those who arrive by foot, bicycle, public transport)

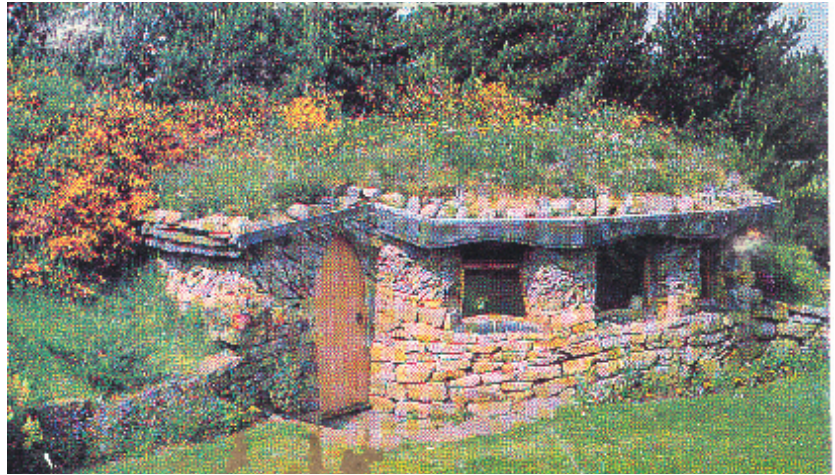
(b) Land-based education (forest schools and permaculture demonstration plots)

8.11 There is growing demand for a variety of courses that use the land as a primary education resource. These include permaculture design courses, wilderness survival skills and woodland and farming skills. In addition the need to educate children about the countryside and farming means opportunities exist for both school-based visits and rural holiday camps and rural craft courses.

8.12 Residential courses require both space to camp and provision of food, usually local and often produced on site. If sustainable living is being taught the course venue needs to teach by example as well as in theory, showing how the residential lifestyle is integrated with land use.

(c) Land-based healing centres

8.13 Healing centres are a modern version of the sanatoriums of 19th and early 20th century, which were usually sited deep in the countryside, by the sea or in the mountains. The tranquility, fresh air and privacy of rural locations are often necessary to aid healing. Fresh, homegrown food is frequently part of healing service and space is required to grow it. Healing often combines more holistic experience of reconnecting with the land/nature, retreat from busy modern life (with its mains electricity, bright lights and artificial environment) with the more specific treatments (shiatsu or homeopathy, for example).



Natural sanctuary, Findhorn Scotland

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LAND BASED PROJECTS

9.1 We suggest that the best way for the Local Development Framework to allow and control all these kinds of development would be to adopt a Low Impact Policy. This could be modelled upon Policy 52 of the Joint Unitary Development Plan (JUDP) adopted by the Welsh Assembly in Pembrokeshire, but adapted to the situation of West Dorset. (See box)

9.2 The Pembrokeshire Policy is accompanied by Supplementary Planning Guidance which provides a helpful explanation for applicants of what the local authority expects to see in an application in respect of business plans, management plans, transport arrangements, and mechanisms for ensuring the affordability and sustainability of the project over time.

9.3 We do not, by any means, regard Policy 52 as perfect. But it does provide a very useful template and basis for discussion for a similar policy in West Dorset. It should be borne in mind that Policy 52 was formulated in part for the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park and some aspects of the policy might need to be changed to adapt to local needs and circumstances.

RECOMMENDATION 1 We advocate that the local authority formulate a low impact policy designed to provide for Land Based LID, taking the Pembrokeshire Policy 52 as a template, or basis for discussion.

9.4 In general, since land is by default agricultural, one would not expect the local authority to allocate land for commercial smallholdings. However the efficient provision of local food, consuming a minimum of fossil fuels is dependent upon proximity. Areas on the outskirts of towns and large villages are particularly appropriate for peri-urban agriculture, and could be identified

**Policy 52
of Pembrokeshire Joint UDP**

Low Impact Development that makes a positive contribution will only be permitted where:

1. The proposal will make a positive environmental, social and/or economic contribution with public benefit; and
2. All activities and structures on site have low impact in terms of the environment and use of resources; and
3. Opportunities to reuse buildings which are available in the proposal's area of operation have been investigated and shown to be impracticable; and
4. The development is well integrated into the landscape and does not have adverse visual effects; and
5. The proposal requires a countryside location and is tied directly to the land on which it is located, and involves agriculture, forestry or horticulture;
6. The proposal will provide sufficient livelihood for and substantially meet the needs of residents on the site; and
7. The number of adult residents should be directly related to the functional requirements of the enterprise;
8. In the event of the development involving members of more than one family, the proposal will be managed and controlled by a trust, co-operative or other similar mechanism in which the occupiers have an interest.

as such in the Local Development Framework. Plots of a few acres would be sufficient for smallholders producing vegetables, fruit, eggs, and possibly a bit of meat for local consumption.

AFFORDABLE RURAL HOUSING

10.1 The affordable housing crisis in Dorset is a cause of great concern to a wide sector of its population. House prices have risen faster than local incomes largely because Dorset is considered a desirable location which attracts wealthy incomers able to pay high house prices. This can price local people out of the market.

10.2 Whilst the average house price for the area is now in excess of £220,000, 50% of people currently earn below £20,000 per annum in Dorset (New Earnings Survey 2004). This is causing a steady depletion of middle and lower income households from rural communities, a loss of working age adults and Europe's fastest increasing elderly population. All this is leading to loss of vital village services like shops and post offices, village schools and rural public transport service.

10.3 In the *Framework for the Future of the Dorset AONB*, adopted recently by the district council as supplementary planning guidance, the first of the key issues identified in the section "People, Jobs and Services", is (5.12.15) "lack of affordable housing for local/young people and key workers"; another is that "young people are not being retained in the county". The West Dorset Partnership Community Plan 2004-5 identifies housing as one of its seven priority themes and the following specific issues: local house prices too high for local wage earners, low paid employment locally and greater need for specially adapted properties.

10.4 This lack of provision for homes which are generally affordable, is now acknowledged to be a major failure of rural planning, not only in West Dorset but in many places throughout the country.

10.5 Low impact self built homes are a practical solution to this problem — not the only solution, but an environmentally friendly one which costs the taxpayer

nothing. A self built home can be extremely cheap to build. A simple but warm and comfortable temporary bender home can cost as little as £400 to build, a yurt can cost about £2,000, a wooden cabin or straw bale home can be built for about £4,000, even a smart timber frame ecohome can be built for prices ranging from £25,000 to £40,000.

10.6 Chapter 7 estimates that in West Dorset alone, the number of households who would be keen to build their own affordable home, or commission its building, runs into the hundreds. But there is no opportunity for them to do so. There are two reasons for this. Firstly land with permission for building typically sells for 100 times the price of land without planning permission, making self-build on windfall sites unaffordable. And secondly there is no provision for self-build housing — low impact or conventional — in the local plan.

10.7 This perverse situation is one which can be quite easily turned around. There is a shortage of affordable housing, there are individuals and families capable of building their own homes, there is no absolute shortage of land, and there is a local authority empowered to allocate land for affordable housing or introduce exception site policies. It should not be hard for the District Council to find a way of allowing people in West Dorset to build affordable low impact homes which do not harm the rural environment.

RECOMMENDATION 2: SELF BUILD SURVEY We suggest that the local authority should conduct a well publicized survey to find out how many people in the district would be interested in affordable self-build housing, and where this need is located.



Because there is no provision for self-build and low impact homes, some people move onto land surreptitiously without applying for permission. This mobile home on a secluded permaculture plot near Bridport was occupied as a dwelling up until 2005, when the landowner sold the property. Compare the visual impact of this mobile home to that of many of the holiday caravan sites that can be found in the AONB.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AFFORDABLE HOMESEEKERS

11.1 In respect of the people whom we have identified as homeseekers there are two mechanisms the Local Development Framework could adopt to allow people in Dorset to build affordable low impact homes: the first is to allocate land for the purpose; the second is through exception site policies.

11.2 PPS 3 on Housing, paragraph 30 states that local planning authorities should adopt “a positive and pro-active approach which is informed by evidence, with clear targets for the delivery of rural affordable housing. Where viable and practical, Local Planning Authorities should consider allocating and releasing sites solely for affordable housing.”

11.3 PPS 3 applies to both conventional and low impact housing; however there are likely to be some rural situations where a conventional development might be deemed to have too high an impact on the environment or landscape, but where a small development of highly sustainable low impact houses, or a one-off — would be acceptable.

11.4 In this context we point to an article by Brian and Sybille Rushbridge in Green Building magazine, written in order to explain why sustainable housing is so much more advanced in Germany than in the UK.¹³ One of the reasons they give is the assistance given by local authorities to the self-build sector:

“German self-builders are also encouraged by the more transparent local planning system. Local councils decide on a regular basis which land should be developed next to houses or flats. they will then establish which owners are willing to sell suitable land to the council. On this land the council delineates individual plots if these are in demand, installs the utilities, and attaches outline planning permissions. It also keeps an open register of all plots with planning permission, regardless of ownership, and many local papers publish these lists quarterly. Such single plots are an affordable proposition for self builders (unlike the large sites used by volume builders here) and thus give a helping hand to the most forward-thinking group in the construction sector.”

11.5 Self-build in Germany, as in many European countries, comprises over 60 per cent of new owner-occupied housing. In the UK, the figure is less than 10 per cent, and most self-build is market housing rather than affordable housing.¹⁴

11.6 By contrast, the Bridport Self Build group was established in 2002, and has so far been unable to find any land. It has looked at four sites, but none have been made available for them, the majority eventually going for market housing. The group is now working with the

Somerset-based group ECOS (formerly the Somerset Trust for Sustainable Development) to try to locate a site. But really this is the job of the local plan. That is what local plans are for: to help provide development land to meet peoples’ needs.

RECOMMENDATION 3 The local authority should consider allocating appropriate sites for self-build affordable housing, low impact and otherwise, in the Local Development Framework.

11.7 However, allocation can be an inflexible instrument, and there is a danger of allocating land in an unpopular location. The other mechanism, the Rural Exception Sites Policy, is arguably more appropriate because it is a response to demand from below.

11.8 Policy HS4 of the West Dorset Deposit Local Plan states that: “Sympathetic consideration will also be given to proposals for affordable housing on suitable sites within or adjacent to villages that do not have a Defined Development Boundary provided that local facilities are easily accessible (other than by motor car) from the proposed development”. This advice is very welcome, and should be carried over into the Local Development Framework.

11.9 However a major problem for individuals and community groups wishing to benefit from the Rural Exception Sites Policy is the fact that nearly all local authorities are resistant to applications from anybody other than housing associations and registered social landlords. Individuals, even though they may meet all the criteria, have access to land, and (being rural and local) know somebody with a JCB who will do the work at a friendly price, are regularly given the brush off by planning authorities, usually on the grounds that there is no means of securing the future affordability of the home.

11.10 There is no basis for this in Government Guidance. Circular 6/98 on Affordable Housing stated: “Isolated single homes . . . should be considered with reference to rural exception policies in the development plan.” Circular 6/98 was cancelled with the publication of PPS3, but there is nothing disallowing one-off homes in recent guidance; local authorities now have much greater discretion as to how they formulate their Rural Exception Sites Policy. The DCLG document Delivering Affordable Housing, (paragraph 100) states:

“Alternatively, the local authority may permit a private company to own and manage the affordable housing stock. In this case it may be necessary to ensure, through the planning obligation or another legally