

**AN EVALUATION OF RURAL HOUSING POLICIES**

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**Master of Philosophy**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ASTON IN BIRMINGHAM**

**April 1990**

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## **SUMMARY**

**The University of Aston in Birmingham**

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Peculiarities in the rural housing market have been associated with the operation of rural planning policies. Research into the issue has been hampered by a dearth of information, especially at the local level and this has affected investigations. This thesis has provided some detailed information on the workings of "local needs" planning policies in a rural county and considered, firstly, the way in which strategic policies differ in similar areas and secondly, how they are interpreted at the local level. A detailed case study of planning applications for dwellings involving claims of "local need", examined the issues raised in one district. Consideration was also given to a definition of local needs and a discussion of "affordable" housing issues in the context of the study.

Development control records covering a ten year period were examined in order to select suitable cases for closer scrutiny. Research into more than 1,000 planning application files utilised access to privileged information and investigated the types of local need claimed, the source of the need, Parish council, Borough council and planning officer recommendation and the policy implications of the planning decisions made. A follow up survey of houses constructed outside settlements as a result of such applications, considered the current occupier's status in relation to his claim to a specific "local need".

The results have highlighted the need for a unified approach to policy formulation and application, revealing wide variations in the treatment of local needs issues between districts, coupled with an inconsistent understanding of the term. An approach to the definition of local needs is considered and potential solutions discussed.

### **KEYWORDS**

Rural Housing  
Rural Planning  
Village Planning

Local Needs  
Housing in Rural Areas



### **Acknowledgement**

This research project was undertaken whilst the writer was working as principal planner in the local planning department of a district in rural Shropshire. It took place over the same period as the preparation of the Borough's rural local plan and, with the agreement of the Borough Planner, much invaluable information was made available on a "privileged" basis.

In particular, thanks are due to the administrative staff of the department's development control section, who were able to help with many problems and whose patience and knowledge have been tested by my questioning.

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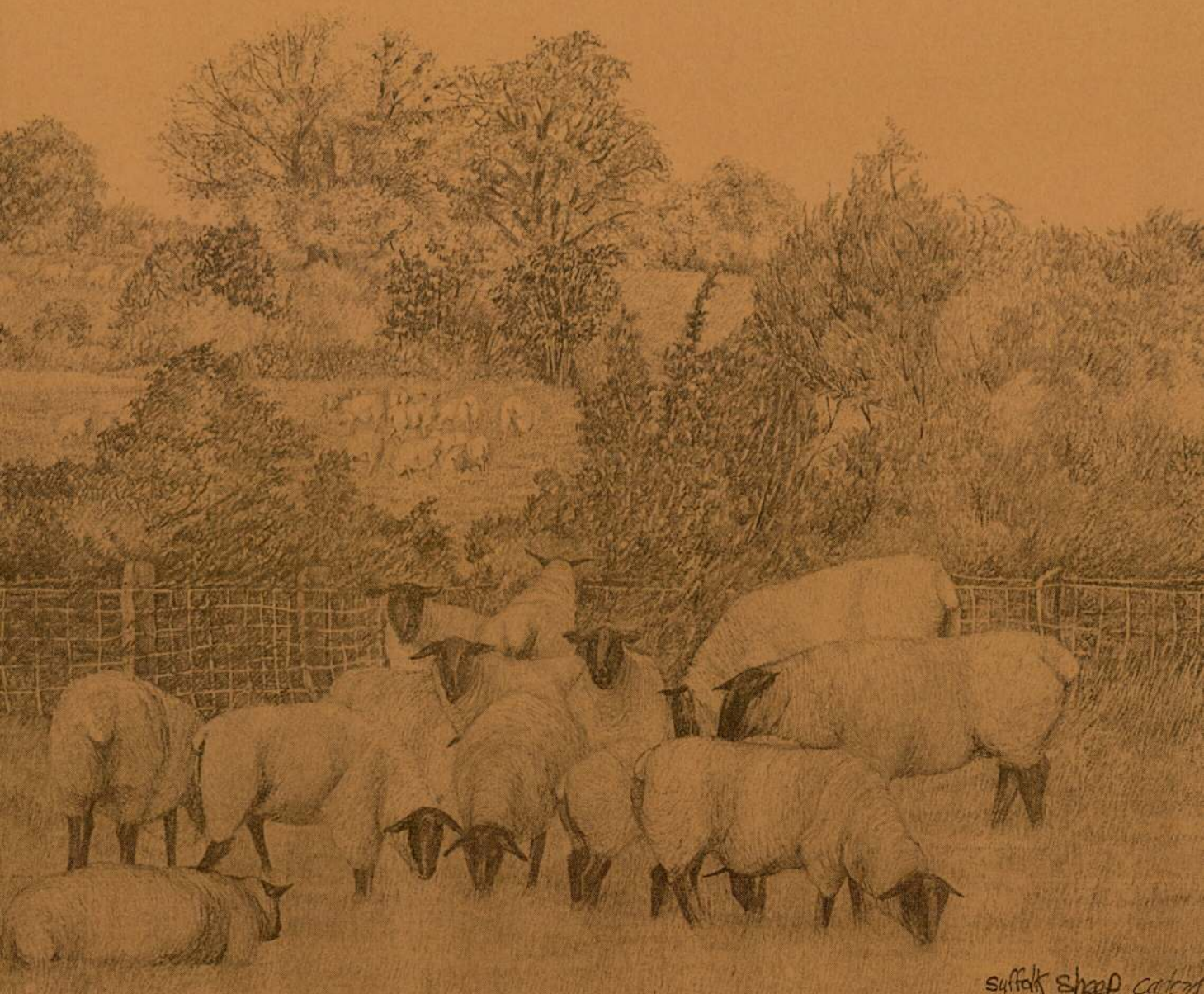
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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1:1 Issues

This study is concerned with several issues which may be covered by the general phrase "rural planning". Over the past ten years or so there have been a number of central government inspired legislative changes designed to remove bureaucratic restrictions on business initiatives and to encourage the workings of a free market. These have taken place during a period of surplus farm production when agricultural land values are in decline and housing land values are rising. Such issues are inextricably bound up with post war demographic changes and technological advances in various fields including transportation and communications. The resulting confusion has been said to encourage distortions of the housing market, particularly in rural areas and there has been much recent interest in the effects of house price inflation on disadvantaged sections of the community, particularly low paid local people, who are liable to find themselves competing in the housing market with city salaried commuters.

It is suggested that these matters have not been sufficiently influential in affecting the workings of the planning system and that the planning methods used in the 1980's are still those conceived in the inter war period, geared to crude policies of restraint and protection with recreation and landscape matters as side issues. There is little evidence to indicate that the present planning system is or has been capable of addressing the questions raised effectively, although there has been relatively little research into such matters.

### 1:2 Aims and Objectives

This study sets out to provide some additional information on the subject by examining the workings of "local needs" planning policies in the context of a rural county. The objectives include an assessment of the effects of policies on people living in the district with special attention being paid to the term "local needs". The study

also considers the strategic policies prepared by county planning authorities and how these are interpreted in practice by district local planning authorities. The examination considers some of these issues in detail as part of a case study of rural planning policies in West Shropshire.

### **1:3 Methods**

Utilising a variety of development control records, a selective examination of planning applications in a central Shropshire district was carried out in order to identify those which were concerned with new dwellings in the countryside. More than 1000 cases submitted over a period of 10 years were chosen for closer scrutiny and these provided a source of information on such matters as the reason for the dwelling, address of applicant, siting of the dwelling, policy implications, officer's recommendation, decision, etc.

The study took the form of a piece of "active" research in that it was carried out in conjunction with the preparation of a plan for the rural area of the district involved and in turn, influenced the eventual form of the up-dated rural settlement policies included in the plan.

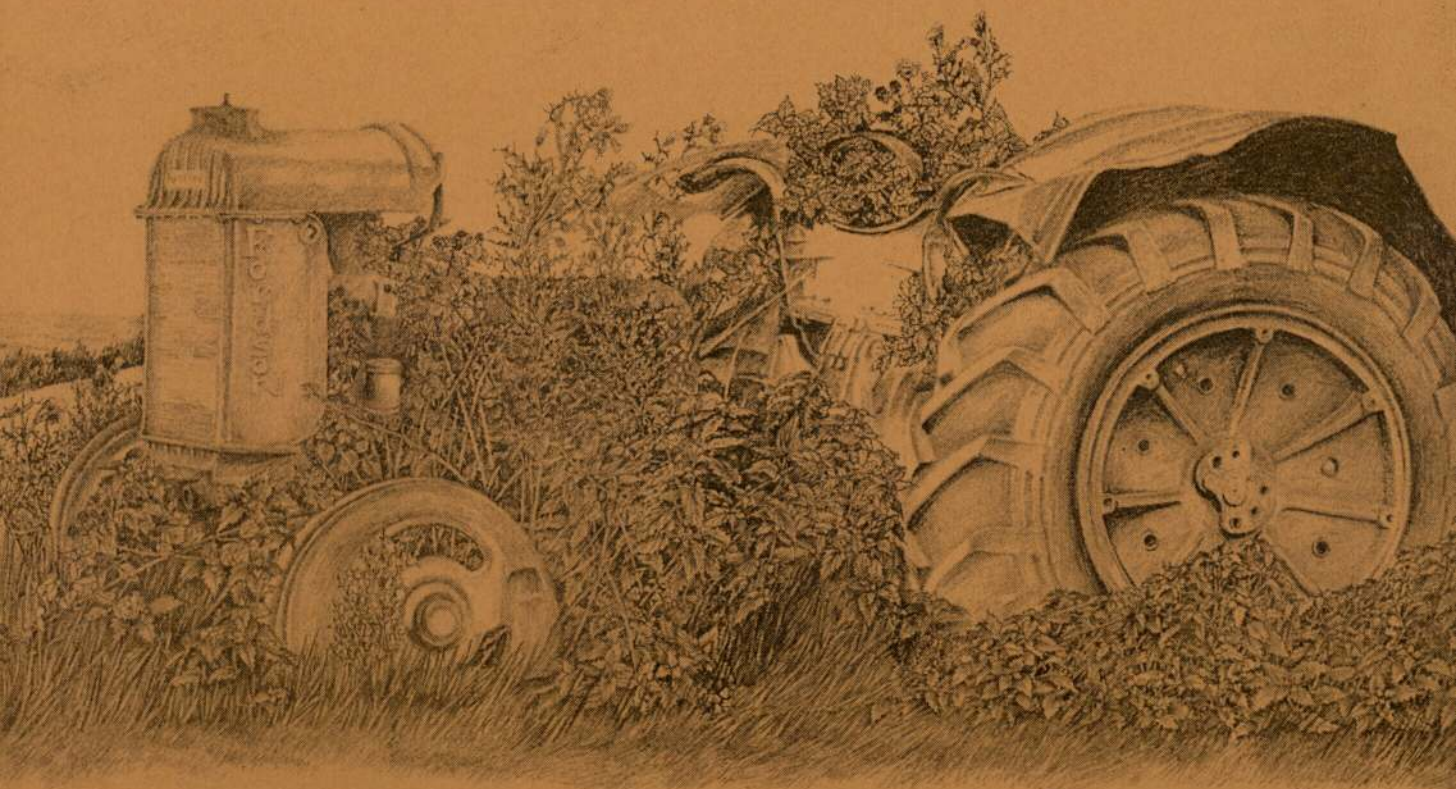
### **1:4 Structure of the Study**

The study is divided into several chapters, the first two introducing and reviewing issues in the context of the agencies involved and attempting to explain the way in which planning policies have evolved since 1945.

The third chapter sets out to review previous research, concluding that there is little detailed information available on policy performance at the local level. Subsequent chapters set out to remedy this omission beginning with an examination of rural housing policies operated in and adjacent to the study area. A case study is introduced which examines the detailed workings of such policies in one district with particular reference to local needs issues. The final



two chapters discuss this subject in relation to a follow up study of houses constructed in response to local needs demands, considering a definition of local need and examining present methods of planning for such issues.



*Fordson Cadoza*

CHAPTER 2  
THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH



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## 2. THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

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### 2:1 The National Context

#### (a) Summary

Since the original concept of rural planning was first embodied in national legislation, a number of fundamental changes have taken place. These innovations have not yet been properly taken into account by either the national or local agencies involved when considering contemporary attitudes to rural planning or rural housing.

From the immediate post-war period until the 1970's, responsibility for housing and rural planning was placed clearly in the hands of local authorities, even to the extent of making rural district councils responsible for development control and introducing public participation into the local plan making process. The emphasis was on the devolution of planning with major regional plans giving way to local plans and regional strategies. In the 1980's, this emphasis has altered and the original concept of public participation has been modified by the introduction of the need to consider the demands of private development agencies. Central government has begun to increase or strengthen the means by which it can ensure compliance with its own policy requirements.

In the 1980's bureaucracy, particularly planning, has been seen as an interference with the forces of a free market, as evidenced by such publications as command papers entitled "Lifting the Burden" (DOE 1985). Central government has tended to enforce its decisions and policies directly onto authorities by a variety of means, ranging from regulatory to fiscal, by publishing circulars clearly setting out policy requirements, by appeal decisions and by manipulating the distribution of grants, rate capping overspending authorities and surcharging recalcitrant councillors.

Until February 1989, apart from the existence of a powerful agricultural lobby, there was little evidence of any separate understanding or consideration of the problems of rural areas. These appear to have been overwhelmed by a preoccupation with unemployment and inner city matters. There is a pressing need to reconsider the intrinsic concepts of the role and function of the countryside before those changes which are currently taking place become unalterable.

This is not to suggest that what is happening is all necessarily bad, but, the available evidence indicates that decisions are being made based on outdated concepts of the needs and functions of rural areas. Greater knowledge of the forces presently at work is necessary so that policies may be formulated based on a clear understanding of the situation.

#### (b) Introduction

Since the Second World War, rural areas have been planned by local authorities applying settlement policies which have been developed without proper research into their causes and effects. The result has been a variety of policies, most based on key villages or main settlement concepts, applied with varying degrees of fervour in different districts. There has been a clear difference between apparent national objectives and what is happening "on the ground". Conflicting guidance and advice is available which only serves to confuse the issues further. Practitioners and researchers are agreed that there is a need for a re-examination of the role of the countryside, perhaps as fundamental as that which resulted in the original legislation of the late 1940's dealing with agriculture, planning and access to the countryside.

Present changes in agricultural practice, coupled with a social, transport and communications revolution, have led to a need to look deeper into those issues which are responsible for the present problems of rural areas. They include such matters as the reasons for applying rural settlement policies, the degree of restraint which



is introduced, the management of rural areas where demand is such that local people are priced out of the housing market and the creation of a tier of housing restricted to people employed in agriculture, forestry or, more recently, other local needs.

On the one hand there are areas under pressure from the housing demands of major conurbations within (say) 40 minutes driving time and on the other, the need to maintain services for rural communities. This conflict has led to the development of a number of policy devices which are used to prevent or encourage development in rural areas depending on the local authorities' interpretation of the problem. Some districts appear to resist new development by what almost amounts to the paranoid application of strict settlement policy and others permit virtually all applications for housing submitted by local people, stretching rules to meet all points.

Cloke comments that:

*"... there has been a . . . period of post-war planning of the rural environment which has developed without the basic research inputs to policy initiation and monitoring. Thus it is that major planned changes have taken place in the countryside in an atmosphere of inexperience on the part of planners and ignorance on the part of large sections of the general public." (Cloke 1979 preface)*

This chapter is intended to lead into the main theme of the study, concerning the details of settlement policy and housing provision in a rural area. Before becoming involved in such detail, however, it is essential to examine the background to the existing legislative and administrative framework in order to illustrate the manner in which national objectives are formulated and translated into policies and the means by which these are locally applied. At the same time it is important to appreciate the side issues involved and their contribution to the subject. For example, the effects of changes in commuting patterns, shopping habits, fuel prices, road building etc., may be difficult to quantify, but their effects on rural areas are more important in the late 1980's than they were in the late 1950's when rural settlement policies were originally formulated. As an



example of the importance of these issues, the following quotation illustrates the present role of England's rural areas:

*"Country areas offer homes and jobs to 10 million people: a fifth of the population. Nine out of ten of the people who live and work in England's country areas are not involved in farming. Some are commuters or retired people but the vast majority make a living by producing in these areas goods and services that other people want to buy. Businesses located in rural areas form a valuable and growing part of our national economy. These days engineering and high technology firms are just as likely to be found in rural locations as traditional craftsmen."*  
(Rural Development Commission 1989).

### (c) Development of Post War Planning

The origins of present day town and country planning lie in the 1930's when there was no national system comparable to the present one, and "ribbon development" began to take place along newly built arterial roads as the unemployment of the 1920's began to make way for the industrialisation and relative prosperity of the immediate post war years.

Ribbon development caused problems because agriculture had been in recession, few farmers could resist the high prices for land offered by speculative builders and the new roads of the 1920's and early 1930's offered frontage services and relatively fast access, even by public transport, to the factories and offices of the town. Roadside parking outside these properties caused congestion problems and the country disappeared behind an "urban frontage" for many miles around towns.

Public pressure led to an ad-hoc solution (or at least an attempt) in 1935, with the Restriction of Ribbon Development Act. The Act had many shortcomings, but at last government had accepted that part of "planning" was a national, rather than a local responsibility. Urban spread continued however and rather like the 1980's, the depressed areas of the north remained depressed. Public pressure led to the



government commissioning the Barlow, Scott and Uthwatt reports dealing with the distribution of industrial population, land use in rural areas and compensation and betterment respectively.

It is not the task of this document to describe these in detail, but by 1943, a Minister of Town and Country Planning had been appointed to ensure "consistency and continuity in the forming and execution of a national policy with respect to the use and development of land", thus ensuring a national approach to the problem. Eventually this was followed by the two acts of greatest significance to the development of rural areas; The Town and Country Planning Act of 1947, which set up what has virtually remained the present planning system for rural towns and villages, and The Agriculture Act of 1947, which set up a price support system for farm products.

Again, it is not an aim of this research project to discuss these acts in detail, but they establish two clear linked objectives at a national level which have hardly altered since. The first is the principle of restricting development in rural areas and the second is that of conserving agricultural land for the production of food. When these are linked with the proposals for national parks introduced by the Dower Report in 1945 concerning recreation and leisure in the countryside (eventually incorporated in the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act via the Hobhouse Report), we have the present system of planning control in rural areas i.e. geared to food production, recreation and largely restrictive towards development.

These objectives are incorporated in present legislation and are currently expressed in the 1971 Town and Country Planning Act as amended and extended by various circulars and regulations detailing the approach of the government of the day. It has been argued that these aims may now be in need of revision, perhaps because:

*"simultaneously, successive national governments have implemented agricultural and fiscal policies, amongst others, which were not intended to affect rural housing but demonstrably have done so." (Clark 1982 p.3)*



#### (d) Current Issues

##### (i) Agriculture and Conservation/Recreation

At national level, food and timber production, coupled with recreation and leisure activities, were originally considered to be the main function of rural areas. The system of town and country planning was set up with this in mind, central government even ensuring that planning restrictions did not hamper food production by permitting exemptions from the regulations for farm buildings on registered agricultural holdings. Similarly, guaranteed prices, subsidies, grants and other incentives including tax and rate relief, have all combined to encourage a more efficient agricultural and forestry industry. Forty years on from the original concept however, criticism is being levelled at the system. For, whatever the original merits of the set up, current planning practice has its limitations, one being an apparent failure to keep pace with progress. These faults are expressed in contemporary conservation arguments criticising the present approach and articulating the need to reconsider our appreciation of the original rural planning objectives. Previous concern with food production is questioned for example, because developments in agricultural production techniques have improved yields to such an extent that fewer rural workers are needed to produce far greater amounts of food. The corollary being a choice between storing surplus produce, using land less efficiently or cultivating less of it.

Additionally, the original concept of the countryside performing a recreational function is in danger because new agricultural production methods are changing what was considered to be the traditional landscape of the countryside to permit mechanised farming and intensive animal husbandry to take place. Indeed Shoard (1980 p.9) considers that "*the English landscape is under sentence of death*", commenting that the countryside will be unable to fulfil its recreational role unless the present system of control is revised.



Clear examples of this include the draining of fenland and the ploughing of uplands so they can be used for grain production whilst the EEC has a surplus of grain.

This attitude signifies a fundamental alteration in concept. What were originally conceived as compatible land uses are now increasingly seen as irreconcilable. This issue should not be closed without noting the comments of Coleman (Coleman, 1977) who considers that the present system results in the accretion of acres of "quasi-urban" land uses in the rural areas surrounding towns (for example sewage farms, nursery gardens, riding schools etc). National policies have not yet addressed these issues in a structured manner.

#### (ii) Settlement Policy/Demand for Housing

When national trends are examined, it is apparent that rural settlements may be expected to come under greater pressure in future. Increases in agricultural efficiency may initially have led to a decline in rural population as families were forced to seek employment in towns, but any rural vacuum thus resulting has largely been filled by commuters, retired folk or in satisfying the demand for second homes. There are local exceptions, but certainly in England, improvements to the national road network and the steady development and availability of private cars have enabled commuting patterns to be altered. When coupled with the demise of traditional industries and the development of new technology enterprises, this has resulted in a significant flow of population from cities, particularly of middle management or mid career people. Census results show a consistent fall in city population and a compensatory rise in the population of surrounding smaller towns as progress, in its various forms, enables families to support themselves in more pleasant surroundings but within present day commuting time of an urban base.

This has been clearly demonstrated in a study of population movement in Stratford-on-Avon District, which suggests that something:

*"dramatic and far reaching is occurring . . . the effects could be as significant as were those which occurred during the Industrial Revolution". (Stratford-on-Avon District Council 1983)*

The study continues to say that current statistics do not show the true rate of in-migration to rural areas because most in migrants move to the existing rather than the newly constructed housing stock, and are not picked up by present surveys.

Housing demand is growing in such areas and consequently fewer and fewer rural settlements may be considered to be "unpressured" by demand for new development and even those which may be expected to be so are often in demand for retirement or holiday homes. This is not a new phenomenon, but the rate at which it is happening appears to be growing. The fact that this is occurring is recorded by Cloke who compared a "pressured" rural area with an "unpressured" area and in so doing, prepared an index of rurality based on information taken from the 1961 and 1971 census. On comparing the two sets of results, he notes that urbanisation (or the influence of the nearest urban complex at least) is increasing. For example:

*"The western axis of urban pressure from London, visible in 1961, has been consolidated and extended almost to Bristol." (Cloke 1979 p.12)*

He continues to note that the separation of London and the Central Urban regions was visible in 1961, but:

*"the 1971 rurality distribution demonstrates a substantial erosion of this separation" (Cloke 1979 p.12)*

and that

*"(There has been) a spatial devolution of urban pressure away from the conurbations . . . and . . . increased urbanisation in England and Wales" (Cloke 1979 p.13)*

The evidence points to the probability that this trend accelerated between 1971 and 1981 and leads on to reinforce the conclusion that



many more rural areas may be expected to be considered pressured in 1991 than were considered pressured in 1961.

Nationally, the need to reconsider housing location (or rather to consider the countryside as a suitable location for new housing) has been expressed by a past president of the National Federation of Housebuilders following the Ministry of Agriculture's publication of figures indicating that farming land prices had slumped to their lowest level since 1978. The response of the Housebuilders' Federation was to offer to build on surplus agricultural land :

*"10,000 acres per year is all that's required to solve a housing shortage faced by millions of people" (Pye 1986)*

National policies have not yet been directed towards these topics, although the issues of agriculture, conservation and housebuilding have their own vociferous lobbies and the government does attempt to balance their conflicting demands by means of appropriate legislation or advice. Before leaving this matter it should be emphasised that it includes a number of important social issues which should be considered to be of national concern, but as they are directly related to the provision of houses in villages and social changes in settlements, they are included as local issues in the "Settlement policy" section of this chapter.

#### (e) Government Policy

The more general issues of rural settlement policy are not really considered at the national level, although it is apparent in practice that many central government policies have a direct or indirect bearing on the provision and availability of rural housing. Whilst it is not the task of this document to itemise them all, the following examples indicate the major role of factors under central government control.

(i) Circulars and Advice

It is clear that the number and type of planning applications submitted is affected by the actions of ministers. For example, a statement by the Secretary of State for the Environment concerning the direction in which certain policies should be formulated, does affect the applications received by planning authorities. When that statement is concerned with a possible alteration of government attitude, then the effect may be seen both in applications received, attitudes of applicants and in the arguments advanced at inquiries into refused applications. For example the written reply to a parliamentary question made by the then Secretary of State for the Environment, Kenneth Baker, in May 1986, hinting that a more relaxed attitude may be taken when considering changes of use of redundant farm buildings in green belt areas. Commenting that it may be appropriate to take into account the need to diversify the rural economy by encouraging new types of employment and enterprise he said that:

*"Redundant agricultural buildings can provide very suitable accommodation for small firms or tourist activities or can be used for individual residences, without detriment to the green belt and to the benefit of the local community."*  
(Planning No.667 1986)

This statement specifically builds on the advice contained in annex "a" of circular 14/84 which restricts green belt approvals to:

*"agriculture, sport, cemeteries, institutions standing in extensive grounds, or other uses appropriate to a rural area."*  
(DOE Circular 14/84)

At the same time, the statement extends the advice contained in circular 2/86 (Development by Small Businesses) to the effect that many new uses can be introduced without harm into rural areas or settlements.



Other circulars have similar effects, particularly those relating to rural housing. The effect of this is to encourage applicants to appeal to the Secretary of State if the current advice is not considered in relation to their application (or does not appear to them to have been given sufficient consideration). Thus central government policy may be directly translated into action without the usual participation of the public or county or district councils.

#### (ii) Planning Legislation and Private Housing

Current government policy is now linked to providing a five year supply of developable land in all areas (circulars 9/80, 22/80 and 15/84). The definition of a five year supply of land is a matter for negotiation between county councils, districts and representatives of local builders. For the first time since the introduction of planning legislation there is a requirement to consider demand when preparing structure and local plans which must be translated into development on the ground.

This represents a fundamental change in concept from previous legislation and advice, for the circulars make it clear that the government will consider the arguments put by developers if suitable land is not identified in plans and made available for development and that there will be a presumption in favour of development on other sites not identified in plans if builders bring them forward at appeal:

*"While the fullest possible use must be made of . . . urban sites . . . most new housing will continue to be on new sites. The planning system must (identify and develop housing land) taking account of market demand and other housing requirements."*

*"(development in smaller towns and villages) . . . can help sustain smaller communities in rural areas. In a few cases it may be practicable to (make provision for) new settlements." (DOE circular 15/84 p.2)*

*"in the absence of such an identified five year supply, there should be a presumption in favour of granting permission for housing." (DOE circular 15/84 p.6)*



This may not at first, appear to affect the rural housing situation, but the circulars clearly state the need to consider marketing sites and the housebuilders' pressure groups have shown their interest in "surplus agricultural land".

*"(sites must be developable and) in areas where potential house owners want to live, and be suitable for the wide range of housing types which the housing market now requires."*  
(DOE Circular 15/84 p.3)

The government's determination to apply such policies may be illustrated by decisions made by the Secretary of State following Examinations in Public (the statutory inquiry system for structure plans). These show that he will not necessarily follow the views of the planning authority. For example in approving a review of the Strathclyde Structure Plan, the Secretary of State modified it to require :

*"proper consultation with the private sector on housing supply and demand"* (Planning 1/86 p.5)

It can be seen then, that government advice contained in circulars can increasingly have a direct effect on rural planning and that the present administration intends to enforce such advice. This is clearly illustrated by the statement contained in circular 15/84 indicating that joint planning authority and housebuilder land availability studies have been useful in assessing market demand and site development potential. The statement is followed by the warning:

*"The Secretary of State hopes that planning authorities and housebuilders will continue to co-operate in this way, and that it will not be necessary to use his powers of direction under section 116 of the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980."* (DOE Circular 15/84 p.3)

This statement clearly indicates the government's intention to insist that joint studies are carried out. In Shropshire, there has been a useful degree of cooperation and such studies have benefitted participants in that contentious sites are discussed informally and their relevance to land supply calculations agreed before plan Inquiry stages begin.



### (iii) Resource Provision and Public Housing

Whilst central government policy can be seen to positively encourage private housing, the reverse is true of public housing. There has been a large reduction in the finance made available by central government to local authorities and a pronounced shift in the distribution of a major portion of local authority finance from rural towards urban areas. For example, Dunn, Rawson and Rogers (1981) show the inequitable distribution of Housing Investment Programme allocations made by central government to English housing authorities. These averaged £61.70 per resident overall, but only £32.90 per resident for the 63 most rural authorities. (Dunn et al, 1981 p.209)

Since 1977, Housing resources have been provided by central government in response to a system of bidding supposedly geared to strategic local needs and circumstances, known as the "Housing Investment Programme" (HIP). Each housing authority submits a document containing a resume of their housing situation, both public and private, together with a bid for housing money, a breakdown of the housing stock and waiting list and a housing strategy statement.

The strategy statement is intended:

*"to provide the foundation on which the (document) rests" and "a description and analysis of local housing conditions and problems . . . an assessment of possible solutions and proposals for action" "It is essentially a qualitative statement, drawing upon, but not confined to, the quantitative description of the local housing situation contained in (the document)." (DOE Circular 38/78)*

In practice, rural authorities tend to be disadvantaged with the system in that they are often unable to devote sufficient staff resources to dealing with this approach. For example, specialist staff employed to deal with the collation and analysis of statistics are rarely available in small rural authorities and yet detailed research would probably enable those authorities to identify problem areas more accurately and prepare a case to take greater advantage of government grants.



*"In the present context it is evident that these smaller, not necessarily less able, authorities react unhappily to the formality of form filling, hurried deadlines and complex calculations and estimates which have become part of the HIP system." (Dunn et al 1981 p.212)*

In the writer's experience, rural authority staff have since become more competent at dealing with the system, but this experience is now used to complete the necessary returns in a shorter time, not necessarily in preparing a better case for a larger share of grant.

The system operates on an annual basis and therefore clearly favours authorities who have a number of alternative proposals prepared and are able to offer ready made schemes to take advantage of whatever additional government money becomes available at short notice. The exact allocation to be made is never guaranteed when the bid is made and therefore forward planning is haphazard, particularly for smaller rural authorities, who may have very few schemes on stream at any one time. Various other examples could be given, but the disadvantage of rural as opposed to urban areas continues throughout.

The major issue then, is the relative merits of a central system of resource provision which does not take account of the different problems of rural areas, treating urban and rural housing needs as similar subjects, despite evidence which illustrates the clear differences for example, in such matters as scale and access to alternative housing opportunities. As in the case of planning advice, it is apparent that central government is frequently becoming directly involved with local issues. For example a housing authority's HIP bid for the construction of, say, 20 general needs council houses in a rural area will not normally attract an appropriate central government contribution, indeed, an authority which insists on constructing such a scheme will find its grants cut back for other schemes which would normally have been approved. As this issue impinges on matters of local interest it is also covered later in the study, in the section on housing and settlement policies in the local context (2:3).



#### (iv) Other Housing Legislation

An important facet of national policy is the recognition of the need to improve housing conditions and the housing stock. The 1974 Housing Act introduced the concept of Housing Action Areas and General Improvement Areas where Local Authorities, having defined an area of particular need, are entitled to special powers and financial grants to assist in house and area improvement. These are rarely used by rural authorities because, although their problems may be on the same physical scale, they tend to be dispersed over the whole of a district, rather than concentrated in a few specific and easily identifiable locations.

A further problem in rural areas occurs because the 1980 Housing Act gave local authority tenants the right to purchase their rented accommodation with a discount which increased with their length of occupancy (The Right to Buy). Subsequent circulars have increased the discount and required authorities to advertise the availability of this right. The result in rural areas has been to further reduce the meagre supply of rented accommodation. In some parishes in the writer's district for example, virtually all the council houses have been purchased by the sitting tenants and, in several pleasant villages, for example Church Preen, these have now been resold on the open market.

The Act does provide for exemptions to take account of the special problems of certain rural areas such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks, but even in these areas, very few exemptions have been granted. Current advice from the regional offices of the Department of Environment is that exemption will not be granted unless a dwelling has been substantially modified to accommodate people who are disabled and have special needs. This virtually excludes all conventional two storey housing and applies over the entire study area. The consequent diminution of their public rented housing stock causes rural authorities particular problems since they also have a responsibility to rehouse former agricultural and service tenants under the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976.

CHAPTER 2: 2

THE REGIONAL AND  
COUNTY CONTEXT





### (a) Summary

At the regional and county level, little has altered since 1945 in the way in which rural areas are planned and until relatively recently, there has been a remarkable continuity of approach. Key settlement and restraint policies have been developed and advocated as the most logical planning method, despite evidence which casts doubt over their efficacy and considerable changes in those factors which originally led to their development. However, the social structure of the region has altered and this, coupled with major changes in transport and communications, has led to the need to reconsider the present approach to rural planning which is increasingly seen as anachronistic and socially divisive. Attempts which have been made to address the problem at the regional and county levels may be seen to be relatively ineffective and do not appear to spring from the fundamental alteration in concept which may be required.

### (b) Development of Post War Rural Settlement Policies

Very little positive rural planning took place before the Town and Country Planning Act 1932, which effectively repealed and consolidated previous planning legislation, permitting planning authorities (county councils) to prepare schemes for land likely to be developed in order to "secure proper sanitary conditions, amenity and convenience". The agreement of 75% of landowners was required and there was no obligation to prepare schemes, but at least rural problems were recognised in those areas where they were prepared. Cloke cites a Warwickshire scheme recognising:

*"the practice of large-scale residential building in the countryside."*

and a Durham scheme which identified:

*"the loss of employment due to pit closures (and suggested that) some contraction of villages might be necessary as a result." (Cloke 1979 p.53/54).*

Some schemes began to acknowledge the need to prepare plans which identified key settlements, i.e. villages to which new housing/services were to be directed, Cloke mentions Cambridgeshire in 1934. It was not until after the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, however, that the duty was placed on county councils, as local planning authorities, to prepare development plans based on surveys of their areas, examining social, economic and physical factors. Before continuing to comment on the development plan system in more detail it is useful to explain the "regional" role in the planning process.

### (c) Regional Strategy

In the immediate post war period, regional planning was perhaps thought of as the way to deal with the dereliction caused by the hostilities. For example, Abercrombie had been appointed during the war to organise a plan for the Greater London area and in 1948, a plan was prepared for the West Midlands conurbation. The depression of the 1950's perhaps led to a move away from regional planning, although it was clear that passenger transport, water, industrial and economic development and roads, for example, needed to be dealt with on a regional, rather than sub-regional scale.

Planning, however, was largely left to the:

*"obsolete pattern of county borough and county areas and their boundaries." (Cherry 1974 p.192).*

Following the re-organisation of local government in 1974, the present system was set up and, in Shropshire, this remained until the 1986 abolition of the metropolitan counties. Basically the West Midlands County Council met with the four neighbouring county councils as a Standing Conference on Regional Planning and prepared strategic advice which was published as the West Midlands Regional Strategy. ("Regenerating the Region: A Strategy for the West Midlands." West Midlands Forum of County Councils. 1985).

Following the abolition of the metropolitan county authorities however, a new development plan regime was introduced to urban



areas. Each metropolitan borough is required to produce a unitary plan incorporating strategic and local plan material with the Secretary of State providing the overall strategic input in consultation with the shire counties.

In the West Midlands region, the Department of Environment set up a conference to advise the Secretary of State on strategic land-use planning for the area during the 1990's. The conference consists of the seven metropolitan district councils, the four surrounding shire counties, government departments and the West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority. Five main issues are considered: regeneration strategy, economy and employment, population and housing, transportation and the green belt. There are opportunities for interested organisations and individuals to comment both on the conference's advice and on the Secretary of State's draft strategic guidance. The most important difference to previous arrangements is that the organising body is under the direct control of central government and is not locally elected. The effect of these arrangements on rural planning in Shropshire is beginning to be seen as the figures for such things as population growth filter down through the Structure Plan review process.

#### (d) Development Plans

In rural areas then, County councils were responsible for the preparation of development plans. Legislation and government advice together with contemporary planning practice led them to identify centres where services were to be concentrated. Whilst there was some variation throughout the country in the manner in which centres were chosen:

*"the rural settlement policies contained within the development plans varied only as to the number of settlements selected rather than whether selection should take place at all."*  
(Cloke 1979 p.56)



Whilst the matter will be considered in more detail as a local issue later in this chapter, it is useful at this stage, to examine and comment on the inclusion of key settlement policies in plans formulated at the county level. Martin and Vorhees (1981) examined 43 development plans, 35 of which contained settlement concentration policies, 8 omitted to recommend them and only one specifically endorsed a dispersal policy, commenting that:

*"Key settlement policy has been a cornerstone of rural planning policy during the last 30 years. It is a strategy to confine major growth of housing, services, and perhaps, employment to a few settlements which are selected with reference to the functioning and development of the wider rural area. Key settlement policies were first introduced in the early 1950's in the county development plans." (Martin and Vorhees 1981 p.1).*

The underlying rationale for their adoption were summarised by Martin and Vorhees in the form of a list of 22 reasons referred to as "subjects of concern". These reasons are reproduced in table 2.1. The effects of such policies on housing provision at the local level tended to be rather varied, depending on the number of villages selected for expansion and housing demand in the area, but in general, new housing development was restricted in the open countryside and in "non key" villages. From this point of view the application of such policies during the 1950's and 60's could be said to have been successful. However, several researchers have commented that this approach can be criticised as a crude and often socially divisive tool which failed to take account of the differences between rural areas and the changes taking place in rural society. For example, Clark comments that:

*"Key settlement policy was perhaps oversold, being used in areas as different as those with depopulation and those with severe urban pressures." (Clark 1982 p.47).*

and:

*"The policy has been criticised for its tendency to polarise the social composition of the non key settlements . . . while it is possible to show that there has been an increase in the proportion of a village's population who are in certain socio-economic classes . . . it is not clear that their arrival has diminished the standard of living of those who formerly occupied the houses." (Clark 1982 p.46).*



**TABLE 2.1 REASONS FOR ADOPTING CONCENTRATION POLICIES**

<u>Physical</u>	
(i)	Concentrate residential development to prevent sporadic/ribbon development or development inappropriate in scale or character to the smaller rural settlements.
(ii)	Locate new residential development in certain settlements, so that accessibility to work is improved.
(iii)	Maintain the quality of the environment; in particular, protect heritage areas and Green Belts.
(iv)	Create or restore a hierarchy of central places.
(v)	'Tidy-up' the settlement pattern; hasten the process of decline in small, sporadic settlements so that only the large and compact settlements remain.
<u>Agricultural</u>	
(vi)	Assist increased production in agriculture by restraining demand for development land in the countryside.
(vii)	Assist the supply of agricultural labour by stemming the drift to the towns.
<u>Economic</u>	
(viii)	Concentrate in order to reduce the costs of providing engineering infrastructure and services.
(ix)	Reduce the costs of, and increase the catchment for social services i.e. for schools, health centres, playing fields, village halls etc.
<u>Socio-Economic</u>	
(x)	Maintain population numbers in the countryside and stop the drift to the towns.
(xi)	Encourage the diversification of economic activity in rural areas; build up the larger settlements so that they are attractive to industry.
(xii)	Improve the quality of rural life/'resuscitate' it as recommended in the Scott Report.
(xiii)	Foster community spirit, friendliness by promoting more compact settlements.
(xiv)	Meet constraints imposed by natural drainage on the dispersal of settlement.
(xv)	Promote road safety by limiting isolated and sporadic development.
(xvi)	Direct overspill population to rural areas to increase the catchment population for services.
(xvii)	Facilitate development control and administrative procedures related to implementation.
(xviii)	Confine housing development to the satisfaction of local needs.
(xix)	Limit growth because previous policies have led to the over-commitment of land for development purposes.
(xx)	Halt the decline in rural facilities and rationalisation of services.
(xxi)	Preserve the Welsh language and culture.
(xxii)	Concentrate new development in order to safeguard open land for recreational and leisure purposes.

Source: Martin and Vorhees and associates 1981 pp.22,23

### (e) Development Plan Reviews

The 1947 Act required planning authorities to review their plans every 5 years. This requirement was not always strictly complied with, but nevertheless, reviews were prepared. The results of these reviews, however, did not really change the situation until the early 1970's. In fact evidence assembled by Martin and Vorhees (1981) and Cloke (1979) indicates that the first development plan reviews, and the wave of informal rural plans and policies which followed them, emphasised conservation and containment even more than the original development plans. For example, East Hertford, Macclesfield and Kennet Development Plans (1951-60) selected settlements to which services would be directed. The first reviews of these plans (1963-4) clearly indicated which settlements were suitable for either development, limited infilling, or no development. (Martin and Vorhees 1980 table 5.1)

It is interesting to note in retrospect that these policies were being operated by county councils prior to the devolution of planning functions or the introduction of public participation in the planning process. Without wishing to digress too far, it should be recorded that a fundamental review of the planning system took place about this time, following the report of the Planning Advisory Group, set up by the Minister of Housing and Local Government in 1964. Their report, *The Future of Development Plans* (1965), recommended changes which would introduce more flexible plans, expected to be more responsive to change, for example in population, social and economic trends, traffic volume and type etc. Set up by the Minister of Housing and Local Government, Richard Crossman in 1964, the group included civil servants and members of the planning profession including Walter Bor and Wilfred Burns. It is clear that the authors recognised the possibility of an impending revolution because they stated that:



*" . . . there is no doubt that the explosive growth of population and car ownership, increased personal incomes and greater leisure will have a tremendous impact on country and coastal areas . . . these are among the most important problems that planning will have to cope with in the next twenty years and they are the problems of counties." (M.O.H.L.G. 1965 p.21).*

At the same time, there was much debate on the issue of public participation in the plan making process and in anticipation of the publication of the Skeffington Report "People and Planning" (1969), the 1968 Town and Country Planning Act made provision for these issues. Thus, the 1947 system was changed in that the new act introduced a significant degree of decentralisation of decision making away from central government, by permitting local authorities to adopt their own local plans and introduced the need to satisfy the Secretary of State that adequate publicity has been given to proposals before they are included in adopted plans.

Following this then, it is hardly surprising that during the late 60's and early 70's there appears to have been a "reaction" to the earlier, more rigid policies and clauses designed to cater for "local needs" were introduced into many county plans as exceptions to the general rural housing policies. These usually advocated that more favourable consideration would be given to applications for housing outside key settlements from people able to demonstrate strong local ties with an area, or an operational need to be near their work. This applied in particular to agricultural businesses such as dairying and stock rearing which required close supervision on a daily basis. However, there is no evidence to show that these changes had more than a marginal effect on housing provision at the local level.

#### (f) Structure Plans

The re-organisation of local government outside Greater London in 1974 introduced public participation and a degree of devolution of planning functions as the new second tier local authorities (boroughs and districts) took responsibility for local planning and the day to day decision making associated with development control within their



areas. Structure plans, prepared by the county authorities, were to provide the strategic framework within which the districts would develop more detailed local policies. However, no radical change in rural settlement policies occurred at this time, indeed, Martin and Vorhees' Review indicates that:

*"The most noticeable feature about rural policy pronouncements in the Structure Plans is their continuity with what has gone before." (Martin and Vorhees 1981 p.46).*

Thus most Structure Plans contained settlement concentration policies of one type or another. Derounian (1979) examined those available at the time and noted that only 3 counties proposed to disperse development between groups of villages, the remainder preferring to rely on concentration policies. There was, however, a continuing development of policies designed to cater for local needs, Dunn et al (1981) commenting:

*"Housing problems of local people, however defined, are an increasingly common theme in structure plans, . . . . data on this topic is very limited. Only a few counties refer to specific problems . . . yet paradoxically most plans put forward policies. The issues of local need are emotive and popular at the present time, yet there is no consistent definition." (Dunn et al 1981 p.204).*

No specific government advice was issued on the subject of local needs, and those policies contained in structure plans which deal with the issue have been described as:

*"....vague and rather bland in their approach, strong on statements of general intent but weak on mechanism." (Dunn et al 1981 p.204).*

#### (g) Structure Plan Reviews

Most of the structure plans prepared and adopted in the late 1970's have now being reviewed and it is apparent that the recession, changing attitudes and the last census results, have led to some major changes in policy direction. These contemporary issues are



explored in the following section, which concentrates on the Shropshire County Structure Plan so as to provide a background to the detailed case study of rural settlement policy within part of Shropshire.

#### (h) Current Issues

##### (i) Introduction

As set out in detail earlier in this chapter, it should be emphasised that, apart from a few notable exceptions, such as some remote areas of Wales, Scotland or Cornwall, the major changes which have taken place since 1945, have altered the fortunes of many rural areas. Even those parts of the country previously experiencing a decline in population have found a new role as retirement areas or are within present day commuting distance of major conurbations. There are growing pressures on the rural environs of most regions from "outsiders" wishing to move in to live and commute to their jobs or to retire or holiday. These demands are coupled with the wishes of local people to be allowed freedom to develop and expand local businesses, to have the opportunity to live locally or to retire "close to their roots". In fact there are numerous social concerns resulting from these competing demands which are given relatively little consideration by county planning authorities at present, but there are signs of a clear, socially polarised, trend towards migration from urban to rural areas:

*"Yet key settlement policy was originally designed to stop urban migration." (Clark 1982 p.45).*

There may well be a need to reconsider the use of such policies together with the role and function of the countryside in future in view of the fact that the original policy objective has been superseded.

##### (ii) Service Provision

County and regional authorities are responsible for a wide range of services, but of particular interest in a discussion of issues affecting rural areas are roads and transport, education and health.



Roads and Transport: County councils normally act as agents of the Department of Transport, preparing and managing schemes to improve and maintain trunk routes. There is a national roadbuilding programme which even during a recession, has slowly but systematically, continued to improve the national road network. Contemporary standards of design and construction now leave few areas of the country without good links to the national motorway system. The system was designed and built to enable road haulage firms and industry to operate more efficiently, but a by-product, has been to allow people with access to a car, relatively good links to and from many rural areas. Similarly, improvements in motor vehicle comfort, performance and reliability, coupled with an increasing tendency to offer them "with the job", all serve to reduce the impact of distance so far as rural areas are concerned. For example, because of the construction of a national motorway link, Birmingham's executives are able to become Shropshire's commuters. The result is a continued and in Shropshire at least, increasing demand for executive homes in pleasant rural areas, leading to rising house prices in particular locations.

A further concern are the route licences granted and subsidies which may be offered by county councils to the operators of rural buses. The recent Transport Act has led to more competition on profitable routes and meant the withdrawal of non profitable rural routes as cross subsidisation is no longer viable. Again, this is operated at a county/regional level, but as it is more local in effect, is discussed under "local issues", representing a further factor in what may be termed the "social engineering by price" which is changing the traditional view of rural areas.

Education: County councils are the education authorities. Operating virtually as agents for the Secretary of State for Education, they decide how best to interpret national criteria for school size, catchment area, further education etc. As the population ages and other demographic factors are showing up in the form of falling rolls in secondary schools, education authorities are forced to make



decisions to enable them to deal with, for example, up to 30% fewer pupils in rural areas. In many cases decisions are made which involve closing rural schools. This affects rural people and is instrumental in the attitude of many rural communities to the prospect of further development in their areas.

The system contains an inbuilt pre-occupation with paper arguments, which are based on the accounted costs of the authority and do not take note of the wider cost to the community of centralising education services. As central government provides much of the money for education services, this is a further example of central control in a county service which is leading to the closure of small rural schools and has less effect on more wealthy rural inhabitants who are able to afford to travel out or send their children to private schools.

Health: Regional health authorities, faced with diminishing finance in real terms, have tended to concentrate on efficient use of scarce resources. In the past 20 years this has led to a concentration of facilities and the closure of many smaller rural hospitals. There has also been a tendency to concentrate on obtaining value for money when running peripheral health services such as district nursing, health visiting etc., often linking them to health centres run by general practitioners. This is cost effective in urban areas, but the system can work to the detriment of more sparsely populated areas where perhaps staffing should be more related to the time needed to visit patients than the numbers on a practitioner's list. This is yet another service which is more or less directly financed from central government and which has tended to disadvantage rural areas, or at least those rural residents without access to transport.

#### (iii) Employment Initiatives

In recent years there has been a new approach to all areas of employment promotion, much of which is arguably best co-ordinated at county or regional level. The recession of the early 1980's, causing record levels of unemployment in many regions, in turn prompted elected councils to demand action and initiate schemes to



attract and keep jobs or to encourage new businesses. For example, the advice contained in such publications as "Stimulating Public Enterprise - The Local Authority role" (Local Authority Associations, 1988). Such schemes are important in rural areas, particularly as agricultural problems begin to manifest themselves in the form of redundant farmworkers who may need far more support than their urban counterpart due to the lack of alternative employment.

This must be considered together with a changing attitude to rural areas which couples an oversupply of farmland to a potential increase in leisure and tourism activities. Few counties now have not appointed a director of tourism and leisure to exploit this avenue of potential jobs and income. The subject offers an increasing range of job opportunities in rural areas ranging from those generated by the expenditure of cash earned from farm based bed and breakfast establishments to jobs in farm museums, craft industry, traditional rural pursuits etc. This is a current issue which may directly conflict with the need for rural housing for local people or to support local services and leads directly back to the original need to re-examine the role of the countryside.

#### (iv) Settlement Policy

The authorities responsible for the issues in this context are county councils. As previously explained, regional issues are more informally considered but the strategic policies in whose formulation the public are legally entitled to participate, are prepared by county councils and contained in their structure plans. It should be noted that whilst these are prepared by county councils, they must be examined in public before a panel appointed by the Secretary of State and there can be, as in the case of the previously mentioned planning and housing circulars, a direct central government involvement at a crucial level. This factor, together with control of the planning appeals system at the local level, ensures a major policy input by the government of the day.



A structure plan is expected to include estimates of the total number of houses needed within the county and to allocate these to the districts within its boundaries and perhaps decide the rural : urban distribution of houses within each district. How much further it should go in directing development is a matter for negotiation between county and district. Shropshire County Council for example, in their first review of the structure plan, explain that they:

*"support the fundamental strategy of encouraging the incremental growth of villages in most areas, whilst at the same time continuing the long established severe restrictions on new housing in the open countryside and the Green Belt." (SCC 1984 p.31).*

The plan then continues to claim that this is fundamentally different from the previous main village (key settlement) approach which in practice:

*"has not been very successful" and that services have: "continued to be withdrawn from other villages possibly hastened by the designation of main villages." (SCC 1984 p.31).*

In practice, this is not the fundamental change it is claimed to be because local plan policies, administered by the district authorities, have to translate the policy into dwellings on the ground and the county have included a number of policy caveats to curb this apparent freedom. These tend to be used by districts to maintain the status quo.

#### (v) Local Needs Issues

Local needs policies are not defined at the county level in the Shropshire plan, although it does contain policies which were intended to cater to some extent for local need. This is in line with practice in counties, as described by Dunn, Rawson and Rogers:

*"Many (structure) plans state that land and existing permissions will be allocated to meet local needs . . . That such local need policies do not necessarily have official approval is, however, indicated by the deletion of such a provision in modifications made to a key settlement policy in Norfolk." (Dunn et al 1981 p.204).*



Structure plans are supposed to include only land use policies or policies with direct land use implications. The issue of local need is not strictly related to land use, and is therefore more often reduced to discussion in the reasoned justification to policies. This point is covered in more detail in chapter 3 but the following quotation illustrates the point:

*"policies 1/16 and 1/17 indicate the number of houses which the county council consider should be built in rural Shropshire up to 1996 . . . . (district councils have discretion to control their scale and location) . . . it is expected that some of the factors influencing this discretion will be:*

*1. The provision of an adequate supply of houses in rural settlements for the needs of local people, particularly those who work in the area or have strong local ties within the community." (SCC 1984 p.59).*

The Shropshire plan mentions the subject again in relation to housing policies, but without further definition of the term. Again, in relation to in-migration to rural settlements, the matter is not dealt with in detail, although a reasoned justification to one policy does reveal the attitude adopted:

*". . .this policy is aimed at preventing the development of larger scale speculative developments which would attract people who would otherwise be accommodated in Telford or elsewhere in the West Midlands." (SCC 1984 p.58).*

Without wishing to pre-empt argument and discussion to come in the following section, it should be noted that this attitude does cause local people concern in that:

*"Housing development is therefore to be limited to one or two houses on infill sites and must be judged in the light of the interests and essential needs of the local community." (SCC 1984 p.58).*

If rigidly applied, this sort of restriction can price houses out of the reach of locals because strategic planning policies cannot prevent demand for houses in rural areas, only prevent that demand from being satisfied by the construction of new dwellings. There is current concern that in areas of demand such policies have the effect of altering the social structure of settlements by perhaps



artificially raising the price of houses by creating scarcity. Incomers can buy in, whereas locals may not have access to high earning employment and have to look outside their village to cheaper housing areas. As this concern overlaps the local approach, it is discussed there in greater detail.

#### (vi) Housing Policy and migration patterns

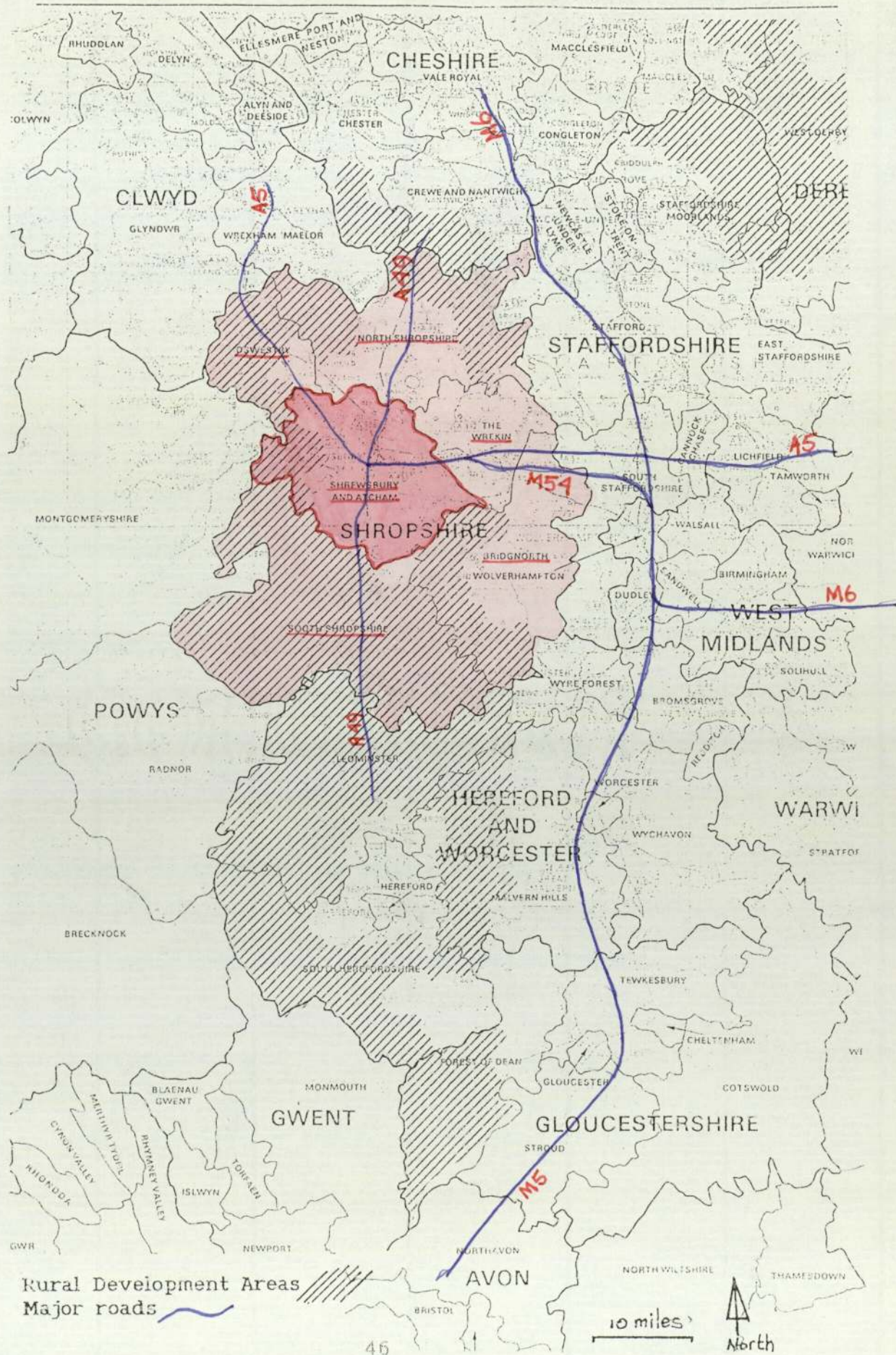
As previously mentioned, strategic information on the number of houses needed within the area is an important structure plan function. This study is not intended to dwell on the manner by which housing demand is expressed or calculated in structure plans, as it must begin to concentrate on its main purpose which is local and rural in content. Suffice it to say that in Shropshire, in line with national trends, there has been a steadily growing demand for new dwellings to suit the natural growth and rate of family formation of the indigenous population, a steady rate of in-migration "by demand" to much of the county and a steady rate of in-migration "by design" to Telford new town. Figure 2.1 shows the county and the six districts in relation to their surroundings. However, the important issue here is that the figures used to calculate county housing demand may show a true rate of in-migration, but they do not fully represent those housing needs caused solely by in-migrants over a stated period. This may be better shown by a look at the available statistics. Most are given on a county wide basis, but it is possible to rework them excluding the new town of Telford which tends to distort the picture, tables 2.2 and 2.3.

**TABLE 2.2 HOUSEHOLD CHANGE 1971 1981**

Year	1971	1981	%Change
Shrewsbury	27400	30916	+12.8%
Rest of Shropshire (excluding Telford)	35155	64307	+11.8%



FIGURE 2.1 COUNTY LOCATION





**TABLE 2.3 HOUSEHOLD CHANGE 1971 1981 (RURAL AREA ONLY)**

Year	1971	1981	% Change
Shrewsbury Rural	8420	9384	+11.4%
Rest of Shropshire (Excluding Telford)	35155	38476	+9.4%

*(Figures relate to enumerated h/holds 1971/1981 OPCS Small Area Statistics tables 15, 10).*

Even when Shrewsbury's rural area is isolated there is still a significant rate of growth which is greater than the rest of Shropshire, despite the operation of restraint policies.

The tables show a clear increase in the numbers of households in the county even excluding in-migration to Telford. Shrewsbury in particular shows a greater rate of growth than the rest of the county. That this is due to in-migration can be clearly seen by comparing the growth shown in table 2.2 with table 2.4 showing implied net migration between 1971 and 81.

**TABLE 2.4 IMPLIED NET MIGRATION 1971/81**

Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough		
Population change	Natural change	Implied net migration
+4770 (+5.8%)	+1082 (+22.7%)	+3688 (+77.3%)

*(Source SCC 1982 tables 2.3 and 2.8)*

Thus between 1971 and 1981 over 77% of the population increase in Shrewsbury was due to in-migration. What the tables do not show is that migration was also significant between 1961 and 1971. The figures for natural change between 1971 and 1981 will also contain a significant element of growth generated by previous in-migrants.

These facts are treated quite lightly in reports concerned with policy performance which show the fall in the numbers of in-migrants to Telford but do not dwell on the consistent rate of in-migration to the rural parts of the county:

*"Net migration into Shropshire has dropped very substantially in recent years from over 3500 in 1976 to just over 800 in 1981. This decline has been due primarily to a reduction in the number of people moving into the county rather than an increase in the number moving out. As such it has clearly been associated with the slow-down in the growth of Telford." (SCC 1981 p.5)*

This relative complacency conceals a situation akin to that in Stratford-on-Avon mentioned earlier in this chapter where the county council figures have been shown to underestimate the effect of in-migration on the demand for houses.

The extent of the problem at county level can be illustrated by the following statements from the Shropshire County Council's 1982 monitoring report which was prepared to provide information on a number of issues including:

*"the way the (structure) plan's policies and proposals are being implemented." (SCC 1982 p.1).*

The report includes a simple, but arguably objective, assessment of the performance of policies on a general level but also contains a number of statements which show that on the question of housing and in particular migration, further more detailed research is needed:

*". . . discrepancies are almost certainly due to the fact that the estimate of the 1976 population base from which the structure plan forecasts were prepared was incorrect." (SCC 1982 p.4).*

and:

*"no accurate estimates of the number of people moving to and from individual districts within the county are available." (SCC 1982 p.5).*

and:

*"Comparisons between these estimates of actual net migration and the assumptions used in the structure plan must be made with caution." (SCC 1982 p.5).*

Similarly when discussing housing progress in rural areas outside recognised towns and villages, the report comments that over a quarter of 1600 applications for such dwellings were approved, yet:



*"No attempt has been made to examine the exact circumstances that underlie each of these permissions . . . restrictions on housing in the rural area are not as severe as some people think . . . it seems likely, therefore, that district councils are in fact fairly regularly granting permission for houses which are for the use of people other than essential forestry or agricultural workers." (SCC 1982 p.25).*

All of these issues are of vital importance in formulating policy and yet none were researched at the time of the report and none have been investigated since, indeed it appears from statements made in the first review documents that the issue is being accorded relatively low priority and that policy performance is not likely to be critically reviewed in this county at least:

*"The Structure Plan has been operating very effectively since 1980." (SCC 1984 p.19).*

and:

*"Since the structure plan was approved in 1980 the rate of migration of population into Shropshire and the rate of housebuilding within the county have fallen significantly." (SCC 1984 p.50).*

The caveats made previously indicate that these statements are far too simplistic, yet major policy decisions are being made based on them. To reiterate, it is clear from information made available in the plan, that there has been a steady inflow of migrants since 1961 at least, yet once they have arrived, their household needs are classified as those of the indigenous population. The statements made all give the impression that most future growth needs are generated by a "Shropshire" population, failing, almost deliberately, to point out the continued influx of outsiders who become statistically "native" the moment they arrive. For example:

*"more than two thirds of the new houses required in the period up to 1996 will be needed by people already living in the county." (SCC 1984 p.28).*

The monitoring report continues to predict future housing needs based on this premise, but should be compared with the population figures cited previously which show that over 77% of the population

increase occurring between 1971 and 1981 in the borough of Shrewsbury was due to in-migration - although there is no data to break this down further. How can the district authority develop an understanding of the situation sufficient to permit the formulation of effective local plan policies when the information on which strategic policies are based is so poor?



CHAPTER 2: 3  
THE LOCAL CONTEXT



(a) Summary

At the local level it is not difficult to see the major social changes which have occurred since the original planning legislation was conceived. By a variety of devices, central government has now begun to directly influence local decision making, yet it is argued that national policies have failed to address relevant issues of rural planning.

It is also argued that insufficient guidance is available to the authorities responsible for preparing settlement policies. There is also evidence that stated rural planning objectives are not being achieved and that written policies are not accurately enacted. Thus, the changes taking place have not been reflected in policy formulation or implementation.

The result is a series of policy initiatives responding to local pressures which tend to be at best, inadequate and at worst unenforceable. Restraint policies in areas of demand create artificially high prices, local needs policies are not always fairly applied and services continue to be withdrawn through lack of support while local expectations for service provision are increasing. There is evidence of increasing social polarisation at the same time as resources which might deal with it are being withdrawn.

(b) Development of Rural Settlement Policies

A few village plans were prepared in the 1960's, at about the same time as the county development plans. Most local settlement planning therefore took place under the auspices of county councils who were then responsible for day to day development control in most rural areas. The previous section therefore covers the early development of key settlement policies and the eventual emergence, during the late 1960's and 1970's, of policies designed to deal with the issues



raised by local needs. In 1974 local government was re-organised and responsibility for day to day development control and "local planning" passed from county councils to the various district authorities. No new policy guidance was given at this time and there is no evidence of a radical change in policies occurring, although this hardly surprising, as it took several years for most of the districts to gather teams together to work on rural plans, a subject which was seen as having relatively low priority during a period of severe financial restraint.

Since then there has been slow but steady progress in structure and local plan preparation. This has involved the public and resulted in an increasing tendency to recognise the issues of local need. Policies dealing with the matter are built into the majority of structure plans, albeit:

*"strong on statements of general intent but weak on mechanism." (Dunn et al 1981 p.204)*

Most local plans covering rural areas deal with the subject in more detail, although there is evidence of a wide variation in definition of the term "local needs", even in authorities of similar nature or subject to similar pressures.

### (c) The Present Planning Situation

#### (i) Rural Settlements

Since 1974, district councils have been the local planning authorities responsible for processing planning applications and therefore directly responsible for administering the strategic rural settlement policies of county councils as expressed in structure plans and their reviews. By means of local plans, they must also fill in the strategic framework provided by structure plans. In most cases this involves them in the process of writing rural settlement policies. This in turn has usually involved soliciting public opinion, selecting key settlements, specifying development potential and/or setting development limits on previously selected villages as well as taking



part in the structure plan participation stages. Current legislation requires district planning authorities to deal with all planning applications except those which concern mineral workings or, in the opinion of the authority, are major departures from the structure plan's provisions (or those which the Secretary of State calls in to deal with himself). Thus the districts have a relatively free hand in the interpretation of the county's rural settlement policies. This can cause problems and conflict. Martin and Vorhees note the following in the Welsh district of Dwyfor:

*"Analysis of planning applications showed that when settlement policy conflicted with the wishes of applicants to develop outside designated settlement boundaries, it was often defeated."*

and

*"Planning itself was not afforded a very high priority before local government re-organisation, since when the county and district have adopted different views as to the future of the area." (Martin and Vorhees 1981 p.184)*

This is an extreme example of strategic policies being defeated by local interpretation but it is repeated to varying degrees in many rural districts, although the evidence tends to be hidden by the statistics which are most readily available. Counties are naturally often unwilling to admit the failings of their structure plan policies.

#### (ii) Local Needs Issues

Virtually all structure planning in rural areas is based on policies of restraint, particularly in "pressured areas." There are an increasing number of districts which may be said to be pressured, authorities persist in applying restraint policies yet:

*"Many structure plan policies restricting rural development to local needs have been deleted by the Secretary of State who at this time views with some ideological horror a situation whereby a restriction on the availability of private sector housing opportunities might lead to a considerable increase in local authority spending on direct intervention into the housing market." (Clope 1983 p.252)*



Local plans can contain policies which are directed more precisely to these issues, even to the extent of altering the intended effect of structure plans. This matter is discussed further in the following section, together with housing, as a current concern.

#### (d) Current Housing Issues

##### (i) Social Changes

The pressures brought about by the revolution in transport and communications can be said to have changed the fortunes of many rural areas at the regional/county level. The effect at the local level is often pronounced. National or regional statistics show increases in rural population and a loss of urban population, but they do not show the social changes which have caused the replacement of indigenous people in some villages with affluent and mobile incomers, many of whom may not need to support local services such as shops or schools.

The statistics do not show the local effects of rising house prices against diminishing local job opportunities or poor wage rates, nor do they show the changing social pressures or attitudes brought into rural areas by incomers. These are not necessarily all negative influences, but they do illustrate the existence of a climate of change which can cause local problems and which may be perceived, but not always quantified, in a manner acceptable to conventional authorities.

These issues have been noted by Newby, who considers there to have been two important social changes in rural England over the past 30 years. The first concerns the:

*"Extensive social polarisation between an affluent majority (of both newcomers and in many cases, local farmers and landowners) and a poor and relatively deprived minority."*

The second is the:

*"gradual absorbtion of rural life into the main stream of English society as a whole . . . eclipsed by nationally inspired social, economic and political developments."*  
(Newby 1980 p.273)

He continues further to note that this has:

*"not only narrowed the gap between "rural" and "urban" life styles, but has made it increasingly difficult to understand recent discontinuities in rural life by examining only the indigenous sources of social change."*  
(Newby 1980 p.273)

This inevitably leads on to the fundamental conclusion that these changes have not been reflected in the attitudes taken to rural policies by any of the authorities responsible for either their formulation or their implementation. The following subject headings attempt to relate this conclusion to the range of issues considered most important in the local context.

#### (ii) Housing Authority Concern

Rural housing authorities tend to be generally disadvantaged due to lack of resources, government attitudes and policies. This has been largely covered previously in section 2:1, p.27 (Resource Provision and Public Housing), but some additional comment should be appended concerning housing waiting lists, home improvement grants etc. in relation to the local context.

In the writer's district at present, for example, no discretionary improvement grants are made, except to disabled people needing property adaptions. The local concern is that there are many rural properties in need of repair which can only be purchased by people who can afford the repairs (more likely to be incomers). When improvement grants were available (1981-84), more local people were able to take advantage of them. Often these were people who would not otherwise have purchased a property. However there is concern that the way in which these grants were administered tended to discriminate against less affluent locals. For example, as the condition of the rural housing stock is frequently poor, the grant was often conditional on a full programme of improvement being



carried out. Thus, a farmworker may have wanted an inside toilet, a new hot water system and minor repairs, but in order to get a grant for this the authority insisted on the provision of a damp proof course, enlarged windows, raised ceiling heights and an extension for a bathroom in addition. It was more difficult, therefore, for a low paid local to take advantage of a grant than for a person from outside with access to capital or borrowing resources. For example, an urban dweller selling an expensive town house to move to a cheap rural cottage would have little difficulty in either paying for or raising a mortgage to cover the difference, whereas the local worker may already be on his financial limit. In the writer's district, this often seemed to result in the person with most money being given the largest grant, whilst the person with least was offered no grant at all. There is also anecdotal evidence of the amount of a probable grant being "added" to the price of a house. Estate Agent's sale particulars at that time referring to the availability of improvement grants as a reason for asking a particular price.

Central government guidance on the matter was not and is not forthcoming, tending towards the conclusion that improvement to the housing stock rather than matters of occupancy is their prime concern. (DOE circular 1/85). The remedy may not be as simple as merely reinstating grants by increasing the finances available.

The prospects then, for less affluent locals, are not good where upgrading property is concerned, but when considering people in need of council housing, the situation is worse. This may be because a rural housing authority's expressed housing needs are often difficult to assess. There is evidence of "hidden demand" caused by poor housing, tied cottages, demand for small numbers of dwellings spread over large, sparsely populated areas and lack of staff resources to investigate these problems. Local problems of particular note in the writer's district include people not registering their need for housing because there are no suitable dwellings in their parish



and older people "under occupying" council dwellings because the only alternative accommodation is many miles away, whilst young families in the parish occupy overcrowded, poor quality private accommodation.

Thus a waiting list for rural dwellings often shows neither the precise number and circumstances of potential applicants, nor the area to which they wish to move. Applicants tend to express a wish to be housed in villages where they know there are council dwellings. A graphic example of this occurred in the writer's district where a significant proportion of the first group of council dwellings to be built in a particular village for many years, had to be allocated to urgent local cases which only became manifest after building work started on the scheme. In recent years increasing detailed control of housing finance by central government has tended to militate against rural housing initiatives which might have assisted these problems. This matter is raised later in the study.

It is interesting to compare the effects which these issues and the "right to buy" legislation are having on housing for local people in rural areas, with Newby's statement concerning the extensive social polarisation which has taken place since 1950. In the writer's district it can certainly be argued that the effect of central government action over the past ten years has been to consolidate and accelerate such polarisation.

### (iii) Planning Authority Concern

As previously explained, local planning authorities are responsible for allocating land for residential uses which can accommodate the structure plans' anticipated housing allocations. The process of allocating suitable sites usually involves the preparation of local plans and therefore a requirement to consult local people.



At the same time, local planning authorities are charged with the parallel task of dealing with planning applications for all matters except minerals. Thus the same authority is responsible for preparing, administering and interpreting rural settlement policies and processing the resultant planning applications.

It can be argued that this makes them far more responsive to local needs issues than county authorities. In the writer's experience for example, most parish councils fail to respond to strategic issues concerned with the possibility of several thousand new dwellings spread over the county, whereas few parishes fail to comment on suggested housing sites in villages within their area. Perhaps due to a lack of understanding of the structure plan process, but more probably due to the relatively long time delay between consultation and housebuilding. Cause and effect are years apart and the connection between a structure plan and village housing has, in the past, failed to be made at the grass roots level. There is evidence that this situation is being addressed by planners, but previous failings must be understood as they are an important reason for the current situation. Local planners find themselves liaising between members of parish councils and district councils on matters of strictly local concern, such as conservation, loss of rural services, rural employment, local needs issues etc., it may be that they should also be tackling the consequences of strategic planning at the parish level.

Thus within the dynamic context of conflicting advice and demand from local residents, landowners, conservation bodies, builders, statutory undertakers, county councils, central government etc., local planning authorities are expected to prepare rational rural settlement and housing policies which reflect structure plan policies and local political pressures. Such policies are part of the wider local plan process and may be as detailed in their attention to individual settlements or local needs as the authority wishes, within the limits of contemporary practice. There are currently many difficulties in framing policies which deal with issues of local housing need in an effective and justifiable manner. They must be easily understood by



local people, they must be seen by the public to be fairly applied by both local planners and local councillors and must stand up to the rigorous independent examination of an appeal against a refusal of permission. In the light of present Government concern with free enterprise and a reduction in bureaucratic interference, this latter point is more difficult to satisfy. The following section considers this issue in more detail in relation to local concern.

#### (iv) Local Concerns

Housing development: The comments received in the writer's district in response to local and structure plan consultation exercises, indicate that people are most concerned with if, where and when, new housing is to be built in their immediate area. Pressures on many rural areas are creating demands for new dwellings where previously there were few. Government policies are insisting on measures to obtain value for money from public services and rural schools and other services are threatened. People are keen to protect the environment, their services and their investment, but not necessarily in that order. These concerns must be reconciled with a number of others in the formation of settlement policies, the equation being a permutation between the needs of conservation, housing and service provision or support. For example, the consultation report prepared as part of the Shrewsbury and Atcham Rural Area Local Plan (SABC 1989), summarises letters expressing the concern of some present village dwellers (often the articulate middle class incomers) to prevent further development which they see as threatening either their view, their investment, or both (Newby's affluent majority)? This attitude, often characterised as "NIMBY" (not in my back yard), contrasts strongly with that expressed by established residents (often employed in the area and having to live there), who would like to see a reasonable social mix, a choice of housing and employment opportunities for local people and adequate service provision. The balance is further swayed by local builders and landowning locals (sometimes even absentee landowners) who see further development of rural communities as a means of making money or of maintaining farm income in a period where diversification may be more rewarding financially than agricultural production. This latter group is aided



and abetted by local agents with an eye on the market, their commission and little else. The difference in value between land allocated for residential purposes and agricultural land can be almost £500,000 per acre.

Local Needs Housing: It has already been stated that there is a growing demand to take advantage of modern developments which enable an increasing number of people to live outside conurbations. This in turn, places a greater demand for housing on rural communities. In parts of rural Shropshire for example, in some villages close to the M54, every building which could possibly be converted to a residence has been converted. The policies presently operating in the area are aimed at preventing or restricting new development and there is no doubt that the social structure of settlements has been affected. In other similar areas, the view has been to the effect that some further housing may be reluctantly welcomed, provided it is as expensive as the present housing. The writer has visited most parishes in the study area and has often experienced the attitude that new housing is acceptable provided it is not council housing.

In this area, disused barns with residential conversion potential change hands for over £50,000. At this value, The cost of an exploratory planning application and an appeal, if necessary, is well worth the risk. Where locals still exist in large enough numbers to make their views known, they have often expressed concern that there is a need for housing to cater for the genuine needs of families with local ties and that the gentle, controlled growth of some settlements to meet those needs should not be permitted to present an insurmountable problem. (Rural Area Local Plan Written Statement p 4. SABC 1989).

It can be argued that the current government's preoccupation with private enterprise, reducing rate subsidy and freedom for the individual is leading to the situation in which rural schools are being closed because of falling rolls; local people are asking for new housing suitable for families who will support the school; plots are



being allocated by local authorities but are being developed to provide either housing for retired incomers or large houses for affluent commuters who frequently send their children to private schools. This in turn leads to demand for more rural housing and the cycle may be repeated. The view has been expressed that this situation will persist while the government's advice to local planning authorities is largely to the effect that they should refrain from interfering with the workings of the housing market.

Consultations carried out during the preparation of the rural area local plan in the writer's district indicate that local people are concerned about the effects of settlement policies, claiming, perhaps with some justification, that the severe restriction on building new dwellings in certain areas makes these villages highly desirable from the point of view of some incoming residents. There is evidence that in pressured areas, a guarantee of no growth coupled with the declaration of a conservation area encourages the process of "gentrification" (i.e. the purchase of houses by affluent in-comers, to the detriment of indigenous locals in terms of housing opportunities).

Withdrawal of Services: One of the main reasons for the original introduction of key settlement policies was the need to concentrate development to encourage, maintain and support services. However, services have continued to be withdrawn from rural areas for various reasons, not least the improvement in road communications and private transport which enable relatively long distance commuting to take place to both work and services. This has left some rural villages as dormitory estates with no services whatever - thus further disadvantaging less affluent or non car owning households. This may be seen as a cycle of deprivation in which all factors are working to complete the circle:

Services in the rural area are not good or are withdrawn and it is an advantage to run a car. Running a car enables a family to use services provided outside the area. The petrol costs of a monthly trip to a superstore 20 miles away from a village can be paid for in the savings made. By using a credit card carefully, even less



affluent families can gain free credit for monthly food purchases. The supplies no longer purchased locally lead to closures of local stores. Fewer trips by bus to the nearby town leads to the withdrawal of public transport. Services in the rural area are poorer and it is virtually essential to run a car and so the cycle continues.

If the housing demand cycle discussed earlier is superimposed on this situation, it becomes clear that there are problems in some rural areas which are exacerbated by the settlement policies currently operated. These assume restraint and containment and make little provision to take account of the changes which have occurred over the past thirty years.

#### (e) Conclusions

This chapter has shown that planning legislation and the manner in which it is administered has not altered in response to a whole series of unprecedented changes which have taken place in society over the past thirty years. It is suggested that current government attitudes are failing to address such issues effectively and have therefore caused an exacerbation of their effects, particularly in rural areas. It is clear, for example, that gradual demographic changes, coupled with recent social changes and contemporary improvements in transport and technology have combined to provide a set of circumstances quite unlike those which existed when planning legislation was first introduced.

This phenomenon has not gone unnoticed by contemporary writers, for example, Clark (1982), Cloke (1979) and Newby (1980), have each remarked on the manner in which development pressures have spread outwards from urban areas and that major social changes are occurring in rural areas as a result. Despite such commentary and the implications which can be drawn from the trends identified, there has been very little action to deal with the issues raised. Two people have compared the phenomenon with the industrial revolution, yet politicians largely continue to ignore it and even to encourage

the pace of change. The following chapter examines research which has been carried out into rural planning matters and considers whether the issues so far raised have been pursued in an effective manner.





*Suffolk sheep Cadoza*

**CHAPTER 3**  
**REVIEW OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH**



**3:1 The need for Research**

The previous section has introduced a number of current issues of concern in considering rural planning. Many of these topics have been researched very little and those studies which have been carried out are often limited by the relatively broad basis of available information. Indeed the situation was so bad in 1979 that Cloke prefaced his study of key settlements with the following:

*"the rural planner is groping in a fog of ignorance. Much of this deficit in rural knowledge has been due to an urban bias in planning, research and problem solving, necessitated by the speed and scale of urban growth." (Cloke 1979 vii).*

In the writer's experience even now, many rural policies (in Shropshire at least) are formulated with little consideration of their effect or value, being normally based on County Council supplied, self fulfilling estimates of housing need or past policies. The fog of ignorance is thickened by a smokescreen of statistics which are designed to show that policies are working satisfactorily rather than to investigate policy performance in a structured manner. This has been touched on in chapter (2) in relation to migration statistics and is covered in more detail in chapter (4) in relation to Shropshire County statistics.

Contemporary researchers are agreed that further information is needed at all levels in order to provide a more stable foundation on which to base policy decisions. For example, Cloke's study helped highlight the deficiencies which exist when he admitted that his conclusions were:

*"constrained by a situation where the only detailed evidence of policy performance available for assessment was that relating to key settlements." (Cloke 1979 p.234).*



Indeed much of his evidence stemmed from a questionnaire sent to parish clerks in Warwickshire, the data from which he considered:

*"at best liable to discrepancies."*

He also comments that some information was:

*"masked in population data."*

and that:

*"the time period under observation is comparatively short."  
(Clope 1979 p.119).*

By contrast, Phillips and Williams' study of public sector housing (1982) records a plethora of research concerned with rural social structure, perhaps:

*"stimulated by a tacit recognition of changing economic and social circumstance in the countryside . . . ."*

They continue to note that no assessment of social and economic conditions or analysis of change in rural areas has so far developed, adding:

*"The nature, location and allocation of rural housing is of major importance in the process of change although, to date, these aspects have received relatively little detailed research attention." (Phillips and Williams 1982 p.13).*

Later in their study they also admit that:

*"There has been a general neglect of rural housing issues . . . a major revelation uncovered during this research is (that) very little is known about basic features of rural planning and rural problems. Research is still at the stage at which gross general statements can be made based on slim empirical knowledge." (Phillips and Williams 1982 p.150).*

This statement might well refer to the previously cited example of Shropshire's structure plan where major policy decisions are based on information which cannot be faulted for clinical accuracy, but which leaves much to be desired diagnostically.

### 3:2 The Direction of Research

Researchers agree that there is a need for further study in general. They are also agreed and the situation prevailing in Shropshire indicates, that specific research would also be useful. The areas which are in most need of study are probably the more detailed issues of policy performance, the evidence available showing that:

*" . . . emphasis on written policy statements can be inappropriate since often these do not have a telling influence upon the decisions taken by agencies and individuals on the ground." (Hanrahan and Cloke 1982 p.13).*

Yet much important work has been based on policy statements, and county structure plans include and monitor settlement policies in rural areas:

*" . . . without considering the possible alternatives, or the suitability of the policy at a local level." (Martin and Vorhees et al 1980 p.217).*

The situation may be represented by a diagram illustrating the subdivision of the most important issues:

Level	Subject	Detail	Item
National	Rural Planning Policies	General	Policy Initiatives
County	Rural Housing Policies	Specific	Policy Performance
District			

This grossly oversimplifies the situation, but helps illustrate the enormous area of possible research as there are so many alternative combinations - each level consists of two subjects which must be considered in two degrees of detail for both items. Vorhees (1980), for example, takes a national view of rural planning policies in general detail, examining settlement policies in structure plans, comparing six counties. Cloke (1979), examines the evolution of settlement policies from a national viewpoint, concentrating on policy



performance in two counties. G Clark's research (1982), is more detailed, considering housing and housing policies in the Lake District area, Shucksmith (1981), concentrates on the same area, but considers the specific performance of local needs policies. Phillips and Williams (1982), concentrate on public sector housing using South Devon as a case study. Various other examples may be keyed into the framework, but there still remains a dearth of research at the detailed, district level. In particular, no currently published research specifically considers either policy performance or initiatives used in preparing rural planning policies at the district level.

It may be pertinent to leave these comments on the direction of research with the following quotation from Vorhees' Study:

*"Some difficulties arose in assembling data at a sufficiently disaggregated level to show the development trends and the effects of planning decisions. Thus . . . the investigations into change were based upon enquiry and circumstantial evidence, as much as on hard statistics."*  
(Martin, Vorhees et al 1980 p.7).

In the writer's experience, this is not really surprising as understaffed district planning offices have little time to devote to collecting statistics. Those which they do manage to assemble are far more likely to be concerned with the need to complete government forms showing the rate at which the authority process planning applications, than the efficacy of policy operation or performance. In past years at least, it was also too great a task to collect and store the huge volume of facts available in a form which would permit future interrogation. Even now, when cheap computer storage and effective processing software is available, chief planning officers are not often willing to devote scarce resources to a task which may well prove that their policies are less than effective.

### 3:3 Possible Reasons for Lack of Research

It is not too difficult to understand why this lack of research should have occurred. It may be because, as Cloke points out, researchers have concentrated on urban problems and their solutions, but it may



also have a lot to do with the fact that unlike their urban counterpart, rural statistics are rarely accessible in a suitably structured or accurate form for the reasons outlined above.

It is a fact that the collation of relatively simple statistics at local level, relating to, say, housing tenure or condition, can be very difficult as information may only be available on a parish or even ward basis. The total numbers involved are small and there are problems in carrying out surveys to supplement census information over large rural areas which would not occur in towns. For example, the information available in an urban area down to enumeration district level, may be comparable over several census periods because relatively little new building has taken place and "status" questions may be followed through. Whereas the information available in a growing rural area may not be comparable from census to census, except on a parish basis and even then, new parishes are formed as building takes place. This fact caused some problems in this study and resulted in gaps in table 5.6., for example. It is no surprise then that Cloke needed to rely on evidence provided by parish clerks and Vorhees admitted that part of his investigations had to be based on circumstantial evidence because insufficient data was available.

Whilst the district authorities are not a good source of readily available information, rural counties often have information collecting or monitoring sections. However, experience suggests that these will often be understaffed or, perhaps more to the point, have not previously been anxious to be seen to be collating or providing access to statistics which might prove critical to their employing authorities.

Rural districts rarely have sufficient staff to collate published statistical information, let alone the time, skills, motivation or technology to process it or collect fresh information. Cloke considers this to be a particular characteristic of rural areas remarking that:



*"Rural areas do not command the manpower services within planning departments which would allow an equivalent breadth of approach to that found in urban areas."(Clope 1983 p.7).*

This is borne out by the experience of the writer who has worked in urban planning departments with almost 100 staff members, many of whom were qualified in various specialist disciplines from planners, economists and sociologists, to statisticians and computer programmers. He now works for a rural district with almost 30 staff, less than a third of whom are qualified, but these are all town planners and with the exception of word processing, no modern technology is available. It is little wonder then that rural planners have been tempted to use:

*". . . diluted urban and regional planning techniques which are ill suited to the rural scale."(Clope 1979 p.2).*

Perhaps the most important factor is the lack of political will. Most rural areas tend to be relatively conservative in approach. Whatever the nature of local political representation, radicalism is left to the more urban areas. Cloke for example, notes that rural areas tend to have relatively stable patterns of political representation and that rural councillors:

*"tend to lend support to planning strategies of conservation and restriction of development." (Clope 1983 p.211).*

Rural problems also tend to become manifest as small in scale and spread evenly over large areas. Thus they are rarely perceived as significant problems worthy of crusading research or innovative solutions. Because of the location of rural housing for example, council tenants normally tend to live in small groups of houses rather than in large estates. Different social groups therefore tend to be mixed in many small villages rather than being separated in "one class" suburbs, resulting in a dilution of problems which might be more readily expressed in urban areas:



*"It is possible to identify large and discrete areas of cities in which a very high percentage of population suffer deprivation. In rural areas, pockets of deprivation are statistically indistinguishable within even the smallest areas." (National Agriculture Centre Rural Trust 1987 p.9).*

### 3:4 Concepts of Rurality

It has been said in the sociological context that:

*"the terms rural and urban are more remarkable for their ability to confuse than for their power to illuminate." (Pahl 1966 p.299).*

If anything, these terms are even more confusing when applied in the context of rural planning. For this reason, prior to setting out to study a small part of the rural planning/housing system in detail, it would be beneficial to consider the way in which rural areas or the countryside are defined by contemporary researchers. This is because there appears to have been a gradual change in thinking since 1945. Cloke (1979), considers the matter in some detail and quotes previous research on the subject which indicates a gradual transition from rural to urban areas in which extremes of difference are easily identified. He remarks that this continuum concept is unrepresentative, being misleading and oversimplified, although there is recognition of common social variables in the extremes identified. Following this criticism of previous attempts at a definition, he continues to develop his own inductive approach which combines sociological, demographic and spatial variables to produce an index of rurality. Using census and other statistics he was able to employ the index to classify districts into one of five categories ranging from "extreme rural" to "urban". In most cases, the application of this method produced what might be expected in that remoteness appeared to be highly correlated with rurality.

However, he continued to remark that:

*"there are few examples where a perfect continuum of rurality can be viewed in the form of a well ordered concentric gradation of the four categories of rurality."*



and noted

*"the abrupt change from (extreme non rural) in the West Midlands . . . to the . . . extreme rural areas of Shropshire." (Clove 1979 p.10).*

A comparison of the index using 1961 and 1971 census information clearly indicates the major changes which are taking place as:

*"the pressure from urban centres has increased, or where green belt policies have caused certain urban pressures to leapfrog to more peripheral rural districts." (Clove 1979 p.12).*

It should be remarked that this method of approach to the problem considers distance from urban centres and the census defined commuting out pattern, but it does not consider those communications links completed since 1971 which will have further altered commuting patterns and exacerbated the trends identified by Cloke. This is particularly important since the real price of petrol has fallen since then and developments in motor technology, jobs and methods of finance are likely to have accelerated these changes. These are discussed more fully in the following section dealing with recognition of change. It should be noted however, that the problem has been previously acknowledged by, for example, Clout, who ventures the following in a chapter headed "Urbanization of the Countryside":

*"In less than a quarter of a century since Britain entered the motorway age, the country will have experienced possibly the greatest social upheaval since the Industrial Revolution." (Clout 1972 p.46).*

He continues to expand on this statement, commenting that the motorway building programme has encouraged commuters to travel further and that London's:

*"commuting hinterlands become broader with every year that passes." (Clout 1972 p.46).*

The result has been that:

*"... the scale of urban diffusion has increased with heightened personal mobility to the extent that rapid urbanisation of previously rural areas has brought about many urgent problems for planners." (Clove 1979 p.16).*

The impact of communications links has been specifically considered in Martin, Vorhees and Associates' Review of Rural Settlement Policies (1980). They chose six rural areas to study in depth, basing their choice on a variety of criteria including census material, distances to motorway junctions, the influence of major roads and rail timetables and Cloke's research. Their original brief did not require them to comment on or define rurality in the country as a whole.

Dunn, Rawson and Rogers (1981) explored rural housing inequalities and again, did not consider "rural" or "urban" as such, commenting instead that the concept of "accessible countryside" was:

*"like "rural England", surprisingly elusive . . . (and extends) over virtually the whole of lowland rural England, with some differentiation in the pressures exerted and in their effects, largely as a result of variations in their accessibility to nearby urban areas." (Dunn et al 1981 p.24).*

No further definition of rurality is contained in the study. Phillips and Williams' (1982) consideration of public housing in rural areas does not contain a definition of rural or urban, concentrating instead on social groupings and change, although when introducing their study area in Devon, they refer to Cloke's index of rurality:

*"Plymouth and environs apart, none of Devon is identified as being under pressure, and much of the county falls into Cloke's categorisation of "extreme rural" or "intermediate rural." (Phillips and Williams 1982 p.46).*

Shucksmith (1981) does not directly discuss the issue but in constructing an analysis of low incomes in England and Wales, he also refers to Cloke's index of rurality for comparison.

G. Clark (1982), does not address the topic as a separate issue, but introduces an interesting twist to its consideration when discussing those features which have been revealed by his study:



*"To plan for Dartmoor, Exmoor, The Peak District or the Lake District separately from the neighbouring lowlands and towns cuts across the functional unity of city and hinterland. This separates employment from workforce and service centre from customers." (Clark G 1982 p.140).*

It may be considered that this represents a fundamentally different approach. Perhaps, it could be extended to suggest that to plan for any rural area independently of the urban area which is responsible for causing housing pressure within it, is wrong. Assuming this to be the case, then our present concept of urban or rural planning is in need of re-examination.

Clearly then, Cloke's index of rurality has been largely accepted by researchers as providing an adequate method of indicating the degrees of difference between rural and urban areas, despite evidence which suggests that it fails to distinguish between the subtle variations of rurality indicative of their present problems. It may therefore be time to debate an approach which admits that in future all rural areas may be considered to be under pressure from urban areas, either from commuter or retirement housing, or if too remote for either, then for recreation, or what may best be described as "contemplative tourism". The artificiality of the present division in planning terms between urban and rural areas comes across clearly, indeed, whether we like it or not:

*"The visual antithesis of town and country belies their functional unity." (Clark G 1982 p.40).*

### 3:5 Recognition of Change

There is no doubt that since 1945, considerable changes have taken place in Britain and that these may lead to the need to reconsider the way in which rural areas are planned. Researchers have been aware of the transition for some time and have recorded it, but most

are concerned with the social movements caused by outsiders buying into villages and displacing locals. Dunn et al (1981), record the contrasting patterns of contemporary population change, citing population decline in remoter areas:

*"often largely as a result of contracting employment opportunities in agriculture." (Dunn et al 1981 p.12).*

Their study relies on an analysis of population changes in mid Wales between 1901 and 1971 and relates to what was then, a relatively remote area. Their figures though, do show a reduction in the rate of decline in population between 1961 and 1971, which may well have indicated the beginning of the new wave flight from the cities.

The study continues to consider the pressures for growth in more accessible areas noting that:

*"location relative to motorways and the primary route network is . . . crucial in determining the extent and type of pressures for growth." (Dunn et al 1981 p.22).*

There follow a number of arguments concerned with pressure on the housing stock, inability of locals to compete in the housing market, suburbanisation, loss of identity, difficulties of integration, and:

*"creating privilege within certain specified areas and in redistributing the problems of pressures for growth in an intensified form to other accessible but unprotected rural areas." (Dunn et al 1981 p.31).*

This may be considered to dwell on the more negative aspects of such changes and should be compared with that summarised by G Clark, who records the same phenomena, but at least admits that some of their effects may be *"rather nebulous"*, commenting that it is *"not clear how one should measure social change"*. He further considers that:

*"the countryside has changed enormously since last century. Not so much in its visual appearance as in who lives there and how they earn their living. The countryside has become a kind of national property since it is now accessible to so many and large numbers of townspeople live there." (Clark 1982 p.27).*



This attitude allows for the fact that not all changes are necessarily bad and that progress, the introduction and enjoyment of new ideas and so on, are not the sole prerogative of townsfolk. Indeed, further into the study he notes the results of the 1981 population census recording them as indicating:

*"the transformation of most British rural areas . . . from regions of depopulation to ones of net inflow . . . "*  
(Clark G 1982 p.143).

Further evidence of change is summarised in his section dealing with conflicts in rural planning:

*"urban and rural housing markets in most of Great Britain have merged into a single market embracing city and hinterland..."* (Clark G 1982 p.137).

This seems a natural corollary of the argument adopted by Newby, who recognises the narrowing of the:

*"gap between "rural" and "urban" life styles (and the) gradual absorbtion of rural life into the mainstream of English society as a whole."* (Newby 1980 p.273).

All contemporary researchers are agreed that change is taking place and that, by and large, this is the result of an increase in the number of people living in rural areas. The fact that this increase has been taking place over a long period is recorded by Phillips and Williams who note that:

*"until the 1930's, rural areas were gradually losing population to urban areas . . . (since then up to 1971), the total population of rural areas in England and Wales increased by 18.3% compared to an increase of only 5.8% in the country as a whole . . . there is a need to dispel the myth that rural depopulation is the norm."* (Phillips and Williams 1982 p.13).

Blunden and Curry record this as a dual process in which:

*"town people moving into and country people staying in the rural areas - has at last brought a halt to the long process of depopulation in many rural areas."*  
(Blunden and Curry 1985 p.187).

The fact that it has been able to happen is entirely due to changes in accessibility both in terms of housing and transportation:

*"The main feature is that population growth has tended to correlate positively with proximity to larger urban centres." (Moseley 1979 p.12).*

and that, as mentioned previously in Chapter (1), in relation to Shropshire:

*"car ownership is so high that commuting by car is now feasible for many families and the improvement in trunk roads and motorways has furthered these trends." (Clark G 1982 p.138).*

However, as has been demonstrated previously, not all researchers agree on the nature of the results of such changes. Cloke (1983) considers that there are considerable rural social and economic ills characterised in post war Britain, such rural malaise being:

*"varied in intensity and thus rural people can be viewed as having few "standard" needs to which "common" policy responses can be addressed . . . this lack of urgency for policy action might well be exacerbated by the resurgence in rural population shown by the 1981 census." (Cloke 1983 p.329).*

This could be because, as indicated by Newby, there has been a tremendous reduction in the gap between urban and rural lifestyles and it may well be that we should now be considering advantaged and disadvantaged sections of society across the rural/urban spectrum rather than continuing to attempt differentiation by location. This is not to say that presently applied rural policies are correct, but that it may be time to ensure the application of social policies to all disadvantaged people regardless of location. It may also be time to consider all rural areas as being influenced to a greater or lesser extent by people from nearby accessible conurbations who put pressure on available rural housing stock in various forms, for example, by bidding for family housing in smaller "no development" villages or by purchasing the small number of housing plots available to build retirement homes. This pressure is not always recognised in the policies which are applied by planning



and housing authorities or, if it is acknowledged, then policies frequently attempt to deal with it by restricting housing opportunities either in number or by introducing local needs policies which often fail to deal with the problem satisfactorily.

### 3:6 The Effects of Rural Settlement and Housing Policies

Researchers are agreed that, in general, rural areas suffer from a variety of economic and social problems, many of which may be affected by or may be said to result from currently applied settlement or housing policies. Perhaps the most obvious of these are effects of restricting housing development.

It is clear that historically, there has been a presumption against development in the open countryside. There are organised and accepted amenity and conservation lobbies with the result that, by and large, planners have adopted policies which "conserve" the countryside and restrict and channel development. It is not difficult for commentators to criticise such an approach and there has been no shortage of such review. For example Cloke's study of the operation of key settlement policies identifies two objectives common to both pressured and unpressured rural areas:

*"a) The concentration of residential and employment growth into selected centres (to optimise service/infra-structure provision) and:*

*b) The use of these centralised facilities to improve or stabilise the opportunities for residents of hinterland settlements." (Cloke 1979 p.199).*

He notes that these objectives are designed to meet fundamentally different requirements, commenting that in pressured areas, successful centralising policy allows the conservation of settlements of environmental quality where further large scale growth would be inappropriate, but in more remote areas, this policy would help prevent depopulation by creating centres of "intervening opportunities".



Cloke suggests that the first objective has been generally successful, but the second has not, commenting that the conservation of rural settlements in pressured areas has been achieved by "*stunting the growth of viable non key settlements*". Similarly, attempts at preventing depopulation in non pressured areas have only been partially successful, but often at the expense of the outlying hinterland. Indeed Cloke mentions rural Warwickshire where planners have:

*"found it difficult to restrict increases in population and housing in settlements where an impetus for growth has already been established under previous planning regimes."* (Cloke 1979 p.200).

Such problems have also been recorded in Devon by Blacksell and Gilg (1981), who noted the failure of the local planning authority to resist developers who preferred to build outside key settlements in villages not scheduled for development by planners.

To a practising planner, it is clear that such difficulties attend the introduction of virtually any policy restricting housing development in areas of demand. For a number of years, permissions granted prior to the introduction of the policy will remain viable and there will be sites which perhaps would be better developed or which local interests are able to argue would be better developed to accommodate policy exceptions. For example "waste" land or disused agricultural buildings. As Cloke remarks, there will be settlements where demand or suitability for growth has not been considered and it may be the case that in Warwickshire, some non-conservation settlements could have been expanded, but instead, development was channelled into a number of key settlements. Cloke also mentions:

*"the replacement of traditional rural residents by affluent in-migrants."* (Cloke 1979 p.200).

Cloke links this to declining services and the operation of key settlement policies which is:

*"gradually encouraging those (low paid, non mobile) people to migrate towards the centralised services of the key settlements."* (Cloke 1979 p.200).



The study carried out by Phillips and Williams is, by contrast with Cloke's, almost entirely concerned with rural housing rather than the more general aspect of settlement policy. They concentrate on the role of the public sector and criticise the approach of rural housing and planning authorities. For example in the matter of their attitude to the provision of council housing which, if restricted in terms of numbers, (as it usually is), avoids "burdening local ratepayers" and ensures some control over agricultural workers by providing few alternatives to tied housing. Their general complaint continues to criticise planning authorities who, they claim, exacerbate the rural housing problem by restricting private house building whilst:

*"large numbers of commuters and spiralists from urban settlements move in." (Phillips and Williams 1982 p.26).*

This analysis of the situation is generalised and is applicable only to certain areas and certain types of settlement. In the Shropshire situation, for example, there are villages containing modern housing estates which offer a choice of reasonably priced dwellings to anyone who would rather not live in a town. Indeed in many cases these dwellings appear to be priced to reflect the lower level of services available in rural areas and the costs of commuting. There seems to be a tendency for researchers to dwell on the opposite extremes of policy performance whereas it is important to distinguish between high quality environment, no growth, conservation villages and key settlements with estate development. In the study area, the main villages of Pontesbury, Minsterley, Bayston Hill and Bomere Heath, are examples of "estate development" villages. It is clear that there is a vast difference in the performance of rural housing policies between the two extremes which is not often recorded in the available research. This difference in performance is expressed in the form of housing opportunities for local people. At one extreme, few are available and at the other, there is relatively wide choice. In the former case, "commuters and spiralists" have an economic advantage over locals and at the other, their pecuniary superiority is less obvious. It should also be remarked that local people may also be commuters and/or spiralists and that as Newby has pointed out, there



has been a blurring of the differences between urban and rural groups (Newby 1980). Indeed, the comprehensive education system, coupled with the recent years of relative prosperity for farmers (and hence the ability to afford private and further education) has led to the growth of what may be termed "indigenous spiralists". Experience gained in dealing with applications for rural housing over the last ten years has shown that by no means all the pressures for rural housing comes from "conventional" commuters or spiralists. Successful indigenous business men may also be interested in "up market" housing in rural areas and there are some affluent farmers with sophisticated housing expectations within the study area.

It should be emphasised that Phillips and Williams's main purpose was to consider public sector housing. They produced evidence to show that in the rural area examined, those policies currently operated had led to locational imbalances in the housing stock, involving an over-concentration on main settlements and sheer lack of public housing since 1979.

The issues involved in the performance of rural housing and settlement policies have also been considered by Shucksmith who concentrated his study on the issues of local need, considering that government policy should be revised in pressured rural areas to redress the consequence of an inefficient and inequitable housing market allocation (Shucksmith 1981). His study was concerned with the Lake District National Park area which he considers exhibits the classic symptoms whereby strictly applied conservation policies tend to increase desirability whilst restricting house building. This causes an increase in house prices which decreases housing opportunities for poorly paid locals. On the detailed matter of local need, he remarks that the term can mean whatever the local authority want it to mean. There is no consistent definition and its usage is confused. This particular issue is taken up in chapter (4) in relation to the Shropshire structure plan and the six districts' consideration of the term.



### 3:7 Summary and Conclusion

Contemporary researchers are agreed that there has been a general neglect of the impact of rural settlement and housing policies. Despite a number of studies concerned with rural social structure, there has been little detailed assessment of social and economic conditions and virtually no analysis of change or policy performance. There is considerable evidence that major demographic and social changes are taking place in rural settlements, but there appears to have been little alteration in the way in which rural areas are considered or planned. There is also evidence that written housing and settlement policies vary in content and effect and that there are considerable differences in the way these are interpreted, although there is no research which attempts to clarify this problem.

The social and physical changes which have occurred since 1945 have rapidly altered the traditional interpretation of the complementary roles of urban and rural areas. Most researchers however, rely on Cloke's "Index of Rurality" to define or compare areas. Few have related the changes taking place in the countryside (as outsiders move in) with the parallel phenomenon of the narrowing of the gap between urban and rural lifestyles. This is coupled with the fact that until very recently, there has been an increase in farm incomes and that the communications revolution has enabled indigenous rural dwellers to reach urban areas as well as commuters to live in rural areas. The links work in both directions.

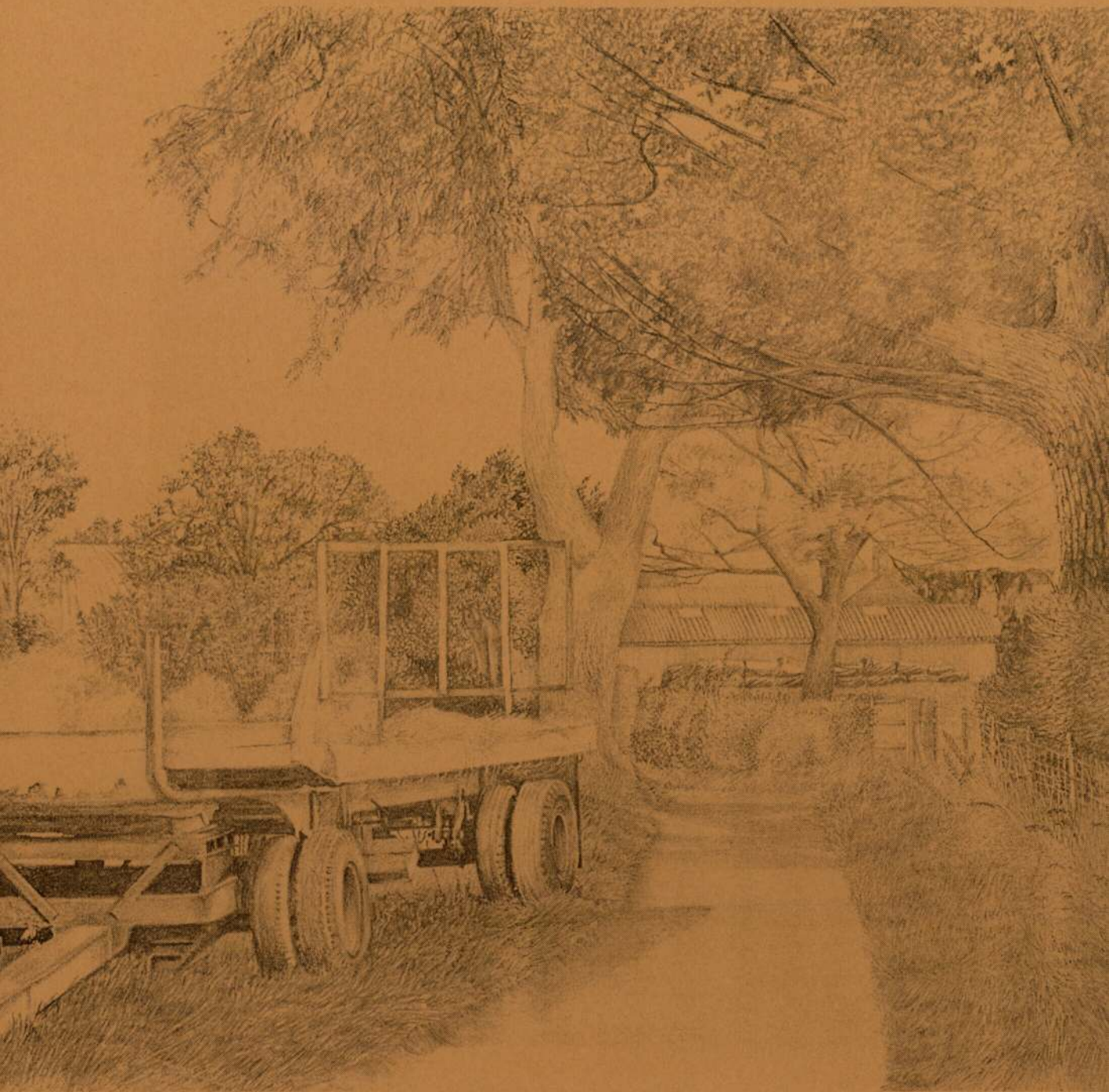
Research has so far concentrated mostly on the wider issues and there is little evidence detailing the effects of policies in practice, except in relation to public housing in Devon or local needs policies in the Lake District. There is a need to allow for variations in policies or for policies which may be "fine tuned" to suit local circumstances and so, whilst these general studies are useful, many more are needed to examine the workings of policies in detail in a wide variety of areas and circumstances. At present the available

research has tended to lead to the use of information based on less than satisfactory sources and there is a general agreement by commentators that further detailed research is necessary to increase our understanding of the situation.

There appears to be a need to reconsider housing, planning and settlement policies in the future. Clearly, traditional policies based on conservation of both settlement patterns and agricultural land have been shown to be at least partly responsible for reducing housing opportunities and therefore assisting in the forcing up of house prices. At the same time there appears to be a significant desire by many people to live away from major conurbations. The few indications which have been revealed by current research show a disparity between policy objectives and perceived policy performance which must be investigated before more realistic or more effective policies may be formulated.

The following chapters help to redress the balance by introducing some more detailed research into policy performance in rural Shropshire. The next chapter begins by illustrating the variation in content and effect of policies by highlighting the different approaches adopted by six neighbouring authorities and examining the written housing and settlement operated by them.





*hay wagon Cadoza*

CHAPTER 4  
A COMPARISON OF RURAL  
HOUSING POLICIES



#### 4:1    Introduction

The previous chapter has shown that there has been a tendency amongst researchers and policy analysts to neglect the impact and consequences of rural settlement and housing policies and that despite major demographic and social changes affecting rural areas, there has been no real alteration in the way in which rural areas are considered or planned. This section sets out to illustrate the importance of this gap by comparing the differences in approach which exist between the study area and the surrounding local authorities. In particular, it examines the rural settlement and housing policies operated by Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough in the Shropshire county context and compares them with those applied by the five adjoining authorities.

The study is concerned mainly with those policies used by planning authorities to direct and control the construction of houses within their districts. It is not directly concerned with issues raised by public sector housing. The results highlight the fact that planning authorities have differing attitudes towards new housing development in rural settlements, often reflecting the character and pressures prevailing in the area, but also influenced by the perception and opinions of officers and elected members. This chapter sets out to summarise and compare the widely varying planning policies operated in the study area, using information obtained from contemporary plans and published reports. It also defines and explains the term "rural housing policy" and considers the area and context in which they are applied.

#### 4:2    The Local Policy Context

Traditional (or conventional) planning practice has deliberately sought to restrict housing in rural areas and to direct it to chosen settlements. The reasons given relate to the cost of providing



services and the conservation of the countryside from either the aesthetic or agricultural point of view. In many situations neither of these reasons are entirely justified and perhaps it is time to examine current practice with a view to considering the needs and wishes of rural dwellers. This need not necessarily be done following the established, stereotyped local authority model, but within the context of the changing pattern of agriculture, rural employment prospects, population age structure etc. Such examination should also reflect the wider background of social and communication changes which have been taking place during the past thirty years.

Most planning authorities, for example, operate policies permitting the construction of new houses to cater for local needs, but often interpret this to equate with the proven needs of the agricultural or forestry industry. Even then, the question asked when an application is considered for a dwelling in a restricted rural area is: "does it need an additional worker (house/family) to run this holding", rather than: "could the holding provide an occupation for an additional family?" This latter approach might be considered more appropriate given present and likely future agricultural employment prospects. Similarly, there may be a case for encouraging rural housing opportunities in remoter areas regardless of the conventional interpretation of local need, which may perhaps be classified instead as "the need to provide support to ensure the viability of the local school/shop/church etc.". Such matters are considered in more detail in chapters seven and eight of this study.

The study area chosen contains considerable numbers of families carrying out traditional and other "rural functions", having family links with the area, often gaining a living there and having housing needs which may be difficult to satisfy given low rural wages and lack of employment opportunities in the face of increasing competition from incoming retired folk or "town waged" commuters.

For the purposes of comparison, a rural housing policy is considered to be a written policy contained in an approved structure or local plan, or an adopted or currently operated policy statement, which



indicates the authorities' intentions in relation to the treatment of planning applications for new dwellings in the rural parts of their districts. A new dwelling may be newly built or provided by conversion or replacement (the latter term including rehabilitation). The stages through which a planning application must pass are illustrated in Figure 4.1 so that the process may be seen in the context of the various parties involved.

#### 4:3 The Study Area

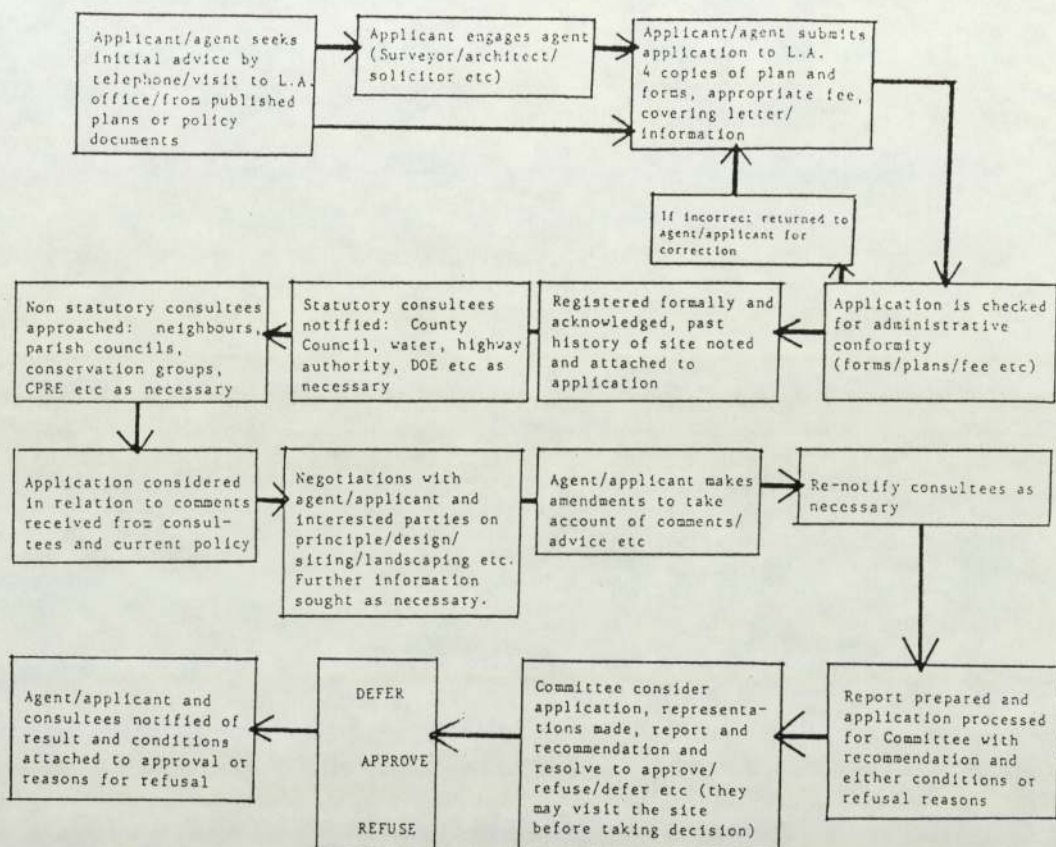
The district for which access to detailed information was available was the Borough of Shrewsbury and Atcham in Shropshire which includes an extensive rural area and, prior to the construction of the M54 (1983), was not especially attractive to commuters from the West Midlands conurbation. Shropshire is situated in the west of the West Midlands region (figure 4.2 and also figure 2.1 on p.46). It is bounded to the west by the Welsh counties of Powys and Clwyd, to the north by Cheshire, with Staffordshire to the east and Hereford and Worcester to the south.

The county is linked to the national motorway network by the M54 (opened in 1984). Various major trunk roads pass through it, providing links with North Wales, the North West, the Midlands and the South. A major road improvement scheme to link the M54 with an improved A5 and A49 to Shrewsbury and beyond is scheduled to be completed by 1992. Main line rail services are offered with services, based on Shrewsbury, to Wolverhampton, Birmingham and London. Rail links are also provided with Chester, Crewe, Cardiff, Aberystwyth and Swansea.

At the same time, as Shrewsbury was the County town of Shropshire, there was a steady demand for housing which could be described as continuing, rather than pressured. A statutory local plan covering the rural area was in the course of preparation and the study could therefore enable policies to be prepared which were relevant to the Borough's needs, and compatible with the policies operating in adjoining districts.



FIGURE 4.1 PLANNING APPLICATION FLOW CHART



This chart represents a very simplified version of events. A typical application would be decided by a Sub-Committee, but Officer/Chairman delegation could take place or a higher Committee or full Council could decide.

Five Shropshire districts and one Welsh district share a common boundary with Shrewsbury and Atcham. Shropshire County Structure Plan contains strategic planning policies affecting the Shropshire districts. Powys County Structure Plan contains strategic policies covering the Welsh district. Thus the full spectrum of demand and pressure is represented ranging from green belt villages bordering the West Midlands conurbation at one extreme, to areas until recently affected by rural depopulation at the other.

#### 4:4 A Brief Description of the Districts Examined

##### (a) Shrewsbury and Atcham (1981 population 86,500)

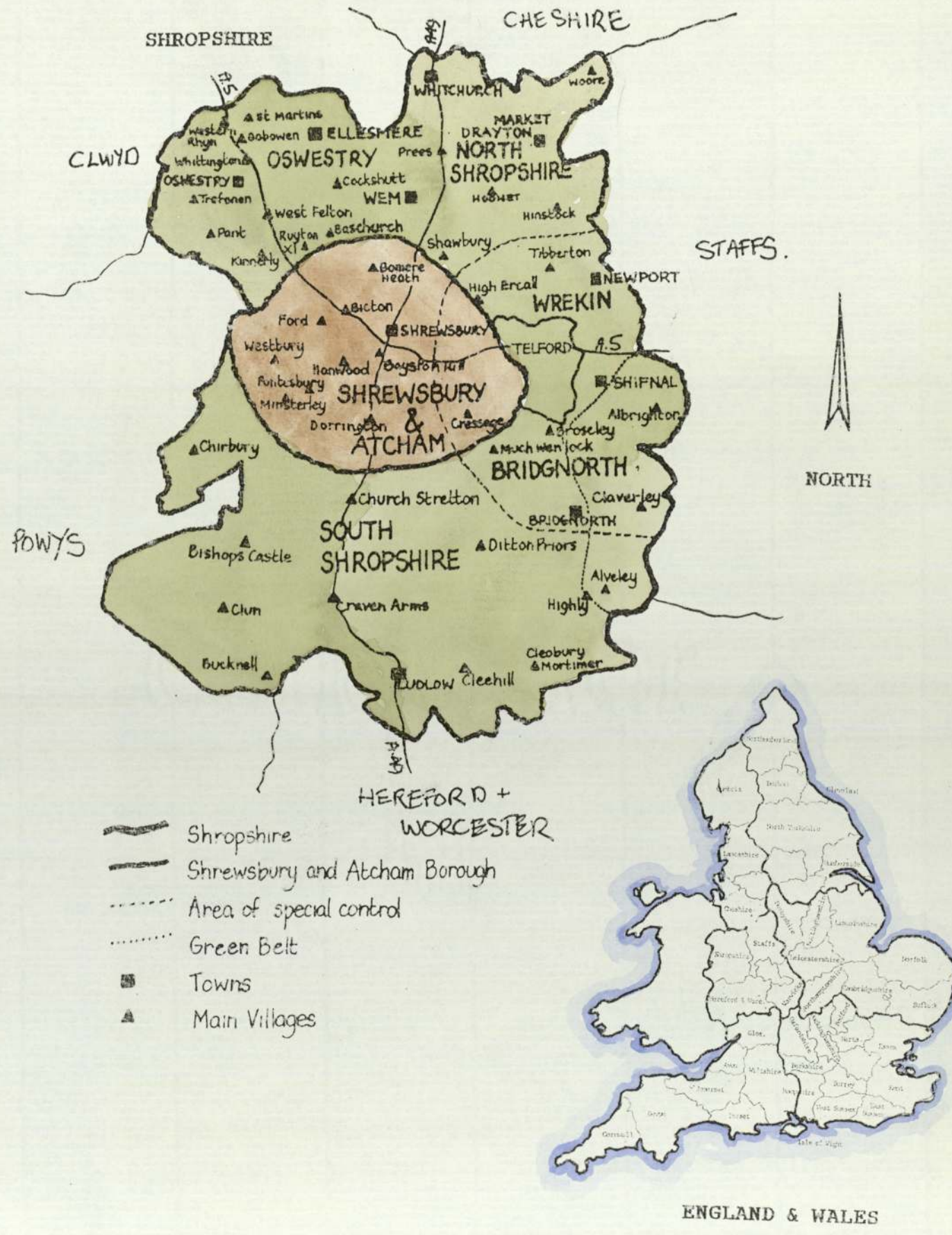
The Borough centres on the county town of Shrewsbury (population 58,300), with its traditional range of services. The area is becoming increasingly sought after as a residential location due to the completion of the M54-M6 link. It is likely to become even more accessible to commuters when the proposed A5/A49 improvements are finished (1992/93) as journey times of around 40 minutes to Central Birmingham will be achieved. Part of the borough is within an area of "Special Housing Control" (ASHCAT) in which policies are operated with the intention of preventing the construction of houses for Telford's commuters within a seven mile radius of the new town.

##### (b) South Shropshire (1981 population 33,800)

A largely agricultural district containing the town of Ludlow, population around 8000. Not under particular pressure at present, but containing a number of attractive villages proving popular with retired folk. Expected to come under greater pressure with the completion of the A49 improvements, providing a link with the A5/M54.



FIGURE 4.2 COUNTY LOCATION MAP



(c) Wrekin (1981 population 124,600)

This district centres on Telford new town (population 104,000). The rural area contains Telford on its northern edge and as it includes a number of attractive small villages, is under pressure from commuters to Telford and the West Midlands via the M54. The entire district is within the area of "Special Housing Control" around Telford.

(d) Bridgnorth (1981 population 49,900)

Centred on the pleasant country town of Bridgnorth (population around 11,000), the district is a popular dormitory for commuters to Telford and the West Midlands conurbation. Considered to be a pressured rural area containing a green belt separating it from Wolverhampton and Birmingham and an area of "Special Housing Control" separating it from Telford.

(e) North Shropshire (1981 population 49,700)

Primarily an agricultural district, lacking a single dominant centre, looking outside for main service and employment needs. The largest towns are Whitchurch, around 7,000 people, Wem, with a population of just over 4,000, and Market Drayton, over 8,000. Not yet considered to be a pressured area, but there are signs that as communications are improved, it could also attract commuters.

(f) Oswestry (1981 population 30,500)

An agricultural area focussing towards the town of Oswestry (population over 13,000). Not yet considered to be pressured, but popular as a retirement area.

(g) Montgomery (Welshpool area) (1981 population 15,000)

The district includes the town of Welshpool, population around 7,000. Not particularly under pressure as a commuter area, but nevertheless providing rural housing opportunities for people employed outside the district.



#### 4:5 Analysis of Rural Housing Policies

##### (a) Method of approach

The policies which deal with these issues may be expected to be contained in documents prepared by the local planning authorities under appropriate sections of the Town and Country Planning acts. Indeed, in some cases they were in the form of local plans which had been prepared and, following a statutory period of public consultation, adopted as council policy. In other cases the plan was still in the course of preparation and a draft plan was used, elsewhere other non statutory documents were the only source of written policy guidance. In each case, the appropriate document was examined and the authority was contacted to check that the policies contained in them were used for the purposes of development control or advising potential developers.

As explained in chapter 1, County Councils have a duty to prepare structure plans dealing with strategic policy issues such as settlement structure, overall growth rates etc. District councils prepare detailed local plans within the structure plan framework, dealing with more precise local issues, for example identifying growth villages or sites suitable for development.

In order to appreciate the relationship between the various documents, it should be noted that policies operated by district authorities and contained in local plans are required to conform to the strategic planning guidance contained in county council prepared structure plans. The regulations require a district authority to apply to the county council for a "certificate of conformity" before a local plan may be placed on deposit.

Planning policies set out in structure and local plans and published guidance statements for each authority were examined for information revealing their intentions regarding the provision of dwellings in rural settlements and in the open countryside, either by building or

conversion. These policies are discussed in more detail later in this chapter, but are shown in summary in table 4.2. Policies would normally be used to advise agents and prospective applicants and to assess private and public sector planning applications for dwellings in the rural area.

Table 4.2 summarises the present position and shows that there is a considerable difference in the treatment of applications for dwellings in rural areas. For example, three authorities specify the number of houses intended to be built in named settlements. Two are the pressured areas of Bridgnorth and Wrekin, yet the other, Oswestry, is probably the least pressured district. Wrekin restricts all new housing to "essential local need" and closely defines this. North Shropshire restricts new housing outside named settlements to the "needs of agriculture", Oswestry to "employment or personal needs", South Shropshire to "agriculture or forestry needs" and Montgomery to "local community need". No doubt there is room for interpretation of these policies in practice, but it appears, on paper at least, that the same applicant seeking permission for a dwelling for his "non vital" local need would probably receive approval in Montgomery, Oswestry, and South Shropshire and a refusal in North Shropshire, Wrekin, Bridgnorth and Shrewsbury.



TABLE 4.2 SUMMARY OF TYPES OF POLICY OPERATED

Name/pop.(81)	Housing need 1981-96 (in rural area)	'Direction policies'	'number policies'	'number guidance'	Restricted to specific needs in settlements.	Restricted outside 'development villages'.	Restricted in open rural area	Replacement Policy	Conversions Policy	House size Policy	House size guidance	Extension size Policy
Shropshire 374900	28800 (5400)	YES	NO	NO	YES ASH ESS	YES ASH ESS	YES AGR FOR	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
North Shrops 49700	3100 (1100)	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES AGR	YES AGR	YES	YES AGR FOR	NO	YES	NO
Oswestry 30500	1700 (700)	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES EMP PER	YES EMP PER	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO
Shrewsbury 86500	5900 (1200)	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
South Shrops 33800	2200 (900)	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES LOC	YES AGR FOR	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES
Wrekin 124600	10000+ (400)	YES	YES	NO	YES ASH ESS	YES ASH ESS	YES ASH ESS	YES ASH ESS	YES ASH ESS	NO	NO	NO
Bridgnorth 49900	2200 (1100)	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES
Welshpool 14650	1520 (1050)	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES COM	YES DIS	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
SEE NOTE 1	2,3	4	5		6	7	8	9	10	11		12

## NOTES EXPLAINING TABLE 4.2

Information has been derived from relevant structure or local plans. The fact that an authority has no written policy or guidance on a topic means that it is usually dealt with using county council policies.

- 1 From 1981 Registrar General's Census of Population.
- 2 Shropshire County Council Structure Plan Alteration no.1 and Welshpool District Council Local Plan. Figures show the anticipated housing increase needed to cater for the expected rate of household formation, natural population increase and in-migration.
- 3 Includes dwellings expected in all main villages and settlements.
- 4 Does the district operate written policies with the objective of directing housing to named settlements?
- 5 Are there written policies aimed at directing specific numbers of houses to named settlements?
- 6 Does the district operate written policies aimed at restricting new rural housing in development settlements to specific needs?
- 7 Do written policies attempt to condition or restrict to specific needs, rural housing in settlements outside those named as suitable for further housing?
- 8 Do written policies attempt to condition or restrict development outside settlements (normally but not necessarily open countryside)?
- 9 Is there a written policy dealing with replacement dwellings?
- 10 Does the authority operate a written policy dealing with conversions?
- 11 Is there a written policy covering the size of new houses?
- 12 Is there a written policy controlling the size of extensions?

ASH Area of Special Housing Control  
ESS Essential Need  
AGR Agricultural Need  
FOR Forestry Need  
EMP Employment Need  
PER Personal Need  
LOC Local Need  
COM Community Need  
DIS Discretion of Local Planning Authority



Clearly then, the written policies available to prospective applicants and their agents used to judge planning applications, and the advice therefore offered by officials, varies from district to district, but in a manner which does not appear logical. Thus, applications for dwellings in the rural area and the issue of local needs appear to be treated differently, often in neighbouring districts experiencing the same or similar pressure for new dwellings. Policies seem to be fairly restrictive in areas closer to the conurbation where pressure for housing might be expected to be great, but the converse does not always seem to apply. To examine this in greater detail it is worthwhile taking each district in turn in the context of the county council policies and comparing their different approaches, firstly to the more general issue of directing new housing to rural settlements and secondly to the treatment of applications dealing with the rural housing needs of local families.

(b) The "Direction" of Housing to Rural Settlements

(i) Shropshire County Council view

A clear indication of the numbers of houses expected to be provided in each district over the period 1981-1996 is given in the 1980 County Structure plan and the 1984 Alteration. In summary, they indicate the total number of dwellings expected by district and indicate the proportions to be allocated between urban and rural areas. The policies also separate Telford from Wrekin for the purposes of allocating dwelling numbers and list the settlements in the county regarded as towns. The reasons for including a proposed "urban/rural split" is set out in the Explanatory Memorandum of Alteration 1:

*"This urban-rural split is a major factor in the growth and future location of population. The guidelines on the proportion of houses that should be built are of particular importance to the rural areas, especially those where the problem of population decline and loss of services remain serious. Because circumstances and settlement patterns differ greatly from one part of the County to another, it is necessary to have separate guidelines for individual districts." (SCC 1984 p.53).*



The reasons given for the precise urban/rural proportions contained in the plan vary little for each district - usually reducing to the fact that it was contained in the original structure plan policy, although the reason given for South Shropshire is worth noting:

*"Policy 1/17 puts the urban split at 60%, a slight increase from the original plan, to reflect the increased migration of people, many of them elderly, into the district." (SCC 1984 p.55).*

(The original structure plan expected 40-50% of houses to be in the urban area.)

The plan also introduces an "Area of Special Housing Control" which covers all but the green belt and certain named towns and villages within an area extending 6-7 miles from the Telford boundary. Inside this (and also inside the green belt), only minor housing development will be acceptable and even this must be *"in a named settlement and necessary for local needs"* (SCC 1984 p.58). Minor development is defined as *"one or two houses on an infill site"*. Local needs are discussed in detail in part 2 of this chapter. The only other strategic direction policies in the plan, are policies 1/19 and 1/21, the former indicating that small scale development will normally be permitted in rural settlements and the latter naming settlements where larger scale housing will be allowed, but containing the clause:

*"(and) in any other villages named in an adopted local plan or a supplementary planning guidance statement as being appropriate for this scale of development." (SCC 1984 p.59).*

The reasoned justification to these policies gives some advice to districts, but leaves reasonable scope for individual interpretation except in the area of special housing control where the policy is:

*"aimed at preventing the development of larger scale speculative developments which would attract people who would otherwise be accommodated in Telford or elsewhere in the West Midlands" (SCC 1984 p.58).*

and is therefore more restrictive.



The Structure Plan also contains a number of other policies concerned with restricting houses outside settlements and other matters such as extensions, conversions and replacements. As these are not concerned with directing houses to rural settlements, they are not discussed here.

(ii) Powys County Council View

The County's strategic housing policies are set out in the Powys County Structure Plan (1984). Briefly the policies show the numbers of new dwellings expected to be constructed by district, up to 1991. (The Welshpool District Local Plan projects this figure to 1996). No indication is given as to the urban : rural proportion expected in each district. Instead:

*"the concept of growth areas has been accepted" (because previous policies exacerbated the problem of rural depopulation by encouraging concentration in growth towns.) (PCC 1984 p.55).*

The plan does not attempt to define settlements, merely dividing the County into 15 areas each with a central town, in which development is governed:

*"to ensure they do not drain their surrounding areas" (PCC 1984 p.54).*

This is virtually the opposite approach of that adopted in adjoining Shropshire. The Powys plan actually aims to:

*"ensure that some of the benefits of improved employment opportunities at the centre are spread to rural communities." (PCC 1984 p.55).*

This is followed by a policy to that effect, but no numbers are included (PCC 1984 p.57). Other policies permit housing outside area centres provided they are:

*"on a scale appropriate to the size of settlement"*

*and:*

*"do not make disproportionate demands on spending on public services". (PCC 1984 p.57).*

Again, no precise numbers are mentioned and "scale appropriate" is not defined.

Policy H5 indicates that larger numbers of houses may be allowed in settlements for local housing or employment needs. This is discussed more fully in part 2 of this chapter as a local needs issue, but is mentioned here because of its reasoned justification which begins with the premise that housing policies should:

*"promote rather than inhibit the reversal of the past long process of depopulation and decline."*

and later continues with:

*"most settlements will require additional housing merely to maintain the size of their communities." (PCC 1984 p.58).*

Table H3 of the plan sets out estimated housing need in each area, including the area centres, but this broad approach makes no attempt to direct precise numbers of houses to individual settlements, although policy H6 indicates that development will be restricted in certain settlements which have undergone:

*"substantial change (or where) the character of the settlements seems likely to be adversely affected". (PCC 1984 p.59)*

As with the Shropshire Plan, there are other policies concerned with replacement dwellings, conversions etc, but these are not "direction" policies and are not discussed here.

It should be noted that the neighbouring district to Shrewsbury for the purposes of this study consists of a small part of the district of Montgomery, and the appropriate area centre is that focussing on the town of Welshpool.

### (iii) The District View

Table 4.3 shows the result of applying the County's strategic policies in terms of the numbers of rural houses expected by 1996 in each district; around 1000 in each, except Wrekin (400).



TABLE 4.3 ESTIMATES OF HOUSING REQUIREMENTS BY DISTRICT  
(1981-1996)

District	Total	Rural
Bridgnorth	2200	1100
North Shropshire	3100	1085
Oswestry	1700	680
Shrewsbury and Atcham	5900	1180
South Shropshire	2200	880
Wrekin (ex Telford)	1200	360

Based on SCC Structure Plan 1984 p.51

Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough do not currently operate policies with the intention of directing specific numbers of houses to particular villages. The South Shropshire Rural Area Local Plan (1985) contains policies naming main housing villages and smaller villages where development "*will be permitted on suitable sites*". The policies do not include the precise numbers of dwellings expected in each village, but area policies show which ones could take small groups of dwellings (3-5) and which could only take infilling, whilst maps clearly show which sites are considered appropriate (SSDC 1985). This approach is very similar to that adopted in the North Shropshire Local Plan (1985) which also shows potential sites and names villages which could take more than five dwellings, fewer than five dwellings and infilling only. Neither authority shows individual "infill" plots.

These districts are not considered to be particularly pressured. Wrekin District, in their Rural Area Plan (1984), name villages where local needs infill may be permitted within clearly defined areas, and name "community areas" in which stated numbers of houses may be permitted, provided they meet local needs criteria and are within settlements. Neighbouring Bridgnorth adopts fairly similar policies, restricting the number of dwellings constructed up to 1991 to five in each of a named selection of settlements, the precise number of dwellings expected in a further list and a pool of dwellings to be shared among remaining, named, groups of villages. Neither of these two pressured authorities show individual sites on maps.



The district of Oswestry in contrast, adopts a fairly neutral stance, showing the approximate number of dwellings expected in named "housing villages". Sites are indicated on the appropriate village map. A further list of settlements suitable for more limited growth of up to five houses is accompanied by maps showing the larger sites. A list of settlements considered suitable for very limited additional housing does not suggest individual sites. (ODC 1983).

The neighbouring district of Montgomery adopts a slightly different approach, using policies to state that 800 houses shall be built in 13 "principal" settlements, naming them, but not distributing precise numbers of houses, nor identifying sites. The Welshpool District Plan lists ten "standard" settlements which are also named in policy as being capable of expansion by up to 10% of their existing housing stock in any five year period. There is also a policy listing "minor" settlements where there is a presumption against development except for local needs. Development in "standard" and "minor" settlements (plus new dwellings outside settlements) are restricted to a total of 250 over the plan period. Individual sites are not identified, although expansion limits along local roads are set which may have a similar effect in that sites with access inside these limits are "naturally selected".

#### (c) Summary and Discussion of "Direction" Policies

Shropshire County Council policies clearly indicate the numbers of houses to be located in each district and the proportions to be built in the urban and rural areas. It is apparent that the intention of the policies, if not always that of the preamble or reasoned justification, is to control and restrict development in rural areas, hence green belt policy, special housing controls policy, restrictions to infilling or small groups of houses etc.

This approach contrasts strongly with that of Powys County who state their intention to control the size of the towns to encourage village development, thus ensuring the reversal of past decline,



leaving the precise rural numbers to be settled in local plans. This practice is perhaps taken to extremes in that Powys policies for housing and settlement only contain the three figures necessary to direct housing to Montgomery, Radnor and Brecknock (the three districts of the County).

The district approach varies as much with the relatively unpressured areas of South Shropshire, North Shropshire and Montgomery adopting a basically similar approach in identifying settlements and a broad "scale" of anticipated development, but not mentioning precise numbers. On the other hand Wrekin and Bridgnorth policies are far more detailed, indicating both precise housing numbers and the villages expected to receive them.

Oswestry is relatively unpressured, but in contrast to its immediate neighbours, lists settlements and the approximate numbers of houses expected. Shrewsbury is still in the process of preparing policies and does not at present have its own direction policies, but as the structure plan is fairly precise in relation to the size of villages in the district it may be said to operate them none the less.

Whatever the differences in approach adopted by the districts, there are clear guidelines laid down by both counties. Despite the contrast between them, there is reasonable strategic guidance and scope for local interpretation which is relatively simple to understand and explain to the public.

#### (d) The Treatment of Local Needs Issues

##### (i) Shropshire County Council view

As explained earlier in this chapter, the strategic view of the county council is expressed in the Shropshire County Structure Plan and its recent first alteration, the latter document containing current policies which have evolved from the approved structure plan and its earlier draft. It is important to understand this because the Secretary of State modified the draft plan before its approval in 1980 and several

of the modifications are of direct relevance to the issue of local needs. It is therefore worthwhile considering present policies in the light of the following summary of those original modifications.

A proposed green belt extension around Telford was deleted from the plan, becoming instead an *"area of special control over housing"*. The panel of enquiry examining the plan and recommending alterations to the Secretary of State, carefully considered ways in which housing restriction in the area should be applied and concluded that:

*"essential local needs could not easily be defined, especially when applied to individual applicants for planning consent."*

They recommended a policy permitting development:

*"necessary to safeguard the interests of the local community."*

The Secretary of State considered this and added the words:

*"the essential needs".(DOE 1980 p.1)*

The reasons for these alterations being suggested are somewhat complex, but in essence, concern the need to maintain a compatible approach to the neighbouring (Staffordshire) county which has an approved green belt, and the existing Shropshire green belt.

Following the panel's recommendation, the Secretary of State also altered those policies concerned with housing in the open countryside to permit:

*"in certain circumstances, replacements and conversions without limiting them to those required by essential agricultural or forestry workers."*

considering that this can help regenerate rural areas and that failing to do so could:

*"be against the best interests of the rural areas."*  
(DOE 1980 p.7).



These comments set the scene for an examination of the county's current policies. It is interesting to note the variety of ways in which the issue of local need is handled in the finally approved document and its first alteration. Policy 1/5, for example, restricts development in the green belt to what is:

*"clearly needed in connection with agriculture, forestry ."*  
(SCC 1984 p.38).

There is no mention of local need in the policy, although the reasoned justification refers to small housing developments which:

*"safeguard the interests and essential needs of the local community."* (SCC 1984 p 38).

No further reference to the matter occurs until policy 1/20 which restricts new housing development in both the green belt and the area of special housing control to what is:

*"necessary to safeguard the interests and essential needs of the local community as a whole."* (SCC 1984 p.58).

In contrast to policy 1/5, there is no reference to the needs of people employed in agriculture or forestry. In fact, no definition or explanation of the terms "essential needs" or "necessary" are included in the policy, although its reasoned justification includes a reference to the needs of the local community *"rather than on the particular needs of individuals"* - putting the onus of interpretation on "the district councils concerned". No further discussion or advice appears to explain the strange difference between "community needs" and "individual needs". However, the reasoned justification to policy 1/21 (naming villages where larger groups of houses may be built), refers to policies 1/16 and 1/17 (setting out total housing numbers and urban/rural split) and mentions leaving discretion to district councils to relate policies to "local circumstances", which are further defined as:

1. *"The provision of an adequate supply of houses in rural settlements for the needs of local people, particularly those who work in the area or have strong ties within the community."*

2. *"The provision of houses suitable for the young or the elderly."*

3. *"The provision of additional support to existing services or facilities."* (SCC 1984 p.59).

The next reference occurs in policy 1/22 which restricts housing outside settlements to those:

*"required by essential agricultural or forestry workers."* (SCC 1984 p.60).

No explanation of the term is given and no specific section of the document deals with local need. References and those definitions which do occur, appear at different places in the text, sometimes in policies, sometimes in the reasoned justification or discussion. The subject is not treated in a structured, logical manner which might perhaps give clearer guidance to districts responsible for interpreting these strategic issues in local policies. This need not necessarily prejudge interpretation to cater for local variation, but in view of the wide differences in approach adopted by districts, should at least include a discussion of what might be considered an essential need, or what is meant by the term "additional support to existing services". The latter term, for example, could easily be interpreted to indicate the need to provide sufficient dwellings to support a local school. Yet at the present time census statistics show that only ten to fifteen new "secondary age" children can be expected for every 150-170 additional houses in certain areas of the County (SCC 1986 p.47). Thus, the "additional support" would have to include a considerable building programme to be effective in the sense of supporting the education service.

Similarly, is it a strategic intention to encourage the elderly to retire away from essential support services? Is the term *"the provision of houses suitable for the young or the elderly"* intended to refer to local people or anyone? A clear discussion of the issues involved would make local interpretation more effective in the strategic sense and more equitable in the local needs sense. The implications of the



failure to define terms in the context of other strategic policies include the tendency for them to mean "all things to all men". Local interpretation is important but without reasonable guidance can be confusing to the objective observer and potential applicants. It is accepted that the structure plan should concern itself with land use based matters, but nevertheless, there is scope for a better explanation and understanding of the issues at stake so that local needs may be more effectively served.

#### (ii) Powys County Council View

Set out in the Powys County Structure Plan (1984), Powys' policies contrast with those of Shropshire because the area is not particularly pressured as a commuter area and does not contain green belts or areas of special housing control. The first part of this chapter has described "direction" policies and the plan's objective of sharing employment and housing opportunities throughout the district so as not to "drain" some areas of population.

Policy H2 sets out to make housing land available in each area to:

*"support the creation of new employment and to provide for local housing needs . . ."*

The reasoned justification to the policy mentioning that:

*". . . it is expected that some housing provision will be made for key workers in each of these areas." (PCC 1984 p.56).*

There is no definition of "local housing need" or "key worker", but there is a discussion in the justification showing a major difference in approach to that adopted in Shropshire. In view of its importance it is reproduced in full:

*"This process of concentration has been taking place but there is now increasing concern about the loss of services in the rural areas, as the number of people available to support such services decreases. As there will always be people living and working in rural areas engaged principally in agriculture, there will be continuing need to provide services in these areas and the plan will attempt to create conditions which will support such services. The key to the situation is the creation of new employment opportunities and although these are likely to be created mainly in the area centres it is*



*expected that this activity will influence housing demand in the surrounding area. It will also be necessary to provide for local housing need arising from the formation of new households. There is a danger however that the unrestricted development of housing in rural settlements could result in housing being taken up by those not employed in the area nor having a local need, for example, retirement homes and homes for those commuting out of the county." (PCC 1984 pl56).*

There is a clear admission that employment opportunities in centres will *"influence housing demand in the surrounding area"* and that local needs are those *"arising from the formation of new households"* and rural areas must be serviced anyway, therefore these services should be supported.

This approach is intended to apply to all rural settlements, unlike the Shropshire county list which is intended to apply to named settlements. The Powys policies are intended to *"stem rural depopulation"*, which is no longer seen as a problem in Shropshire.

Following this up, Policy H5 indicates that housing development will be allowed in settlements where it will:

*"in addition to providing for local housing needs, lend support to the creation of employment . . .",*

the reasoned justification adds a little more to the definition of local need with:

*"In rural settlements emphasis will be given to ensuring housing provision to meet local needs, such as those who work in the area or who have strong local association." (PCC 1984 p.58).*

Policy H8 restricts dwellings outside settlements to those:

*"essential to house a worker who must live on the spot rather than in a nearby settlement."*

The statement speaks for itself, but the reasoned justification expands it by stating:

*"This policy is also intended to allow for those retiring from agriculture but retaining an interest in a family farm to build for their retirement on their own farm." (PCC 1984 p.60)*



Thus adding a further dimension to the definition of local need.

No further discussion of the term takes place in the Structure Plan, although it is interesting to note the comment in the preamble to the policies concerned with the rural economy following a discussion about full and part time farm holdings which concludes that part time farming is an important way of life for many in Powys:

*"In an era where energy costs seem bound to rise and where it is probable that there will be continuing structural unemployment it may be that incentives now geared towards increasing output per man will be revised in the future, and incentives may be geared to keeping more rather than less people employed on the land. If this were to happen, then the effect in the county could be profound." (PCC 1984 p.79).*

Whilst there is no specific definition of local need, the text contains many more positive examples which might lead to the development of a house for someone with local connections than the Shropshire plan which makes little mention of the subject. Once more, however, there is no specific section of the plan dealing with "local needs" and references must be gleaned from various places in the text. The intention to permit retirement dwellings for local farmers, for example, is contained in the "open countryside" policy reasoned justification, and the reference to housing for key workers and the support of services is elsewhere.

Altogether though, the attitude is far more "pro development" than Shropshire's, even to the extent of using both sides of an argument to justify development - a major reason mentioned for the plan's objective of spreading development in settlements around an area centre, being the "*creation of new employment opportunities*", which will "*influence housing demand in the surrounding area*" (PCC 1984 p.56). Policy H5, on the other hand, specifically encourages new housing where it will "*lend support to the creation of employment*". (PCC 1985 p.57). It seems, then, that the plan's major objective is to encourage development with the exception of incoming retired folk. Even commuters are welcomed and the following statement appears in the reasoned justification to a transport policy:



*"The commuting country man . . . is needed by his community, helping to provide the larger, more balanced, social unit which can support the maintenance of services to a dispersed agricultural population." (PCC 1984 p.34).*

(iii) The District View

Whatever the intentions of either officers, or council members when policies are formulated, the seasoned practitioner can clearly see that there are likely to be differences of opinion, of interpretation and of definition which leads to considerable discrepancies between policy statement and implementation. Cloke considers this so important that he advocates treating policies as statements of the ideal:

*"The written rural settlement policies contained within structure plans are prone to misinterpretation. All too often in the past, bald policy statements have been taken by commentators at face value as rigidly applicable local legislation which will exert predictable trends on rural settlement patterns. In fact, the written policies should be considered more as statements of the ideal which are rarely reproduced exactly when subjected to a tortuous series of implementation procedures. Very often the planning intentions which are not spelt out in structure plans are as important to the outcome of rural settlement planning as those which are." (Cloke 1983 p.144).*

Both the County Structure Plans examined appear to contain reasonably clear policy statements designed with the object of allowing the district authorities within their areas to draw up settlement policies to suit local circumstances. The previous section of this chapter, however, has shown how much the approach can vary in the relatively simple task of assessing how many dwellings are to be permitted in which settlements. This section examines individual districts and considers their approach to the question of local needs, particularly their interpretation and definition of the term. Cloke's statement (above) is clearly borne out, but to test the effects of the *"tortuous series of implementation procedures"*, one district is examined more closely in a later chapter and a sample of local needs planning applications has been followed through to implementation and beyond in an attempt to assess how the Structure Plan's intentions are translated in settlements.



County policies have been drawn up with the intention of permitting local interpretation. To some extent, there is evidence that individual districts have carried this through to local plans by developing policies or statements in their reasoned justification, although often the discussion of a new approach to the local needs question promises more than the written policies actually deliver. The South Shropshire plan, for example, discusses housing outside recognised settlements stating:

*"previously the policy only accepted development which was essential for the carrying out of either agriculture or forestry, but there is a need to re-examine the policy in respect of South Shropshire where the pressure for development is low." (SSDC 1985 p.58).*

In fact no written policy appears to translate this promise into action, although the reasoned justification to policy 36 permitting small scale housing development in 42 named villages contains the following statement discouraging speculative building:

*"The District Council is aware of the very sensitive nature of these villages and will only allow small scale development if it meets the needs of the local community." (SSDC 1985 p.60).*

This is followed by a further statement, but not a policy, indicating the Council's willingness to consider one or two dwellings in a settlement not named in the policy provided:

*"The applicant demonstrates that the development is necessary to safeguard the interests and essential needs of the local community or that the proposal arises from changes in the household characteristics and circumstances of residents in the district." (SSDC 1985 p.60).*

The statement is further qualified by a requirement that applicants are expected to provide proof of residence for "an appropriate number of years" or to be young locals who are marrying and setting up home. In addition:

*"It is necessary for the applicant to live in the locality and that the dwelling should only be occupied by the person and his/her dependants who works or has worked within the locality." (SSDC 1985 p.60).*



Contrast this approach with that taken in Wrekin where all rural settlements are within the area of special housing control around Telford and all new development within the rural area is restricted by policy 20 to that:

*"considered necessary by the District Planning Authority to safeguard the interests and essential needs of the local community." (WDC 1984 p.24).*

This is further defined in the policy as:

*". . . the changing household characteristics and circumstances of existing residents currently established within the rural area (and the need for a dwelling) "in close proximity to place of work, where the nature of that work renders nearby residence essential." (WDC 1984 p.24).*

Compared with South Shropshire's approach this already seems very severe, yet the reasoned justification to the policy considers local needs in even more detail, insisting that the Council will consider such applications in the light of the difference between need, demand, convenience and desire, stating that:

*"The desire of people to live in rural surroundings is perhaps understandable, but does not constitute an essential need." (WDC 1984 p24).*

There follows a page of definition of changing household characteristics and local employment needs which indicate retirement, growing family need, young married couples and infirm relatives as examples of the former and stockmen, security men, doctors, veterinary surgeons as examples of the latter. The words "and where the service fulfils a need of the local community or of tourism" are appended to the list, although no examples are given.

It is interesting to note that originally Wrekin's rules were even more strict. The draft consultation proposals required applicants to have lived in that section of the district for 15 years or more and stated that:

*"The simple desire of an existing resident to move from one type of accommodation to another need not reflect a need of any kind." (Wrekin Rural Area Local Plan 1980 appendix).*



This was modified in the light of comment from the public and the Department of the Environment.

The neighbouring district of Bridgnorth, by contrast, concentrates less on the merits of local need and more on the question of dwelling size. The district's rather confusing policies are contained in a non statutory local plan known as Bridgnorth District Rural Settlement Policy (BDC 1986). The policies' objectives are set out in the introduction to the document, but local needs are not mentioned in them except in a very general sense as in objective 2:

*"to clarify and amplify these (structure plan) policies and general proposals in the light of local circumstances as an aid to their effective implementation and, where appropriate relate them to precise locations and areas of land."* (BDC 1986 p.14).

Section 5 of the document is entitled "Local Community Housing Needs: Policies and Proposals", but the first sentence reads:

*"One means of trying to ensure that new dwellings permitted in the rural areas meet the needs of the local communities, is to exercise planning control over the types of dwellings that are built."* (BDC 1986 p.14).

The report then continues to discuss the trend towards the building of large dwellings to the virtual exclusion of all other local needs issues. The policies themselves restrict the size of new dwellings, conversions and extensions, and encourage small dwellings, but make no attempt to address the issues of local needs on any other level, with the notable exception of policy RSP3.

This could possibly be explained by the statement on page 10 indicating that structure plan policies for the area allow for in migration to equal out migration and therefore only locally generated needs would be catered for:

*"The Structure Plan policies for allocating new dwellings to East Shropshire are based on the general proposal that over the plan period as a whole (1976-1991) the number of people moving into the area will equal the number moving out. It is on this basis that 4500 new dwellings are allocated in Policy No.148. This allocation is intended to meet only the locally generated housing needs of East Shropshire (outside*



*Telford), with no allowance made for net inward migration. The structure plan policies for new dwellings in East Shropshire are therefore designed to limit residential development, and allocations of new dwellings are directed at meeting the local housing need rather than the general demand for housing. Thus the approach adopted in this rural settlement policy is to allocate new dwellings solely on the basis of the housing needs of the population already resident in Bridgnorth District." (BDC 1986 p.10).*

An approach not backed up by policies restricting new housing in the area to local needs, but by policies limiting the size of new dwellings in towns and larger villages to 1100 sq ft or less. Additions to houses in the green belt are restricted to small extensions ("permitted" development), garaging (for no more than two cars), extensions which would not take a property into a different "class" and extensions which result in a dwelling smaller than 850 sq ft. No definition of "housing class" is given.

This indirect approach is quite different to that adopted in other districts and it is worthwhile investigating it in more detail. The quotation opening the plan's housing needs section (see previous page) relating dwelling size to the needs of local communities, lies uneasily alongside the last paragraph which relates the size issue with the need to maintain the quality of the rural scene.

*"For some twelve years control has been exercised over the size of extensions to existing dwellings in the rural areas. This arises from a concern that the existing character of rural dwellings should be retained in the interests of maintaining the quality of the rural scene." (BDC 1986 p.15).*

An earlier, draft, document linked extensions with local need, containing a paragraph indicating that house extensions would be allowed only where *"an essential need has been demonstrated."* The policy gave as examples:

*"extra family commitments such as the arrival of a new child, teenage children of each sex sharing a bedroom, or aged relatives needing care." (BDC 1984 p.13).*



In view of the virtual impossibility of enforcing it, this section was never actually included in a policy document.

Local needs issues are covered by reproducing Wrekin's policy 20 (as policy RSP3) itemising local need as changing household characteristics and essential employment needs, but without the detailed advice included in the Wrekin plan (BDC 1986 p.16).

In addition policy RSP4 extends the structure plan definition of "infilling" and "a small group of dwellings" to allow more than 2 or 5 dwellings in "appropriate circumstances", provided the total floor area of the scheme is no more than 2200 or 5500 sq ft. The preamble to the policy sees this as:

*"a positive encouragement to the provision of small dwellings in rural settlements to meet local community housing needs." (BDC 1986 p.17).*

Infilling is defined in the structure plan as:

*"the construction of one or two houses in an otherwise extensively built up frontage. A small group of houses will normally consist of 3-5 dwellings." (SCC 1984 p.43).*

There is no other discussion or definition of local needs.

Contrast this approach with that of North Shropshire District who tackle the issue in a more conventional manner, referring to "local need" several times, but also fail to define the term. (NSDC 1985). Outside named villages new dwellings are restricted to those required by:

*"essential agricultural workers who need to live on the farming unit." (NSDC 1985 p.18).*

Even conversions outside named settlements are restricted, but in this case to those needed by "essential agricultural or forestry workers." In the latter circumstances the policy also states:

*"in such cases an agricultural occupancy condition will be imposed." (NSDC 1985 p.18).*

The North Shropshire plan advances no reason for the different treatment of local need.

This approach seems rather strange and contrasts strongly with neighbouring Oswestry district who have produced a document setting out their rural housing policy which specifically covers local needs. (ODC 1985). "Directional" housing policies are contained in a series of draft documents published in 1983 which do not cover the issue of local needs at all, this is left to the 1985 document which states that local needs policies are only necessary where sites are in great demand for commuter, holiday or retirement homes and that these circumstances are not applicable to Oswestry. The report sets out the need for:

*"an ability to react to individual circumstances where relaxation of the general policy could perhaps be justified without creating a precedent leading to further pressure which may be difficult to resist." (ODC 1985 p.3).*

The conclusion reached is that a series of rules will be applied in the district which permit housing in "non development" areas for employment related or personal needs. Employment is deliberately defined to widen the scope from the more usual agricultural or forestry cases, although applications will be examined in a similar manner. The report mentions that personal needs applications will be judged on the extent of need, rather than desire or convenience. The question of alternative accommodation is also considered, with the conclusion that the aim must be to identify cases of local need which cannot be filled either by the supply of existing housing or housing sites, or by extending or altering an existing dwelling or building. There is also a warning that there is no control over the subsequent sale of the plot or dwelling once permission is granted. The report advocates using conditions to restrict the life of the outline permission to one year and a full permission to two years, instead of the normal three and five respectively, so as to reassess the situation if necessary.

Oswestry's approach to the problem of local needs has much to commend it. The rules are clearly laid down and there is a document



containing a definition which is understandable to lay people, but the difference between this approach and that of North Shropshire must cause problems along the relatively arbitrary western boundary of the two authorities, where settlements and pressures are similar, but two different sets of criteria are used to judge planning applications.

The Welsh District of Montgomery is covered by the "Draft Welshpool District Local Plan" (1984). This document includes the consideration of local needs issues, but once more, no specific definition of the term, although it does refer to the strategic document "Powys Structure Plan" (PCC 1984) which hints at a definition and sets down what may seem, after Shropshire, fairly generous settlement policies. The Welshpool plan discusses this, indicating the need to seek the advice of the Welsh Agriculture Department in cases where applicants cite agricultural reasons for their need and that they:

*"will not wish to unreasonably obstruct the efficient operation of established farm holdings or other significant rural enterprises." (WDC 1984 p.23).*

The document also makes it clear that in such cases an "appropriate occupancy condition will be imposed" and that this will only be revoked in "rare circumstances". The plan also anticipates a potential problem by refusing to permit a new permanent dwelling for a proposed rural business until the business is in operation, but offers the opportunity of a temporary permission for a caravan or mobile home until it is established.

This very detailed approach to the consideration of one section of local need outside settlements contrasts sharply with the approach of the Shropshire districts and in particular that of Wrekin who carefully detail local need for dwellings inside settlements. Following on from the Powys Structure Plan, the Welshpool plan specifically sets out to encourage development:

*"on a carefully controlled basis to many villages." (MDC 1984 p.14).*

even to the extent of purchasing and servicing sites:

*"where there is a foreseeable market demand which is not being met by private house builders." (MDC 1984 p.11).*

This is further amplified by an intention to:

*"not only cater for the needs of newly formed local households, but provide a varied choice of housing sites for existing residents and newcomers to the area who have secured local jobs."*

This is understandable, but then the plan expands this further:

*"housing and employment growth in the . . . area . . . are not wholly interdependent. There is a wide range of employment opportunities accessible to local residents but located outside the planning area particularly in Newtown, Oswestry and Shrewsbury." (MDC 1984 p14).*

Thus there is an entirely opposite approach to the possibility of outsiders purchasing houses and commuting to work to that taken by Wrekin and Bridgnorth. The Welshpool plan even admits:

*"where there would be an advantage in terms of convenience and energy conservation in attempting to reduce this daily outflow of workers, in practice it must be expected to continue." (MDC 1984 p14).*

The plan justifies this approach by saying:

*"There would seem to be no strong reason for not meeting some of this demand, where suitable sites exist in appropriate villages . . . such households . . . introduce extra local income, add support to local services and help improve the structure and vitality of the local population." (MDC 1984 p.15).*

Realising the apparent flexibility of these policies the plan contains the comment;

*"It is not this Council's intention to meet externally generated housing demand over and above that catered for in this plan . . . allocations . . . merely recognise this area's peripheral and minor role in providing a modest range of housing opportunities for people employed elsewhere." (MDC 1984 p.15).*



A further reason for village growth appears in the section introducing the principal settlements to which most rural housing is intended to be directed :

*"It is vitally important that services such as schools, halls, bus services, shops, post offices and pubs are retained to continue to serve local people, and the best means of achieving this objective is by seeking to increase local populations." (MDC 1984 p.18).*

Perhaps this provides the key to the plan's approach. The area is less pressured than the authorities closer to the West Midlands conurbation and there has in the past been a problem of declining population which concentration policies have not helped because the remoter settlements have been "drained" of people. Houses, then, are generally encouraged in named settlements. In minor settlements, where there is a presumption against development, single dwellings are permitted where:

*"the district council is satisfied that the proposed development would contribute significantly to the continuity and development of local community life to a degree which outweighs the general presumption against development." (MDC 1984 p.22).*

This is amplified in the preamble to the policy which specifically refers to the following examples:

*"single dwellings for persons employed or retired from employment in the immediate area and who wish to stay in or return to it permanently." (MDC 1984 p.22).*

Whilst the policy normally restricts implementation to the applicant, Montgomery's approach is still considerably more "open" than the Shropshire districts' and may be said to positively encourage development.

The reaction of the central district of Shrewsbury and Atcham to such a variation in approach by its neighbours has been to tackle each case outside a main settlement on its merits and to have nothing written committing the Council to any specific attitude. If an applicant claims a local need, but this is not very obviously essential, (for example a retired farmer or working a non-viable holding), then,



provided it has local support, it is often treated as a "departure from the structure plan". The application is formally advertised as such and, provided no objections are received, is normally approved with appropriate conditions. Other, less obvious, local needs are normally refused for policy reasons on structure plan grounds.

(e) Summary and discussion of local needs policies

Both county structure plans examined consider the subject of local needs, but neither considers the subject in sufficient detail to enable them to be clearly identified or understood. The guidance contained in their written statements is often sketchy and invites a variety of interpretation to the extent of meaning "all things to all men". The issue is not even considered in a separate section, being mentioned almost "in passing" except in relation to Shropshire's policy 1/21 where a less than adequate three part definition is included as a guide to local interpretation.

Unfortunately the lack of a comprehensible discussion of the issues, particularly in relation to green belts or areas of special housing control, makes it difficult for districts to formulate coherent policies in the face of demands from housebuilders, commuters or locals and the pressure to close rural schools due to declining numbers and current government policies. It has become apparent to the writer, who attended more than thirty different parish meetings during 1984-86, that most villagers consider the preservation of their local school to be an essential community need. This is at least as important to them as housing or job opportunities for local people, yet the subject is hardly mentioned in the strategic planning policies of those authorities responsible for education.

It is right that there should be scope for interpretation at local level, but a much clearer series of guidelines and definitions may be necessary in the structure plans to set out local needs in the context of green belts, areas of special housing control, open countryside, "non development" villages etc. Such an approach would make the



plans easier to interpret for districts and more comprehensible for local people who cannot always grasp the often subtle differences between the county council's restraint and settlement policies, let alone the variety of local district interpretation.

An agent or member of the public would have great difficulty at present in discovering the true housing policies operated in rural areas, particularly those relating to local needs. Apart from the notable exceptions of Wrekin and Oswestry, the guidelines available to the public are not at all clear at district level. Local need is not defined and there are a confusing number of phrases dealing with the issue, apparently interchangeable. Figure 4.4 illustrates this point, showing a glossary of terms used in the plans when speaking of local needs.

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**FIGURE 4.4 A GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN RELATION  
TO LOCAL NEEDS**

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Term and context

*Development which is clearly needed in connection with agriculture, outdoor participatory sport and recreation, cemeteries, or any other use appropriate to a rural area (Policy, applies in green belt). SCC 1984 p.38*

*. . . safeguard the interests and essential needs of the local community (Green belt reasoned justification). SCC 1984 p.39*

*. . . safeguard the needs of the local community (Green belt reasoned justification). SCC 1984 p.39*

*. . . safeguard the interests and essential needs of the local community as a whole (Policy green belt and ashcat justification). SCC 1984 p.58*

*. . . the interests and essential needs of the local community, rather than on the particular needs of individuals (Green belt and ashcat justification). SCC 1984 p.58*

*. . . the needs of local people, particularly those who work in the area or have strong local ties within the community..  
.. provision of houses suitable for the young or elderly. .  
. . provision of additional support to existing services and facilities4('Named villages' reasoned justification). SCC 1984 p.59*

*. . . Essential agricultural or forestry workers who cannot be suitably accommodated elsewhere (Policy open countryside). SCC 1984 p.60*

*. . . rurally based families who do not wish to move homes but cannot obtain a full time income from the land (Preamble, on employment and development). PCC 1984 p.18*

*. . . to help the continued existence of village shops and schools and the continued vitality of community life in rural areas (Preamble on housing/services). PCC 1984 p.19*

*The commuting countryman . . . is needed. . . to provide the larger, more balanced, social unit (Reasoned justification to employment policy T2). PCC 1984 p.34*

*. . . Housing provision for key workers. . . local housing need arising from the formation of new households. . . housing demand arising from the creation of new employment or to meet local needs (Reasoned justification to housing policy H3). PCC 1984 p.56/57*

*. . . additional housing merely to maintain the size of their communities. . . those who work in the area or who have strong local association(Reasoned justification to housing policy H5). PCC 1984 p.58*

*. . . to house a worker who must live on the spot rather than in a nearby settlement (Policy H8). PCC 1984 p.60*

*. . . for those retiring from agriculture but retaining an interest in a family farm . . . changes in agricultural practice . . . agricultural and forestry contractors . . . related to real need (Reasoned justification to policy H8)PCC 1984 p.60*



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FIGURE 4.4 A GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN RELATION  
TO LOCAL NEEDS (continued)

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*... small scale development ...if it meets the needs of the local community. (Reasoned justification to policy 36). SSDC 1985 p60*

*... necessary to safeguard the interests and essential needs of the local community...or...changes in the household characteristics and circumstances of residents in the district. (Reasoned justification to policy 36). SSDC 1985 p60*

*...he/she has lived in the area for an appropriate number of years and there is a change in their personal circumstances, for example, young people who have been brought up in an area and wish to set up home on getting married. (As above). SSDC 1985 p60*

*in the case of agriculture and forestry and (maybe) other rural occupations. (Decline of rural facilities issues discussion). SSDC 1985 p79*

*changing household characteristics and circumstances of existing residents currently established within the rural area. (Policy 20). WDC 1984 p24*

*To provide residence in close proximity to place of work, where the nature of that work renders nearby residence essential (Policy 20). WDC 1984 p24*

*The desire of people to live in rural surroundings ....does not constitute an essential need (Reasoned justification to policy 20). WDC 1984 p25*

*changing household characteristics and circumstances of residents, for example retirement: growing family: young people on marriage: elderly/infirml relatives (As above). WDC 1984 p25*

*local employment-where a case can be made out for a "close presence" and fulfils a need of the local community or tourism (As above). WDC 1984 p25*  
*the housing needs of the population already resident in Bridgnorth district (Planning guidance statement). BDC 1986*

*essential agricultural workers who need to live on the farming unit. NSDC 1985 p18*

*newly formed local households (and) existing residents and newcomers to the area who have secured local jobs (Settlement policies introduction). WDC 1984 p14*

*(where a single house would) contribute significantly to the continuity and development of local community life to a degree which outweighs the general presumption against development (Reasoned justification to policy 9). WDC 1984 p22*

*persons employed or retired from employment in the immediate area and who wish to stay in or return to it permanently (as above). WDC 1984 p22*

Having examined and compared those written policies operated in the wider study area, it is important to discuss common issues further with a view to identifying those which might benefit from more detailed study. Figure 4.4 has shown the variety and nature of the terms used in relation to local need in documents published by the districts within the area studied. Considerable confusion appears to exist over the concept of local need with no clear definition of the term. Little attempt appears to have been made to consider who might be properly defined as "local", or what is considered to be essential, except in the case of Wrekin District Council whose complex definition would cover most cases, but which does not mention the fact that the vast majority of dwellings in the area were constructed prior to the introduction of such regulations and are therefore not restricted in any way. Thus the restrictions placed on new dwellings merely shift the demand to the unrestricted housing stock. In some districts, the policy wording used is so loose, or contradicts itself in such a manner, that virtually all people who already live in the area would be able to claim a local need should they retire or change their circumstances. Oswestry district probably has the most straightforward approach, warning members that few controls may be realistically exercised once a dwelling has been constructed. Apart from this caveat, little has been mentioned in any of the plans about either the effectiveness of such policies or concerning the problems associated with enforcement, certainly there appears to be no empirical evidence available from the districts.

It is also apparent from discussing the problem with district officers, that many councillors, particularly those elected from rural areas, are not anxious to have their hands tied by restrictive policies, preferring to interpret them to suit the circumstances. There are few statistics available which could be used to illustrate this situation. There is no doubt about the complexity of present policies, but there is considerable doubt about their effectiveness either in dealing with some kinds of local needs or directing housing to chosen settlements.



It is almost as though there were a deliberate attempt to ignore the problem, although many officers responsible for implementing such policies admit privately that anomalies exist and that some people have been able to manipulate the regulations by one means or another. It is clear, for example, that almost any sizeable farm will be able to justify an additional dwelling to house a key worker running a suitable agricultural enterprise such as an intensive unit for the production of veal, pork or lamb. A condition would normally be attached to such a permission restricting its occupation (now and in the future) to a person employed or last employed in agriculture or forestry. Therefore the dwelling may not be freely saleable on the open market. There are, however, no controls over the enterprise - it may not even be financially viable for more than a year or so - EEC regulations are notoriously fickle in this respect. In fact it has been alleged that in some cases a house has been constructed without the projected enterprise going ahead. Similarly, in practice, there appear to be no checks on who moves into these houses and there are also several recorded cases of applicants successfully asking for "restricted occupation" conditions to be removed because "circumstances have now changed". At the same time, there are no occupancy restrictions on houses built prior to the introduction of planning regulations (in most cases over 90% of the housing stock). There have therefore been examples of farmers making a case for an additional dwelling, moving into it and selling off the old house. If policies are to be effective, all of these issues must be considered together with the full range of possibilities brought into question by the term "local need".

The matter is further complicated by the attitude of the present government whose advice to local authorities is to remove restricted occupation conditions where these are no longer needed and even to actively promote:

*"the diversification of the rural economy so as to open up wider and more varied employment opportunities."*  
(DOE Circular 16/87 p.1).



The circular provides the advice that as the demands for agricultural products change, then the requirements for dwellings previously restricted to agricultural or forestry workers will change and that:

*"such dwellings should not be kept vacant simply by virtue of planning conditions restricting occupancy which have outlived their usefulness . . .". (DOE Circular 16/87 p.2).*

In the writer's district this circular has even encouraged one applicant to apply for an agricultural restriction condition to be removed before the building has been constructed. (SABC application no. 421/74 5/6/87).

There are a number of ways of looking at the problems associated with local needs policies, but it may be better to draw together the common elements of those which are more relevant to Shropshire, where the detailed case study is based.

- a) *"The interests and essential needs of the local community." (SCC 1984 p.39).*

This "catch all" phrase (used in relation to the Green Belt and ASHCAT), was the eventual result of the Secretary of State's modification to the original (1980) Shropshire Structure Plan. It is frequently used by districts in discussing the issue, but never defined, except by Wrekin District Council, who link it exclusively to the housing needs of the existing population (see the previous part of this chapter). The structure plan does allow its interpretation as permitting support for existing services or facilities and the evidence in Shrewsbury and Atcham District at least, is that this interpretation is popular in some rural parishes when there is the threat of school closure or the loss of a local post office or shop.

- b) *"Essential agricultural or forestry workers who cannot be suitably accommodated elsewhere." (SCC 1984 p.60).*

This phrase, applying to dwellings outside settlements, appears to be fairly clear, but there is considerable room for interpretation in that the word "essential" is nowhere defined and the words "suitably accommodated" and even "elsewhere" can be argued about. There is



anecdotal evidence of a wide range of approaches to this term even within the same district. For example in Shrewsbury and Atcham borough, planning applications have been received for agricultural workers' dwellings in rural areas outside "development" settlements. In some of these cases evidence requested of and provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) as to the essential nature of the proposed enterprise i.e. justifying the need for the worker to live on or near the job appears not to have influenced the decision of the planning committee. There is also evidence that the recommendations made by officers on such matters tend to be more objectively based than the eventual committee decision. Such anomalies are discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

- c) *"The needs of local people, particularly those who work in the area or have strong local ties with the community."* (SCC 1984 p.59).

This phrase applies in the case of villages named in local plans as being suitable for (limited) expansion and is used in conjunction with two others concerned with housing for young or elderly people and support for existing services. There is a wide variation in its interpretation for example between the written policies contained in the North Shropshire District Plan and those in the Oswestry District policy document, although there is anecdotal evidence that, in practice, there is less difference than would at first appear.

### Summary and Conclusion

It is suggested that phrases a,b and c, taken from various places in the Shropshire Structure Plan, contain those elements which form the main framework of all local needs policies operated within the county and that in Shropshire and Powys at least, all other policies which deal with local needs issues contain one or more of these elements. These policy statements can be refined further as two separate principles, although the former could also be said to embody the latter:

- 1 Support for the local community.
- 2 Support for specific local families or occupations.

The first principle encompasses all the various phrases concerned with supporting local services and local community needs. The second embodies all those exemptions to the rules dealing with local employment needs and local personal needs not covered by local community support. It may be that these two basic principles could be used to separate and classify demand and perhaps provide the basis of a system by which planning applications may be more effectively judged.

This chapter has attempted to look in fairly broad terms at the housing policies operated in the districts of Shropshire. It shows that there is a wide variation of approach in operation and there is clearly some merit in taking a closer look at the matter. The following chapter does this in the context of a case study of the operation of such policies in practice in Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough.



CHAPTER 5

A CASE STUDY IN  
WEST SHROPSHIRE



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## 5      A CASE STUDY OF THE OPERATION OF RURAL SETTLEMENT AND HOUSING POLICIES.

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### 5:1    Introduction

The examination of previous research and of policies operated in the Shropshire area, summarised in the last two chapters, indicates that currently applied settlement and housing policies may not have been as effective as intended. Previous research has, however, tended to rely to a very large extent on either anecdotal evidence or on the evidence provided by whatever aggregated monitoring statistics are available. There is, therefore, a distinct gap in knowledge in respect of policy performance at the detailed, local level. Indeed, the practical working of settlement policies and the efficacy of policies designed to cater for local needs or to provide support for local services has hardly been investigated at all. This study has been designed to help fill the gap. Much previous research has had to be based on statistics relating to relatively large areas often incorporating urban as well as rural districts and the true impact of rural housing policies is therefore masked. Moreover, the statistics which have been produced to monitor the effects of such policies do not often permit an independent objective assessment since both policy and monitoring has usually been carried out by the same agency which is responsible for policy development. This criticism was mentioned previously in Chapter 2 in relation to Shropshire's in-migration and the performance of structure plan policies. This section summarises the results of a detailed examination of planning applications in a central district of Shropshire.



This section sets the case study in context by discussing the county of Shropshire as a whole and outlining those characteristics of the area which make it particularly suitable for detailed examination. The following section introduces the district of Shrewsbury and Atcham and sets the scene for the following chapters which are concerned with the details of submitted planning applications and their results in terms of providing dwellings for local needs.

## 5:2 Sources of Information

Shropshire County Council is the major provider of planning information in Shropshire and represents the only comprehensive county wide source. Data is collected and processed by a policy and information section, run as part of the County Planning Department, which is also responsible for the preparation of structure plans and their reviews. The group's main task is to provide and research information to aid the formulation and monitoring of county planning policies with subsidiary objectives which include providing an information source to district authorities and other council departments and interested parties, for example, potential employers or investors. A wide variety of material is collected and used to form forecasts of population, households and dwelling needs. Information used in this process includes census data, information on planning applications and dwelling completions. Population data sets are prepared using national census details supplemented by regular countywide population surveys. Planning statistics are prepared using a computer based decisions analysis system collating figures supplied by the six district planning departments in the county.

The information provided by the group is reliable and easily obtainable but officers admit that:

*" . . . since the forecasts are produced initially for the purposes of structure planning, they do not always entirely meet the needs of other users." (SCC Report of County Planning Officer to Planning Committee October 1986).*

For example a recent publication of the county's policy and information group addresses the need to provide more detailed data and includes table (5.1) showing housing completions by settlement class in Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough. The table shows that most houses completed over the period have been built in towns or main villages, rather than in smaller villages or open countryside.

**TABLE 5.1 SHREWSBURY AND ATCHAM BOROUGH HOUSING COMPLETIONS BY SETTLEMENT TYPE.**

	76/77	77/78	78/77	79/80	80/81	81/82	82/83	83/84	84/85	85/86	TOTAL
Town	257	416	375	241	536	340	599	639	675	428	4506
Main Villages	48	5	2	13	36	3	45	87	51	37	327
Larger Villages	3	18	17	69	106	6	13	9	9	9	259
Smaller Villages	10	21	23	22	13	21	11	18	22	34	195
Countryside	8	10	7	5	8	16	17	5	10	25	111
TOTAL	326	470	424	350	699	386	685	758	767	533	5398

All figures April to March except 1976 (October-March)

Source: Shropshire County Council Housing Monitoring tables 1986

These figures are supplemented by various other tables (for each district) citing numbers of planning applications received and housing completions in various places including the green belt and the Area of Special Housing Control around Telford. They appear to indicate that conventional rural settlement policies have been effective in directing most new housing to towns or main villages and ensuring that fewer houses have been constructed in the open countryside. They do not, however, reveal the true extent of pressure of demand for rural housing or the extent of competition for the existing housing stock between in migrants and local people. Nor do they indicate how many applications were made to achieve these results. There is no indication whatever of the numbers of dwellings constructed to fulfil local needs and no assessment of demands or pressures in the rural area.



There are proposals to develop additional small area forecasts to address this problem, but it is unlikely that even this step will tackle the problem in sufficient detail to permit the monitoring or evaluation of local needs policies or the other issues previously mentioned. The problem is not merely one of providing information scaled down to cover smaller areas, but of the need to gather and monitor alternative statistics to those presently collected. District planning authorities use the information provided by the group to help in the preparation and monitoring of policies in local plans, but as information relating to some vital issues is either lacking or inadequate, the effectiveness of the policies themselves must be questioned. For these reasons then, there is a pressing need to evaluate the workings of settlement and housing policies in rural areas at a detailed local level so that a more directed approach may be taken to policy formulation in future.

### 5:3 The Context of The Case Study Area

#### (a) Character

The character of the county is predominantly rural and its varied landscape covers almost 350,000 hectares of which almost one third are uplands. Some 78,000 hectares of the South Shropshire hills are designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. A variety of landscape ranging from woodland and moorland to parkland and wetland is contained within its borders. As may be expected, the predominant land use is agriculture in various forms. Until the mid 1980's about one third of this area was in arable production with mixed farming, including dairying, on the remainder. Around 25,000 hectares were managed as woodland under various schemes. Minerals, including aggregates, coal, fireclay and brickclay, are worked in the county, mainly in the Wrekin Hills, Wenlock Edge and the North West uplands. (From information contained in the SCC Structure Plan 1980).

The influence of the West Midlands conurbation is clearly felt in those parts of Shropshire close to the Staffordshire border. The Staffordshire green belt is therefore mirrored by a green belt in the east of Shropshire. In addition to the green belt, there is an "Area of Special Housing Control Around Telford", which extends some 7 miles from the designated new town boundary. The policies operated within this control zone have been described previously In chapter 4. Basically the intention is to permit new housing only if it meets local needs criteria therefore, for potential incomers at least, the effect is similar to the green belt notation. It has been suggested that due to the operation of such strict planning controls, commuters who may not wish to live in towns are forced to travel across the green belt to places where restrictions on new building are less severe. Cloke describes this process as the "leapfrogging effect", remarking that green belts:

*"demonstrate a marked propensity to deflect . . . development beyond the boundaries." (Cloke 1983 p.311).*

In this respect Shropshire's M6/M54/A5/A49 links are obviously important. The artificial restrictions on housing in green belt and special control areas coupled with easier transport routes are considered by many local people to be at least partially responsible for transferring housing demand considerable distances from the areas originally perceived as under pressure.

## (b) Settlement Structure and Demography

### (i) Population and Age Structure

The county is divided into six district council areas, one of which contains the designated new town of Telford. The population of the county, by district, is shown in table 5.2, together with an indication of the growth rate since 1951. Table 5.3 shows the household growth rate in the six districts over the same period. This is illustrated graphically in figure 5.2



**TABLE 5.2 SHROPSHIRE POPULATION BY DISTRICT (000'S)**

District	1951	1961	1971	1981	1985	% change
Bridgnorth	43	43	48	50	52	21%
North Shropshire	49	47	48	50	52	6%
Oswestry	31	31	32	31	32	3%
S'bury & Atcham	68	74	83	87	92	35%
South Shropshire	34	33	32	34	37	9%
Wrekin	69	75	97	124	130	88%
Shropshire	294	303	337	375	395	34%

**TABLE 5.3 SHROPSHIRE HOUSEHOLDS BY DISTRICT (000'S)**

District	1951	1961	1971	1981	1985	% change
Bridgnorth	10.4	12.1	15.1	17.0	18.2	75%
North Shropshire	12.5	14.0	15.4	17.1	18.9	51%
Oswestry	8.0	9.0	10.1	11.1	12.4	55%
S'bury & Atcham	18.5	22.4	27.4	30.9	34.9	89%
South Shropshire	9.9	10.4	11.2	12.2	14.1	42%
Wrekin	18.4	22.4	31.2	42.5	47.2	156%
Shropshire	77.8	90.4	110.5	130.8	145.8	87%

Sources: Registrar General's Census, County Volumes and small area statistics, amalgamated and adjusted to correspond with 1985 Districts. Figures have been rounded for clearer presentation

FIGURE 5.2 POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLD GROWTH RATES  
BY DISTRICT 1951-1985

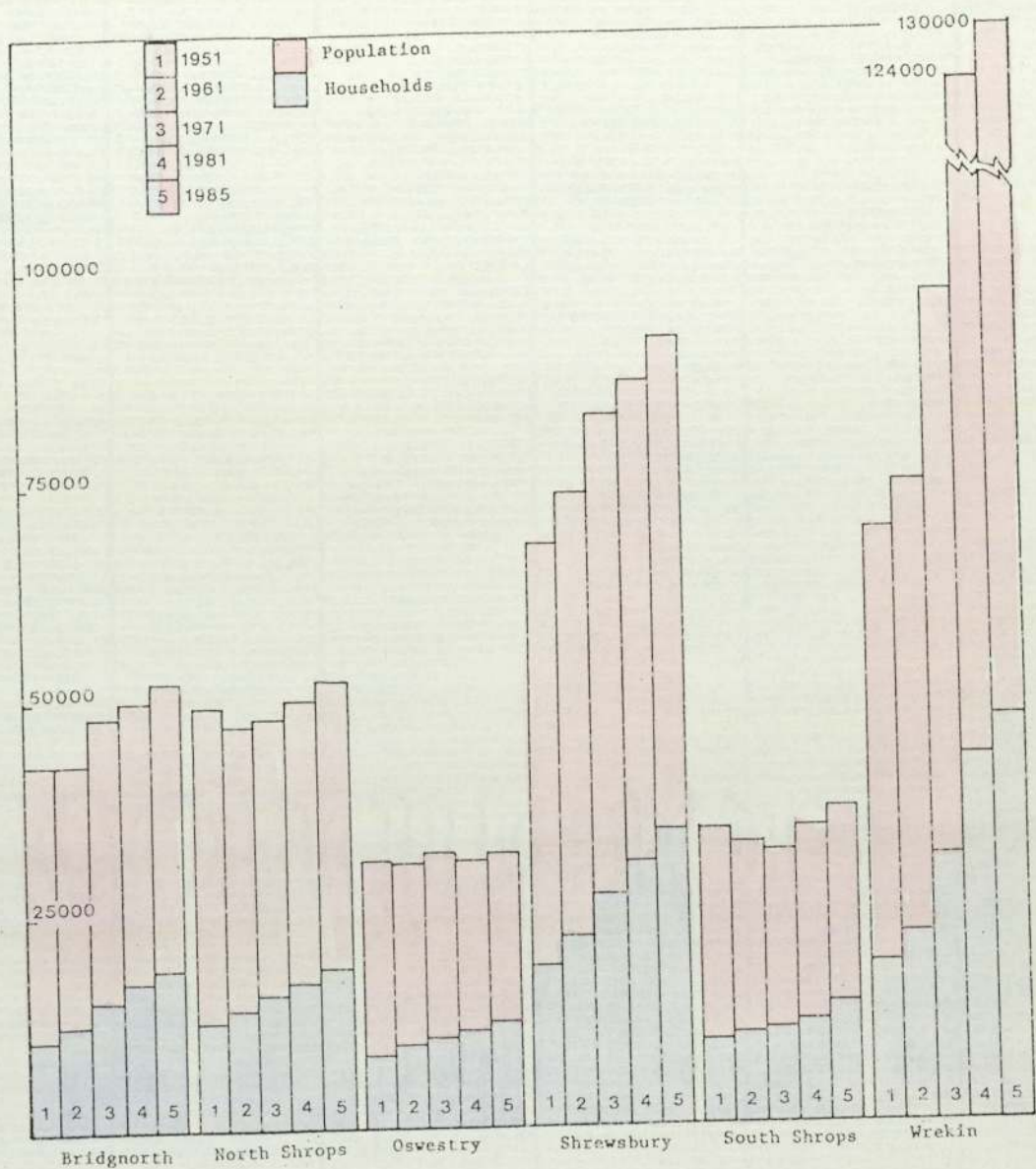




TABLE 5.4 POPULATION AGE STRUCTURE BY DISTRICT

Bridgnorth							
age (yrs) 0-15		%	16-64		%	65+	%
1951	9245	21.5	29756	69.2	3999	9.3	
1961	10105	23.5	28595	66.5	4257	9.9	
1971	12330	25.7	29995	62.7	5525	11.5	
1981	11775	23.4	31809	63.3	6708	13.3	
1985	10224	19.7	34427	66.4	7206	13.9	
change	'51-85	+979	+10.6	+4670	+15.7	+3207	+82

Shrewsbury and Atcham							
age (yrs) 0-15		%	16-64		%	65+	%
1951	15368	22.6	45016	66.2	7616	11.2	
1961	17168	23.2	48100	65.0	8732	11.8	
1971	21010	25.5	50700	61.5	10675	13.0	
1981	19174	22.0	54910	63.0	13081	15.0	
1985	18223	19.9	59011	64.4	14414	15.7	
change	'51-85	+2855	+18.6	+13995	+31.6	+6798	+89.3

Wrekin							
age (yrs) 0-15		%	16-64		%	65+	%
1951	16215	23.5	45954	66.4	6831	9.9	
1961	18150	24.2	49275	65.7	7500	10.0	
1971	27615	28.4	59430	61.2	10050	10.4	
1981	33280	26.9	76740	62.0	13815	11.2	
1985	31727	24.5	82875	63.9	15160	11.7	
change	'51-85	+15512	+95.7	+41751	+101.5	+8329	+121.9

South Shropshire							
age (yrs) 0-15		%	16-64		%	65+	%
1951	7786	22.9	21454	63.1	4760	14.0	
1961	7524	22.8	20757	62.9	4686	14.2	
1971	7625	23.5	19310	59.6	5460	16.9	
1981	7017	20.8	20373	60.3	6400	18.9	
1985	6662	17.9	23117	62.1	7436	20.0	
change	'51-85	-1124	-14.4	+1663	+7.8	+2676	+56.2

TABLE 5.4 POPULATION AGE STRUCTURE BY DISTRICT (continued)

<b>Oswestry</b>						
age(yrs)	0-15	%	16-64	%	65+	%
1951	6479	20.9	21235	68.5	3255	10.5
1961	7099	22.9	19964	64.4	3937	12.7
1971	7590	25.1	17770	58.7	4900	16.2
1981	6671	21.8	18518	60.5	5400	17.7
1985	6306	19.6	20027	62.6	5846	18.2
change '51-85	-173	-2.7	-1208	-5.7	+2591	+79.6

<b>North Shropshire</b>						
age(yrs)	0-15	%	16-64	%	65+	%
1951	11123	22.7	32634	66.6	5292	10.8
1961	11421	24.3	29845	63.5	5687	12.1
1971	12235	26.0	28300	60.0	6570	13.9
1981	11668	23.3	30666	61.3	7710	15.4
1985	10433	20.0	33148	63.7	8459	16.3
change '51-85	-690	-6.2	+514	+1.6	+3167	+60

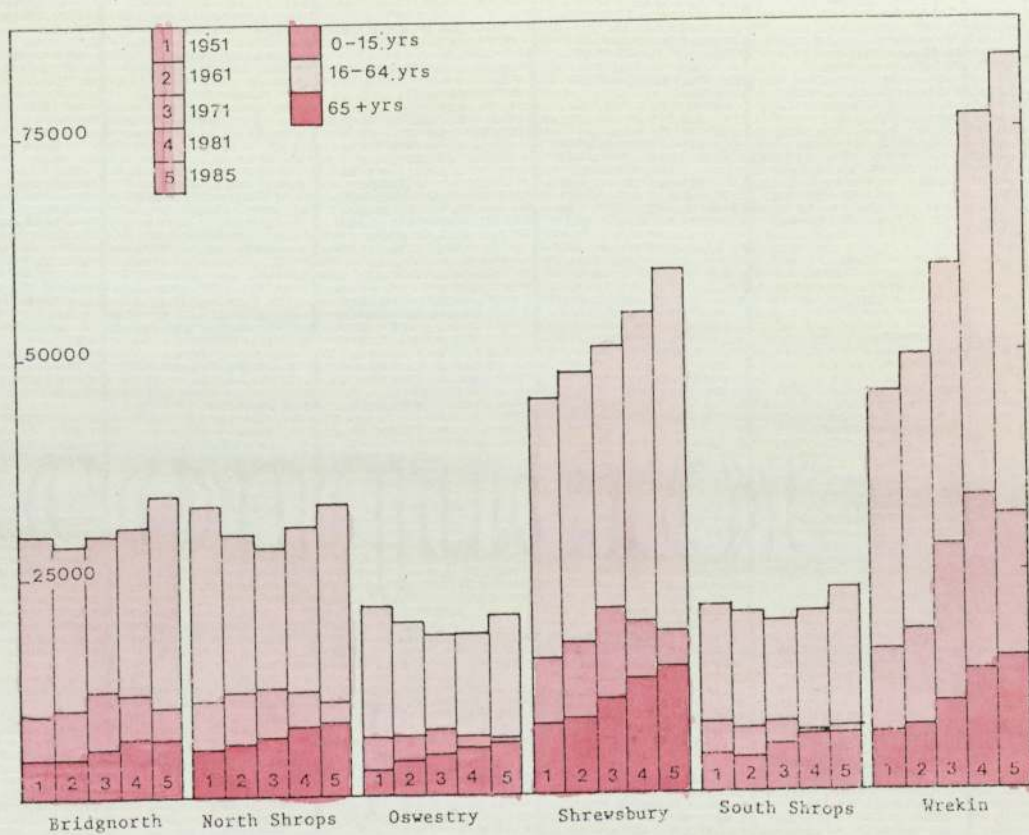
<b>Shropshire</b>						
age(yrs)	0-15	%	16-64	%	65+	%
1951	66216	22.5	196049	66.7	31753	10.8
1961	71467	23.6	196536	64.9	34799	11.5
1971	88405	26.2	205505	61.0	43180	12.8
1981	89585	23.9	233016	62.1	53114	14.2
1985	83575	21.2	252605	64.0	58521	14.8
change '51-85	+17359	+26.2	+56556	+28.8	+26768	+84.3

<b>England and Wales(0000's)</b>						
age(yrs)	0-15	%	16-64	%	65+	%
1951	968	22.1	2926	66.8	482	11.0
1961	1063	23.0	3012	65.2	531	11.5
1971	1155	23.7	3066	62.9	653	13.4
1981	949	19.0	3135	62.8	909	18.2
change '51-85	-19	-2	+209	+7.1	+427	+88.6

Sources: Registrar General's Census. County Volumes and small area statistics. Adjusted for boundary changes. Shropshire County Council Population Survey 1985 table 4. (Age cohorts are not precisely compatible from census to census, but differences are consistent therefore comparisons may be made).



FIGURE 5.3 POPULATION AGE STRUCTURE  
BY DISTRICT 1951-1985



The population of the county increased by 34% between 1951 and 1985, whilst the number of households increased by 87%. Clearly then, population growth is not a reliable indicator of demand for housing in rural Shropshire. Other factors are influencing the matter and in particular, a changing age structure and changes in the rate of household formation. Table 5.4 shows the population age structure of the county by district and this is shown graphically in figure 5.3. For the purposes of comparison the figures for England and Wales are also shown in the table.

#### (ii) Migration

Figures which accurately reflect the numbers of people moving into and out of the county are extremely difficult to obtain. However, using a source based on the previous addresses of people re-registering with general practitioners, Shropshire County's policy and information group have estimated the numbers and ages of people entering or leaving the county and, using a method based on the difference between expected natural change and census results, have estimated the district distribution, this is illustrated by table 5.5.

**TABLE 5.5 SHROPSHIRE MIGRATION PATTERN 1976-1986**

Year	Inward	Outward	Net Gain
1976	15030	11390	3640
1977	15330	12170	3160
1978	15150	13030	2120
1979	14360	12150	2210
1980	13590	12100	1490
1981	12320	11490	830
1982	12280	11080	1200
1983	12090	10840	1250
1984	13330	11480	1850
1985	13950	10970	2980
1986	14550	12230	2320



**TABLE 5.5 SHROPSHIRE MIGRATION PATTERN 1976-1986 (continued)**

IMPLIED ANNUAL AVERAGE BY DISTRICT	
Bridgnorth	30
North Shropshire	280
Oswestry	310
Shrewsbury	880
South Shropshire	790
Wrekin	618
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2900</b>

Source SCC Survey of GP registers Adjusted for births/deaths 1987

Analysis of the results suggest that in-migration is an important factor in population growth. This has been facilitated by a sharp increase in the rate of new housebuilding:

*"An increase in the last couple of years of housebuilding elsewhere in the county, especially Shrewsbury, has caused an upturn in the number of people moving in and a corresponding rise in population growth." (SCC 1987 Information Review, Population p.23).*

The population of Shropshire is growing significantly faster than the national average. Between 1971 and 1981, the county had the sixth fastest growth rate in England and Wales in terms of population, experiencing an increase of some 11.5%, compared to an 0.5% increase nationwide. As a result Shropshire County Council no longer consider population loss to be the problem it was in the 1950's and 60's. Figure 5.2 illustrates the high rate of population growth in Wrekin and Shrewsbury districts between 1951 and 1985, reflecting the continuing growth of Shrewsbury, the county town, and the development of Telford New Town. This contrasts with the relatively slow rate of growth in the more remote districts. When the household figures in table 5.3 are examined however, it is apparent that there has been a considerable increase, even in the remote rural districts. Oswestry district, for example, experienced a population increase of only 3% but an increase in the number of households of 55% between 1951 and 1985. The same district actually experienced a reduction in population of 1,000 people between 1971 and 1981, whereas the number of households increased by 1,000 over the same

period. This is a graphic illustration of a major issue affecting rural Shropshire which has resulted in modest population growth leading to a disproportionate increase in the number of households and hence demand for housing even in the more remote rural areas of the county.

The reason for this becomes clear when tables 5.2 and 5.3 are examined. In 1951 the county contained some 294,000 people and 77,800 households - a crude average household size of around 3.8 people (1951 national average 3.2). By 1985 the Shropshire average household size had fallen to 2.7, exactly the same as the national average. Assuming a static Shropshire population since 1951 this would mean the need to find homes for an extra 31,000 households. Over the same period major changes have taken place in age structure. Table 5.4 shows the county situation where there has been a 26% increase in the younger age bracket, a 28% increase in the working age population and an 84% increase in the population aged 65 and over since 1951. Figure 5.3 illustrates the situation on a district basis.

#### (c) Housing Pressures

The rate of household formation, in line with national trends, has increased quite dramatically and this, together with rising expectations and incomes, has resulted in increased housing pressures in both urban and rural parts of the county, even in those extremely rural areas which have seen relatively modest population growth.

Because of the nature of migration statistics, care must be taken in drawing conclusions from any analysis, but it is clear that substantial numbers of people moved into the county from the West Midlands region and that most of these came from the conurbation. Whilst improved transport links have reduced journey times and enabled long distance commuting to take place, it is difficult to



present evidence which proves this is the main reason for the county's population increase. Certainly, lower house prices, better living conditions and good transport links to the conurbation are reasons, but there is some evidence in the county research of in-migration over longer distances, for example from London and the South East, possibly for retirement reasons, but the figures collected related to previous address, not age or reason for moving. Therefore the retirement theory is based on anecdotal evidence supplied by local estate agents surprised by the apparently insatiable appetite for bungalows expressed by South East based over 50's, often purchasing for cash.

#### (d) Conclusion

The county of Shropshire contains a mixture of "pressured" and "unpressured" areas. As described in chapter 4, the six district councils operate a wide variety of planning policies and this is considered an ideal environment in which to examine the issues raised by the term "local needs housing". The district chosen for the detailed study, Shrewsbury and Atcham, is situated in the centre of the county and contains the county town. The district is linked to the national motorway system via the nearby town of Telford and the M54 (which is shortly to be linked directly to Shrewsbury). The area is subject to a complex series of housing pressures which are likely to become more serious as the exodus from urban areas continues. The following section introduces the district in more detail.

### 5:4 Shrewsbury and Atcham District

#### (a) Description

This district is well situated for a study of rural housing. Formed in the 1974 local government re-organisation from the largely urban Borough of Shrewsbury and the surrounding Atcham rural district, it

contains the county town of Shrewsbury (population 65,000) and shares a boundary with Wales and each of the other five Shropshire districts (see fig.2.1 p.46).

The Borough's rural west contains remote farming settlements, the southern part includes part of the popular holiday and recreation area centred around Long Mynd and Church Stretton. The eastern side is very close to the M54 and Telford new town and the whole of the Borough will be affected by current plans to by pass Shrewsbury and improve the A5 and A49 trunk roads. Journey times at peak periods of less than an hour to central Birmingham can be achieved now. These times will obviously be improved with the construction of the new road links and there is a need and an opportunity to study the rural housing situation before this occurs.

#### (b) Settlement Structure

Shrewsbury was developed in a defensible loop of the river Severn. All major roads centre on the town and the surrounding rural hinterland depends on it for all main services. Part of the Borough, nearest to Telford is within an area of "Special Housing Control". Outside the town area there are some 118 settlements in 43 parishes. A list is attached as figure 5.4.



**FIGURE 5.4 SHREWSBURY AND ATCHAM RURAL AREA  
SETTLEMENTS LISTED BY PARISH**

<u>BAYSTON HILL</u>	<u>REA VALLEY</u>	<u>WEST OF SHREWSBURY</u>	<u>EAST OF SHREWSBURY</u>
6. <u>Bayston Hill</u>	19. <u>Great Hanwood</u> a. Hanwood b. Hanwood Bank	2. <u>Alberbury &amp; Cardeston</u> a. Alberbury b. Cardeston c. Wattlesborough Heath	4. <u>Astley</u> a. Astley b. Upper Astley c. Upper Battlefield d. Bings Heath
<u>COUND VALLEY</u>	28. <u>Minsterley</u> a. Horsebridge b. Minsterley c. Plox Green	17. <u>Ford</u> a. Chavel b. Ford	5. <u>Atcham</u> a. Atcham
1. <u>Acton Burnell</u> a. Acton Burnell	31. <u>Pontesbury</u> a. Arscott Hall b. Asterley c. Cruckmeole d. Cruckton e. Edge f. Habberley g. Hinton h. Lea Cross i. Plealey j. Plealey Road k. Pontesbury l. P'tsbury Hill m. Pontesford n. Shorthill	38. <u>Westbury</u> a. Ford Heath b. Halfway House c. Nox d. Stoney Stretton e. Vennington f. Vron Gate g. Westbury h. Westley i. Yockleton	35. <u>Uffington</u> a. Uffington
7. <u>Berrington</u> a. Berrington b. Cross Houses			37. <u>Upton Magna</u> a. Haughton b. Preston c. Upton Magna
14. <u>Condover</u> a. Condover b. Dorrington c. Great Ryton d. Stapleton		40. <u>Wollaston</u> a. Wollaston	39. <u>Withington</u> a. Withington
15. <u>Cound</u> a. Cound/ Upper Cound b. Coundmoor c. Coundarbour	<u>SOUTHERN UPLANDS</u>	<u>NORTH WEST</u>	<u>SOUTH EAST</u>
30. <u>Pitchford</u> a. Pitchford	13. <u>All Stretton</u>	8. <u>Bicton</u> a. Bicton b. Calcott c. Preston Montford	10. <u>Buildwas</u>
43. <u>Longden</u> a. Annscroft b. Exford Green c. Hook-a-Gate d. Longden e. Longden Common f. Lower Common g. Lyth Bank/Hill	11. <u>Cardington</u> a. Cardington b. Enchmarsh c. Plaish	9. <u>Bomere Heath</u> a. Albrighton b. Mytton c. Bomere Heath d. Fitz e. Forton Heath f. Grafton g. Leaton h. Merrington i. Preston Gubbals j. Walford Heath k. Oldwood	16. <u>Cressage</u>
	12. <u>Church Preen</u> a. Church Preen		21. <u>Harley</u>
	13. <u>Church Pulverbatch</u> a. Church Pulverbatch b. Pulverbatch c. Wrentnall		25. <u>Leighton</u> a. Eaton Constantine b. Garmston c. Leighton d. Longwood
	18. <u>Frodesley</u> a. Frodesley		33. <u>Sheinton</u> a. Sheinton
	22. <u>Hughley</u> a. Hughley	20. <u>Great Ness</u> a. Felton Butler b. Great Ness c. Kinton d. Nesscliffe e. Wilcott f. Hopton	36. <u>Uppington</u> a. Uppington
	23. <u>Kenley</u> a. Kenley		42. <u>Wroxeter</u> a. Donnington b. Eyton on Severn c. Rushton d. Wroxeter
	24. <u>Leebotwood</u> a. Leebotwood	26. <u>Little Ness</u> a. Little Ness b. Valeswood	
	27. <u>Longnor</u> a. Longnor	29. <u>Montford</u> a. Ensdon b. Montford c. Montford Bridge d. Shrawardine	
	32. <u>Ruckley &amp; Langley</u> a. Ruckley		
	34. <u>Smethcott</u> a. Picklescott b. Smethcott		
	41. <u>Woolstaston</u> a. Woolstaston		

An examination of the population and household figures for each parish since 1951 shows the rate of increase or decline (table 5.6). Overall the rural population of the Borough has increased by around 35% since 1951, but the number of households has increased by 76%. This gives some idea of the likely need for additional housing in the rural area. However, this crude figure also includes those villages to which housing has been directed since the advent of planning regulations and there is a need therefore to disaggregate the information to investigate further.

The monitoring of such trends at this level of detail is further complicated by two additional factors. The first concerning changes which have been made to parish boundaries - to accommodate village growth, for example. The second concerns the precise definition of population and households which have changed from census to census. Despite these difficulties, the results are so clear that adjustments to fully eliminate such minor errors are considered unnecessary.

Leaving aside the parishes of Bayston Hill, Condoover, Great Ness, Little Ness and Longden where major boundary changes have taken place, it can be seen that the majority of the rural parishes actually lost population between 1951 and 1986. Similarly the tables show that most parishes gained households over the period. When the results are adjusted to take account of parishes to which development was deliberately directed and major boundary changes, those which are left are supposedly the more "rural" parishes and the following results emerge; only six of the thirty most rural parishes in the district gained population between 1957 and 1986, two of these by 5% or less (table 5.7). Of the remaining four, three had council housing estates built within the period and one had a small estate of agricultural workers' dwellings constructed. Thus it may be concluded that, apart from deliberate attempts to direct housing to specific parishes, rural areas of Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough experienced a decline in population numbers between 1951 and 1986. Over the same period, however, more than half these rural parishes



**TABLE 5.6 SHREWSBURY AND ATCHAM RURAL AREA POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLD FIGURES BY PARISH**

Parish	1951	1961	1971	1981	1987	%change since '51	%change since '71	Pop. H.
1. Acton Burnell	226 52	300 59	202 50	170 57	186 64	-18 +23	-8 +28	
2. Alberbury & Cardeston	965 197	724 202	649 198	660 221	632 218	-35 +17	-2 +10	
3. All Stretton	231 66	190 62	168 59	159 56	122 53	-47 -20	-27 -10	
4. Astley	319 87	280 87	364 121	342 117	484 168	+52 +93	+33 +39	
5. Atcham	391 109	379 111	289 99	263 96	252 104	-36 -5	-13 +5	
6. Bayston Hill (main village)	—	—	5341 1745	6118 2111	5757 2048	—	+8 +17	
7. Berrington	824 159	959 214	939 270	737 281	659 283	-20 +78	-30 +5	
8. Bicton (main village)	913 246	852 259	1038 302	989 340	824 303	-10 +23	-21 +1	
9. Bomere Heath (main village)	1666 438	1481 428	2006 666	2062 748	2126 786	+219 +79	+6 +18	
10. Buildwas	242 70	329 95	317 106	337 125	299 125	+24 +58	-6 +18	
11. Cardington	461 135	395 124	386 123	356 126	414 142	-10 +5	+7 +15	
12. Church Preen	75 21	89 31	117 33	111 34	96 34	+28 +62	-18 +3	
13. Church Pulverbatch	298 85	322 98	360 118	311 123	341 127	+14 +49	-5 +8	
14. Condover (main village)	2759 840	4140 1300	1486 491	1522 523	1610 570	—	+8 +16	
15. Cound	459 132	408 134	458 145	450 149	439 140	-4 +6	-4 -3	
16. Cressage (main village)	322 85	454 132	498 160	649 226	820 316	+155 +271	+65 +97	
17. Ford (main village)	489 134	641 194	686 235	603 230	598 232	+22 +73	-13 -1	
18. Frodesley	179 43	157 41	134 40	122 40	120 42	-33 -2	-10 +5	
19. Great Hanwood (main village)	515 140	599 174	721 234	1114 411	1174 454	+128 +224	+63 +94	
20. Great Ness*	—	—	829 255	748 255	764 265	—	-8 +4	
21. Harley	185 49	150 50	99 36	149 52	161 58	-13 +18	+63 +61	

**TABLE 5.6 SHREWSBURY AND ATCHAM RURAL AREA POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLD FIGURES BY PARISH (continued)**

	1951	1961	1971	1981	1987	%change since '51	%change since '71	
22. Hughley	51 17	68 17	56 16	55 18	54 17	+6 +0	-4 +6	Pop. H.
23. Kenley	134 41	104 34	90 29	93 28	100 35	-25 -15	+10 +20	
24. Leebotwood	211 62	191 65	187 65	186 68	214 85	+1 +37	+14 +30	
25. Leighton	406 116	387 117	394 134	419 141	422 157	+4 +35	+7 +16	
26. Little Ness	—	—	310 70	199 69	206 74	—	-34 +6	
27. Longnor	211 62	257 69	214 66	225 81	256 92	+21 +48	+20 +39	
28. Minsterley (main village)	656 212	909 283	962 326	1016 370	1276 486	+94 +129	+33 +49	
29. Montford	570 160	558 172	513 177	458 169	476 180	-16 +13	-5 +2	
30. Pitchford	175 45	130 36	90 29	103 35	88 34	-50 -24	-2 +17	
31. Pontesbury (main village)	2951 821	3039 911	3474 1143	3365 1211	2888 1077	-2 +31	-17 -6	
32. Ruckley & Langley	56 17	56 16	50 15	54 17	50 16	-11 -6	0 -7	
33. Sheinton	111 28	100 27	78 26	62 25	66 26	-40 -7	-15 0	
34. Smethcott	212 56	198 56	178 49	168 55	184 58	-13 +4	+13 +18	
35. Uffington	354 103	404 129	300 102	268 100	196 75	-45 -27	-35 -26	
36. Uppington	112 28	86 23	72 23	70 22	—	-30 -14	+8 +4	
37. Upton Magna	414 111	379 110	322 103	296 105	338 116	-18 -4	-5 +13	
38. Westbury (main village)	1070 290	957 286	1036 315	963 325	1143 393	+7 +36	+10 +25	
39. Withington	203 62	180 61	141 52	180 63	221 76	+8 +23	+57 +46	
40. Wollaston	242 62	215 60	208 61	223 63	201 64	-17 +3	-3 +5	
41. Woolstaston	86 22	75 24	63 19	59 21	65 22	-24 0	-3 +16	
42. Wroxeter	993 250	657 170	382 114	336 112	421 165	-58 -34	+10 +45	
43. Longden	—	—	—	—	1156 437			
Total Rural Area	20737 5781	21799 6461	26212 8420	26770 9735	27896 10197	+35 +76	+6 +21	

— Boundary changes make some figures unrepresentative

Source: Registrar General's Census, County Population Survey 1987.



**TABLE 5.7 RURAL PARISHES IN SHREWSBURY AND ATCHAM  
POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLD CHANGE 1951-1986  
(Excluding major villages and boundary changes)**

Parish	Change			Comments
	51-86	71-86		
1. Acton Burnell	-17 +17	-7 +26	pop HH	Conservation area included
2. Alberbury & Cardeston	-33 +17	0 +16	pop HH	Conservation area included
3. All Stretton	-35 -17	-20 - 7	pop HH	
4. Astley	+44 +89	+26 +35	pop HH	Council estate constructed in period
5. Atcham	-15 - 8	-16 + 1	pop HH	
7. Berrington	-15 +79	-25 + 6	pop HH	Geriatric hospital in parish (Variable population)
10 Buildwas	+24 +83	- 5 +21	pop HH	Council estate constructed in period
11. Cardington	-20 - 3	- 4 + 7	pop HH	Conservation area included
12. Church Preen	+23 +57	-21 0	pop	Agricultural workers estate constructed in period
13. Church Pulverbatch	-10 +27	-26 + 8	pop HH	
15. Cound	- 2 +18	- 2 + 2	pop HH	
18 Frodesley	-31 - 7	- 8 0	pop HH	
21 Harley	-13 +14	+63 +55	pop HH	
22 Hughley	+ 2 + 6	- 7 +13	pop HH	
23 Kenley	-25 -22	+12 +10	pop HH	
24. Leebotwood	-11 +18	- 1 +12	pop HH	
25. Leighton	+ 5 +33	+ 8 +10	pop HH	
27 Longnor	+23 +44	+16 +35	pop HH	Council Estate constructed in period
29 Montford	-15 +13	- 5 + 2	pop HH	
30. Pitchford	-47 -31	-15 + 6	pop HH	
32 Ruckley & Langley	- 5 - 6	+ 6 - 7	pop HH	
33 Sheinton	-32 0	- 4 + 8	pop HH	
34 Smethcott	-15 + 2	+ 2 +16	pop HH	
35 Uffington	-40 -21	-30 -21	pop HH	
36 Uppington	-30 -14	+ 8 + 4	pop HH	Conservation area included
37 Upton Magna	-25 - 1	- 3 + 7	pop HH	
39 Withington	-19 - 2	+17 +17	pop HH	
40 Wollaston	-13 + 5	+ 8 + 7	pop HH	
41 Woolstaston	-29 0	- 3 +16	pop HH	
42 Wroxeter	-60 -45	- 5 +21	pop HH	

experienced an increase in the number of households. Even in those parishes with both a reduction in population and households Table 5.7 clearly shows a less than proportionate reduction in the rate of household decline.

The figures for the rural area of the Borough are shown in table 5.8 adjusted to allow for the major villages and boundary changes in a more concise form, together with the figures for Shropshire and the entire rural area of the Borough for comparison purposes. This shows more clearly that even in those rural parishes of Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough which do not contain major villages, there has been a consistent decline in population accompanied by a consistent increase in the numbers of households. These are the parishes in which policies of restraint are operated. It is important to note that the rate of increase in households appears to be declining except in the extreme rural parishes where the rate of increase has accelerated since 1971 when compared with the figures for Shrewsbury's rural area, the district or the county. This seems to indicate a greater demand since 1971 in areas where restraint policies are operated, i.e. in areas away from major estate development.

**TABLE 5.8 SHREWSBURY AND ATCHAM RURAL AREA POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLD FIGURES 1951-1958**

	Year					%change since:		
	1951	1961	1971	1981	1985	'51	'71	
Shropshire (000's)	294.0 77.8	303.0 90.4	337.0 110.5	375.0 130.7	395.0 145.8	+34 +87	+17 +32	Pop. H.H.
S'bury Boro' (000's)	68.0 18.5	74.0 22.4	83.0 27.4	87.0 30.9	92.0 34.9	+35 +89	+11 +27	
S'bury Rural (000's)	20.7 5.8	21.8 6.5	21.3 8.4	26.8 9.7	27.6 10.1	+33 +74	+30 +20	
S'bury Rural (adjusted for major villages)	9.4 2.4	9.0 2.5	7.8 2.5	7.1 2.6	7.5 2.7	-20 +13	-4 +10	

Source: Tables 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.6, 5.7.



Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough has its share of housing problems, but overcrowding and multi-occupancy are not amongst them. The 1981 census shows that only 1.7% of households were overcrowded at the rate of 1.5 persons per room and only 0.1% of households at the rate of 2 persons per room (DOE key statistics sheet 1985). Similarly there is a very low vacancy rate of around 3% on average (1981 census and 1985 Shropshire population survey).

#### 5:5 A Critique of The Statistics Available

The statistics so far presented are still relatively crude. Whilst they may be based on a parish level, there are several minor anomalies which suggest that they should only be used to provide broad indications of trends which might be better tested using parallel alternative sources. For example they are taken from census information without adjusting for changes in the definition of households. These changes are related to such things as sharing common facilities or sharing common meals etc.

The 1985 population and household figures are taken from a Shropshire County Council electoral registration survey which is not directly comparable with census data. Whilst formulae are available or can be constructed, which will compensate for such differences at a district level, the greater the disaggregation of the information, the greater the likelihood of error. Similarly at this level, relatively minor alterations to the household figures or the housing stock of the parish can have a disproportionate effect on the figures, for example the construction of ten council dwellings at Leebotwood, or the vacating of a Ministry of Defence estate at Nesscliffe.

The true nature of the impact of rural policies is masked by the use of statistics relating to relatively large areas. When very small areas are examined, there are also problems which indicate the need to adopt a cautious approach. Whilst it may be possible to reconcile many of these differences, the problem of comparison of parishes where boundary changes have taken place is virtually insoluble. The

conclusion reached may well be that even if much time and effort were expended to improve the accuracy and comparability of these figures, the results would be little different. For these reasons it may be advantageous to adopt a lateral approach and use the available statistics to suggest areas which may be more beneficially examined using alternative data sources. The inference is that, despite the operation of restraint policies, there has been a steady supply of new dwellings even in remoter rural parishes of the Borough, but that because of the fall in household size, this has not been sufficient to prevent a decline in population numbers.

This may well have implications for school, shop and other service provision. The statistics do not, however, tell us anything about the nature of that new housing. For example, has it been provided in response to local job opportunities, the need to support the local school, for local personal reasons or is it purely speculative? In order to discover more about these matters, it is necessary to investigate in greater detail.

## **5:6 The Focus For The Research**

### **(a) Direction and Purpose**

The statistics which were available at a detailed level clearly showed that there has been an increase in the numbers of houses built in rural parts of the Borough since 1971, even in those areas in which restraint policies have been in operation. This conclusion should be tested, if possible, to discover whether these new dwellings have been constructed in accordance with approved policies, particularly those relating to local need.

Earlier chapters have shown that there is a lack of detailed research on such matters and a principal aim was clearly to provide data which might be used to clarify research previously undertaken elsewhere. This required a detailed examination of records not normally available to researchers. In the local context, access to



such confidential data sources was granted on the understanding that the results of the study would assist in the examination of the effectiveness of currently applied housing and settlement policies in catering for the issues of local need in rural Shropshire. It was expected to lead to a re-examination of structure and local plan policies and to suggest how they might be altered to enable them to cater more effectively for such needs.

As the research progressed, certain aspects of it were utilised in preparing settlement policies for the rural area of Shrewsbury and Atcham and in advice and comments passed to the county and neighbouring authorities. Thus the research is leading directly to action at least in terms of written policies and was specifically designed to uncover problems associated with the operation of present policies. For example, there is evidence that currently applied settlement policies are not always effective in directing new housing development to key settlements and so a subsidiary objective was to consider this aspect, particularly in relation to refusals of planning permission and subsequent re-applications or the results of appeals. In other words, whether this was due to the action of the district council or the result of appeal decisions. A further supplementary objective was to attempt to provide an assessment of local need based on the number of planning applications received and to assess methods which might be used to deal with local needs issues. For example, different settlement policies, or initiatives involving public sector housing, and housing association or equity sharing schemes.

## (b) Data Sources

### (i) Introduction

To cover the issue of planning for local needs properly, a model source would provide a list of dwellings applied for and constructed in the rural areas of the Borough giving full details of the applicant's status and reasons for wanting a dwelling on that particular site. This information would ideally be supplemented by full details of the subsequent history of the occupants of dwellings

constructed as a result of such applications, showing, for example, whether their local need still persists or whether they have sold the dwelling to people without such connections. Were such a source easily available, no doubt it would have been used as the basis for previous research.

(ii) Available sources

The only place where full records of all local development control applications are kept is in the office of the local planning authority. These records contain much of the information needed to construct a list of dwellings along the lines referred to. Planning offices also hold a more general source of information in the form of the statutory register of planning applications, which provides a list, in date order, of planning applications with the name and address of the applicant, the owner of the site, a brief description of the proposal, the council's decision and the result of any subsequent appeal. The register provides a very concise source of general information, but gives no information on the reason for the dwelling or the status of the applicant.

In the writer's experience, development control records normally provide a plethora of information when held in paper file form, rather less in micro film form and less still in electronic form. The records of Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough were in paper file form at the time the study began. All individual files for planning applications were available, complete with supporting correspondence dating back to 1974 when the Borough was formed. These files contained much supplementary information concerning applications, including copies of correspondence relating to the personal needs of the applicant, notes of the attitude of parish councils, letters of objection or support etc. There were also file notes covering such matters as the opinion of the planning officer or the notes of discussions with the highway authority or the county planning department. Many of these items are of vital importance to the progress of the application, but are not recorded on planning registers, nor recognised in any official decisions analysis exercises. The earlier files (prior to 1980) were due to be microfilmed as the



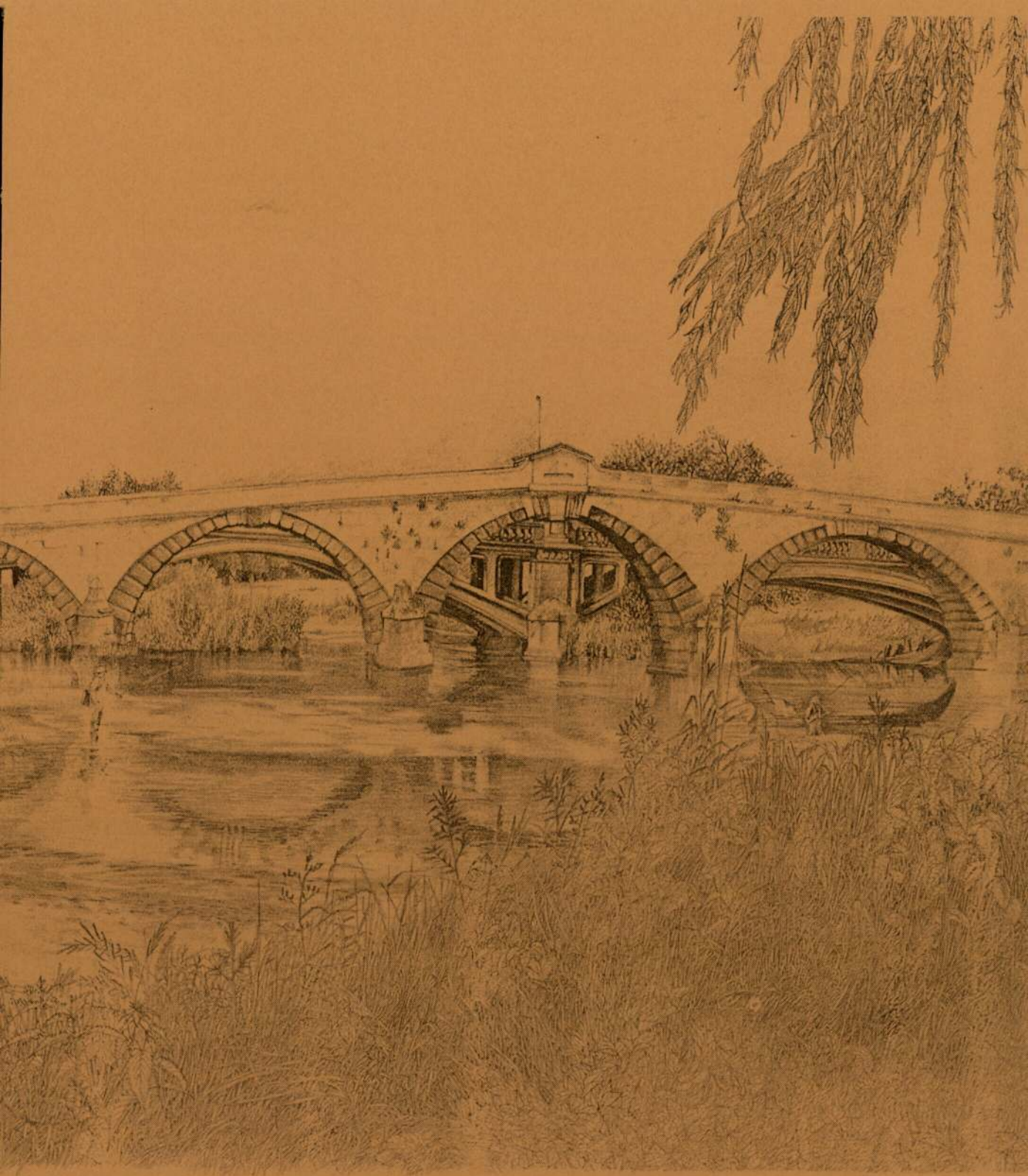
study began. This process involved stripping files of what was considered to be non essential information and consequently many of the details considered important to this particular study have since disappeared.

It should be stressed that this source of information is not normally made available to researchers and its use in this case was directly related to the status of the writer who had been employed by the authority for a number of years, although it is acknowledged that there are a few exceptions, notably (Tricker et al 1979). The source is not without problems however. For example, over 10,000 individual files were available and in some cases more than one application had been made on each site, sometimes over a long period. Thus there was an inordinate amount of paperwork which had to be checked in order to glean the information needed for the study. The precise methods used to process this data source and to eliminate or at least reduce errors are discussed in the following chapter.

More general data was obtained from the publications produced by Shropshire County Council planning department, particularly those concerned with monitoring policies or decisions analysis. The data source for such aggregate statistics is acknowledged whenever it occurs. There is no known source of information relating to the status of occupants of rural dwellings.

This chapter has introduced the district in which the main study is based in order to set the scene for the following chapter which summarises the results of the detailed analysis of these sources.





*The river Severn at Atcham Cadzga*

**CHAPTER 6: RURAL HOUSING  
IN SHREWSBURY AND ATCHAM:  
THE SCALE AND NATURE  
OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS**



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## 6 RURAL HOUSING IN SHREWSBURY AND ATCHAM BOROUGH: THE SCALE AND NATURE OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS

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### 6:1 Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the most comprehensive source of information relating to rural planning applications is the development control record system of the local planning authority. There were some problems with the record system of the study area, particularly relating to the relatively diffuse nature of the facts contained within the system. It proved necessary to develop a procedure which could be used to separate the information needed from that available in a suitably concise and logical fashion without overwhelming the system or sacrificing potential areas of interest which could be useful after initial analysis. Before beginning the task at all, however, it was necessary to select the applications needed for close examination from the 13000 or so which had been made during the selected study period 1974-1984.

### 6:2 The Scale of the Problem

Because the study is concerned with rural housing, only a relatively small proportion of applications needed to be examined in detail. Those not in rural areas, for example, were not needed, nor were applications for non-residential purposes. Table 6.1 places the matter in context, showing the total number of applications received in the Borough each year.

As no computing facilities are operated by the Borough's planning department these figures cannot easily be broken down into non residential or urban/rural, but, using the decisions analysis system "plandec" operated by Shropshire County Council, it was possible to estimate the scale of the problem to some degree. Table 6.2 shows housing completions 1976-86 by settlement class for the whole district (see previous chapter table 5.1 (p.132) combined with table 6.1.).

**TABLE 6.1 SHREWSBURY AND ATCHAM BOROUGH 1974-1986  
PLANNING APPLICATIONS RECEIVED**

Year	Number of Applications	Cumulative Total
1974	916	916
1975	1152	2068
1976	1146	3214
1977	1181	4395
1978	1327	5722
1979	1306	7028
1980	1216	8244
1981	1159	9403
1982	1119	10522
1983	1148	11670
1984	1175	12845
1985	1120	13965
1986	1249	15214

**TABLE 6.2 SHREWSBURY AND ATCHAM BOROUGH 1977-1986  
HOUSING COMPLETIONS BY SETTLEMENT CLASS**

Year	Number of Applications	Small Villages	Larger Villages	Total Rural
1977	1181	18	51	69
1978	1327	31	23	54
1979	1306	30	19	49
1980	1216	27	82	109
1981	1159	21	142	163
1982	1119	37	9	46
1983	1148	28	58	86
1984	1175	23	96	119
1985	1120	32	60	92
1986	1249	59	46	105
Total	12000	306	586	892

Source: Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council Planning Department



It is recognised that the figures are not directly comparable in that the number of applications received is only indirectly related to completions on an annual basis, but nevertheless, over the period 1977-86, some 306 houses were built in very rural areas and these represented some 2.6% of the applications received. Thus, on average, 1200 applications are received each year, these lead to the construction of, on average, 89 houses each year in rural Shrewsbury, of which 34% are built in areas where restraint policies may be expected to be strictly operated. It is this 34% and the applications which resulted in their construction, which offer the most interesting source material for further study.

### 6:3 Method of Selection of Case Study Material

In order to discover the details of the circumstances which led to the construction of these dwellings it was necessary to look closely at the planning applications which were received and processed by the local planning authority and to decide which ones warranted further attention. It should be noted that as this work took place during 1985, it covered the period from 1974-1984 only.

The main objective of the exercise was to investigate housing applications in rural areas outside major villages and for this purpose, a scan of the Borough's register of planning applications was carried out. This resulted in a list of file numbers with a brief note of the type of residential development proposed for all rural planning applications known, or thought to be outside major villages. A major village was either one to which development was directed because it was classified as a main village, or one where infill opportunities were such that, based on local knowledge, development opportunities were considered to be freely available.

The resulting references were used to identify files for each case and these were individually examined to extract a variety of information which was recorded on a form suitable for analysis by computer. The original list of applications was reduced by

telescoping outline applications and the following detailed application, or by adjusting multiple applications for each dwelling, provided this was not the result of demand pressures. For example, if several applications for one dwelling were received showing different designs or sites, then provided these were by the same applicant and only one dwelling was intended, only one form was completed.

Prior to April 1981 no fee was payable for a planning application and it was therefore common practice to submit multiple applications particularly where the applicant wanted a choice of sites or designs or felt that the planning authority would better favour his request given alternative sites.

#### 6:4 Information Collated

Before describing the type of material gathered, it should be noted that because of its confidential nature, it has been deliberately processed in such a way that individual people and applications cannot be identified so as not to prejudice the follow up studies.

The selected development control records were examined and recorded on the forms on a parish by date basis. To illustrate the extent and nature of pressure for development in the district, the records were disaggregated to separate various factors of interest such as agricultural and forestry need, personal need, speculative development etc. This information was collected for all planning applications for dwellings outside main settlements from 1974, when the Borough was formed, until 1984. Over 1000 cases were examined in detail and those resulting in the construction of a dwelling investigated further in the follow up study. A copy of the form used to record the basic information is included as Figure 6.1.



applications

SHREWSBURY RURAL AREA HOUSING PLANNING APPLICATION DATA SHEET

1. Address		Planning Application Number	1	2	3	4	5
Date of Application		6	7	8	9	10	11
Parish		12	13	14	15	16	17
2. OS Reference		18	19	20	21	22	23
3. Position (note proximity to village/farm etc)		a) 'policy 13' village	24	25	26	27	28
4. Sitting		A) Area of Natural Beauty	29	30	31	32	33
5. Nature of application		B) dwelling type	34	35	36	37	38
6. Dwelling Details		A) number of habitable rooms	39	40	41	42	43
7. Reason for dwelling		a) agricultural worker	44	45	46	47	48
8. Applicant's address (write in)		a) In Parish	49	50	51	52	53
9. Submitted by (insert address)		a) owner	54	55	56	57	58
10. Consultation/Discussions		A) MAFF	59	60	61	62	63
		B) Agricultural questionnaire	64	65	66	67	68
		C) Size of Holding (acres)	69	70	71	72	73
		D) Highway Authority	74	75	76	77	78

FIGURE 6.1. INFORMATION DATA SHEET

E) Water Authority	a) no objection	1	43
	b) condition	2	
	c) objection	3	
F) County Authority	a) support	1	44
	b) condition	2	
	c) neutral	3	
	d) objection	4	
G) Parish	a) support	1	45
	b) condition	2	
	c) neutral	3	
	d) objection	4	
H) Neighbours	a) support	1	46
	b) condition	2	
	c) neutral	3	
	d) objection	4	
I) L.A. re design/aiting	a) support	1	47
J) Other (specify)	a) support	1	48
	b) condition	2	
	c) neutral	3	
	d) objection	4	
11. Recommendations of Planning Officer	a) approve	1	49
	b) no recommendation	2	
	c) refuse	3	
12. Decision	a) approve	1	50
	b) refuse	2	
13. Conditions relating to occupancy	a) none	1	51
	b) agric/forestry	2	
	c) personal	3	
	d) other (specify)	4	
14. Reasons for refusal	a) Structure Plan Policies 12-14	1	52
	b) Structure Plan Policies 15-17	2	53
	c) Structure Plan Policy 18	3	54
	d) other policy (specify)	4	55
	e) highway/traffic	5	56
	f) other (specify)	6	
15. Date of Decision			57
16. Date of Construction			58
FOR SELECTED CASES ONLY			
17. Occupant's employment	a) agric/forestry	1	59
	b) retired (a)	2	
	c) other (specify)	3	
18. Place of work	a) Parish	1	60
	b) District	2	
	c) County	3	
	d) Other (specify)	4	
NOTES			

## 6:5 Analysis of Applications

### (a) Method

The completed forms were transferred to electronic file form on the University of Aston's Harris and Vax computers. They were then analysed using a proprietary statistical analysis package (SPSS), utilising the options available to suppress its more esoteric functions and provide plain English headings and descriptions.

### (b) Scale

The total number of planning applications examined for the period 1974-1984 was 1008 (table 6.3). These all related to an application for a dwelling, or for substantial alterations to a dwelling, outside a major village; 610 were received before the Shropshire County Structure Plan came into operation (March 1980) and 398 afterwards. The information is ordered on a parish basis, with those previously mentioned as being "very rural", marked with an asterisk \*.

The main function of the table is to serve as a background against which the more detailed analysis may be seen. However it does illustrate the widespread demand for dwellings in the study area and also shows that this continued after the County Structure Plan restraint policies were introduced, in some parishes at a rate greater than before its introduction. The figures relate to applications, not permissions and some restraint policies were in operation prior to the structure plan's preparation, but it is important to recognise the continuing demand.

It must be stressed that the division of the information into "pre" and "post" structure plan periods was more of a convenient administrative measure than a true reflection of the sudden introduction of different policies or policy interpretation. The files show that the draft structure plan policies influenced decision making from around 1978 onwards, but that no precise date could be fixed for their acceptance, their introduction being gradual rather than sudden. The division should be viewed rather in terms of a comparison between 1970's attitudes, policies and pressures and the introduction of those of the 1980's.



**TABLE 6.3 SHREWSBURY AND ATCHAM RURAL AREA**  
**PLANNING APPLICATIONS RECEIVED (Outside Major Villages)**  
**1974-1984**

Parish	Code	74/80		80/84		1974/84
		%		%		
Acton Burnell *	1	8	1.3	12	3.0	20
Alberbury and Cardeston *	2	32	6.2	14	3.5	46
All Stretton *	3	5	0.8	3	0.8	8
Astley *	4	14	2.3	13	3.3	27
Atcham *	5	3	0.5	3	0.8	6
Bayston Hill	6	26	4.3	12	3.0	38
Berrington *	7	10	1.6	4	1.0	14
Bicton	8	19	3.1	11	2.8	30
Bomere Heath	9	37	6.1	13	3.3	50
Buildwas *	10	8	1.3	2	0.5	10
Cardington *	11	16	2.6	14	3.5	30
Church Preen *	12	4	0.6	2	0.5	6
Church Pulverbatch *	13	18	3.0	16	4.0	34
Conover	14	38	6.2	19	4.8	57
Cound *	15	17	2.8	9	2.3	26
Cressage	16	4	0.6	2	0.5	6
Ford	17	21	3.4	10	2.5	31
Frodesley *	18	3	0.5	6	1.5	9
Great Hanwood	19	5	0.8	5	1.3	10
Great Ness	20	19	3.1	14	6.0	43
Harley *	21	10	1.6	2	0.5	12
Hughley *	22	5	0.8	1	0.3	6
Kenley *	23	5	0.8	7	1.7	12
Leebotwood *	24	8	1.3	19	4.8	27
Leighton *	25	17	2.8	13	3.3	30
Little Ness	26	14	2.3	5	1.3	19
Longnor *	27	12	2.0	3	0.8	15
Minsterley *	28	18	3.0	13	3.3	31
Montford *	29	9	1.5	9	2.3	18
Pitchford *	30	2	0.3	1	0.3	3
Pontesbury	31	84	13.8	62	15.6	146
Ruckley and Langley *	32	5	0.8	1	0.3	6
Sheinton *	33	-	0	1	0.3	1
Smethcott *	34	9	1.5	10	2.5	19
Uffington *	35	11	1.8	3	0.8	14
Uppington *	36	4	0.6	1	0.3	5
Upton Magna *	37	10	1.6	7	1.7	17
Westbury	38	42	6.9	18	4.5	60
Withington *	39	12	2.0	13	3.3	25
Wollaston *	40	13	2.1	10	2.5	23
Woolstaston *	41	6	1.0	2	0.5	8
Wroxeter *	42	7	1.1	3	0.8	10
TOTAL		610		398		1008

\* more rural parishes



(c) Reason for the demand and decision

It is not possible to discover the precise reasons for all people wishing to live in or build houses in a particular location, but in the areas of restraint in the district under study, applicants and their agents wanting dwellings where permission would not normally be given were advised by council officers that permission would be refused unless they could prove some form of local need. Other applicants accompanied their submissions with letters indicating their reasons for wishing to build. These indications were extracted from information contained on the files and linked to the eventual decision on the application to provide the result shown in table 6.4.

The most significant factor shown by table 6.4 is that there appears to be little difference between the success rate of applications claiming a special need of some kind and those which are purely speculative. However, there appears to be a significant difference in approach in the period 1980-84 in that a smaller percentage of agricultural workers' dwellings were approved and this is coupled with an increase in the rate of approval of dwellings for other local workers or for personal reasons. This may be expected because as the country's agricultural industry has modernised and developed, there has been a reduction in the need for agricultural workers, especially since the late seventies. It would appear from the figures, that despite this reduction, the demand for houses in the rural area has not diminished. Other reasons for needing a dwelling have been substituted for agricultural reasons as the rural area has adjusted to meet contemporary demands, or perhaps, as people who live in the rural area have adjusted to the decline in traditional agricultural employment opportunities.

In order to illustrate this more effectively, the figures can be reworked to show all other needs compared with speculative applications. But before doing so, it is worth looking at table 6.4 again to examine the differences between the various needs and decisions. Council houses, being the responsibility of the district council, have a very high "approval rate", although it should be



TABLE 6.4 REASON GIVEN FOR DWELLING NEED BY DECISION

1974-1984				
	Approve	Refuse	No Decision	Total
Agricultural worker	86 (59%)	56 (38%)	4 (3%)	146
Local worker	13 (52%)	10 (40%)	2 (8%)	25
Retired local	1 (33%)	2 (67%)	0	3
Personal/relation	39 (63%)	22 (35%)	1 (2%)	62
Speculative/holiday etc	453 (60%)	281 (38%)	15 (2%)	749
Council housing	9 (82%)	2 (18%)	0	11
Gipsy/traveller	3 (60%)	2 (40%)	0	5
Miscellaneous	4 (57%)	3 (43%)	0	7
Total	608 (60%)	378 (38%)	22 (2%)	1008
1974-1980				
Agricultural worker	55 (64%)	30 (35%)	1 (1%)	86
Local worker	7 (41%)	8 (47%)	2 (12%)	17
Retired local	1 (33%)	2 (67%)	0	3
Personal/relation	23 (59%)	16 (41%)	0	39
Speculative/holiday etc	273 (60%)	174 (38%)	7 (2%)	454
Council housing	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	0	5
Gipsy/traveller	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	0	2
Miscellaneous	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	0	4
Total	365 (60%)	235 (39%)	10 (1%)	610
1980-1984				
Agricultural worker	31 (52%)	26 (43%)	3 (5%)	60
Local worker	6 (75%)	2 (25%)	0	8
Retired local	0	0	0	0
Personal/relation	16 (70%)	6 (26%)	1 (4%)	23
Speculative/holiday etc	180 (61%)	107 (36%)	8 (3%)	295
Council housing	5 (83%)	1 (17%)	0	6
Gipsy/traveller	2 (67%)	1 (33%)	0	3
Miscellaneous	3 (100%)	0	0	3
Total	243 (61%)	143 (36%)	12 (3%)	398

understood that a planning authority may "deem" itself permission for its own projects, although in the case of the study area, comments are made by the planning committee which are incorporated into the eventual resolution adopted by the council as if it were a normal application. So, apart from the council's own needs, it appears that people quoting special personal circumstances stand a slightly better chance of gaining planning permission than any other class. There were insufficient cases claiming this need during the study period to draw conclusions on the treatment of applications involving retired local people, but it should be remarked that many cases involving elderly, or sick people, were dealt with under the personal/relation heading and so it may be that not all retired locals were recorded under that name, perhaps giving a slightly false picture. This category also reappears in the follow up studies showing that retired farmers are often found to have moved into an "agricultural worker's" bungalow on their holding, often exchanging dwellings with their sons.

Table 6.5 condenses the information contained in table 6.4 and shows the reason given for dwelling need in three categories comprising speculative applications, agricultural or forestry need and all other need. The table clearly shows that as the approval rate for applications claiming agricultural support reduced, there was a commensurate increase in the approval rate for applications citing other needs. When the figures are examined in terms of percentages of total approvals, (vertically rather than horizontally) applications claiming agricultural support comprised over 15% of approvals in 1974-1980, compared with all other needs, which formed 10% of total approvals. However in the latter period "agricultural" approvals had reduced to 13% of the total and all other needs had risen to over 13%. The situation is clearly reflected in the difference between the rates of total refusals in the two periods. After 1980, there was an increase in the rate of refusal of applications claiming an essential need for agricultural or forestry reasons. Speculative applications comprised about the same proportion over both periods.

The reason for this similarity is difficult to explain. It may be coincidental, but it could have something to do with the advice



**TABLE 6.5 REASON GIVEN FOR DWELLING NEED (CONDENSED)**

1974-1984				
	Approve	Refuse	No Decision	Total
Spec/holiday	(75%)453 (60%)	(74%)281 (38%)	15 (2%)	(74%)749
Ag.worker	(14%) 86 (59%)	(15%) 56 (38%)	4 (3%)	(15%)146
Other need	(11%) 69 (61%)	(11%) 41 (36%)	3 (3%)	(11%)113
Total	(100%)608 (60%)	(100%)378 (38%)	22 (2%)	(100%)1008
1974-1980				
Spec/holiday	(75%)273 (60%)	(74%)174 (38%)	7 (2%)	(74%)454
Ag.worker	(15%) 55 (64%)	(13%) 30 (35%)	1 (1%)	(14%) 86
Other need	(10%) 37 (53%)	(13%) 31 (44%)	2 (3%)	(12%) 70
Total	(100%)365 (60%)	(100%)235 (39%)	10 (1%)	(100%)610
1980-1984				
Spec/holiday	(74%)180 (61%)	(75%)107 (36%)	8 (3%)	(74%)295
Ag.worker	(13%) 31 (52%)	(18%) 26 (43%)	3 (5%)	(15%) 60
Other need	(13%) 32 (74%)	(7%) 10 (23%)	1 (3%)	(11%) 43
Total	(100%)243 (61%)	(100%)143 (36%)	12 (3%)	(100%)398

offered to potential applicants prior to the submission of an application. For example it may be that many potential applications which have no chance of success are not made because, following discussion with appropriate planning officers, the applicants feel they would only be wasting time and money. It should be restated that since April 1981, a charge has been introduced to offset the costs of handling a planning application. This is presently about £60 per dwelling. A similar charge is made for handling a building regulations application. These charges may well have deterred the less serious (or less well off) potential applicants and this could have affected the figures for the latter period. However only those applications which have some chance of success are encouraged and only the more determined (or foolish) applicants persist with their case in the face of a negative prognosis. On the other hand it may be that the majority of speculative applications are in settlements and may be expected to be approved and the majority of "local needs" applications are in more remote rural areas and may be expected to be refused if they had been speculative. This can be tested by re-examining the figures in terms of the position of the dwelling in relation to settlements.

#### (d) Position of dwellings and decision

The information collected relating to the position of proposed dwellings was relatively simple, amounting to an indication of whether it was in a village in which "infilling" was permitted, in another settlement or in open countryside. Infilling was defined as one or two dwellings in an otherwise built up frontage, but no attempt was made to judge whether applications complied strictly with this definition, merely whether they were in or adjoining such a village. The results were analysed by decision in an attempt to discover whether there was a correlation between position in relation to such a settlement and decision.

Table 6.6 shows that there is a direct correlation between the position of the proposed building and the rate of application approval. In villages where there might be expected to be infilling



TABLE 6.6 POSITION BY DECISION

1974-1984						
Position	Approve		Refuse		No Decision	Total
Infill villages	(34%)	209	(23%)	87	6	302
		(69%)		(29%)	(2%)	
Other villages	(28%)	172	(38%)	142	6	320
		(54%)		(44%)	(2%)	
Open countryside	(37%)	227	(39%)	149	10	386
		(59%)		(39%)	(2%)	
Total	(100%)	608	(100%)	378	22	1008
		(60%)		(38%)	(2%)	
1974-1980						
Infill villages	(36%)	130	(17%)	41	4	175
		(74%)		(23%)	(3%)	
Other villages	(30%)	108	(39%)	91	3	202
		(53%)		(45%)	(2%)	
Open countryside	(35%)	127	(44%)	103	3	233
		(55%)		(44%)	(1%)	
Total	(100%)	365	(100%)	235	10	610
		(60%)		(39%)	(1%)	
1980-1984						
Infill villages	(33%)	79	(32%)	46	2	127
		(62%)		(36%)	(2%)	
Other villages	(26%)	64	(36%)	51	3	118
		(54%)		(43%)	(3%)	
Open countryside	(41%)	100	(32%)	46	7	153
		(65%)		(30%)	(5%)	
Total	(100%)	243	(100%)	143	12	398
		(61%)		(36%)	(3%)	

opportunities, applications had a greater chance of approval than those in other settlements, or the open countryside, although the difference was not as great as might be expected.

When separated into pre and post structure plan periods, the figures show a 10% increase in the rate of approval of applications outside settlements and a reduction of 14% in the rate of refusal during the latter period. There was a commensurate reduction in the approval rate and an increase in the refusal rate in "infill villages", whilst a fairly steady rate of approval and refusal was maintained in "other villages".

These differences are further highlighted when the figures are used to calculate the percentages of total approvals (i.e. calculated vertically rather than horizontally). The figures for the 1980-1984 period show that approvals in "infill villages" formed 33% of total approvals, this represents a reduction of 3% compared to the earlier period. The comparable figures for approvals outside settlements were 35% for the earlier period and 41% for the latter, an increase of 6%.

Thus, the figures show that, since the adoption of the structure plan, there has been an increase in the rate of approval of planning applications for houses outside recognised settlements and that this also represents a significant increase in the total proportion of planning approvals. This result is somewhat unexpected and it is not possible to advance any explanation at this stage, other than to suggest that perhaps opportunities in "infill" villages are becoming fewer as sites are developed whilst demand remains the same, or increases and that applicants demonstrating various local needs are being supported in terms of planning approvals.

#### (e) Occupancy conditions

In order to investigate the links further, the applications were examined to see whether special conditions were attached to approvals which in some way restricted permission to suit the individual needs of applicants. In particular, applications were



examined for conditions which restricted the occupation of the dwelling to people who were either actively engaged in or recently retired from agriculture or forestry or were named in the decision notice. Table 6.7 shows those applications approved by position and by the type of occupancy conditions imposed on the consent.

There appears to be a significant link in that a far greater proportion of approvals outside settlements were restricted by such conditions. However before proceeding to draw further conclusions from table 6.7, it should be adjusted to take account of certain types of applications which could not legally be conditioned in any case. Generally speaking these were cases relating to existing dwellings, concerned with such things as rehabilitation, replacements, additions etc. This is discussed further in section (g) in relation to types of dwellings. The effect of this adjustment is shown in table 6.8.

The table shows a fairly consistent rate of applications which could or could not be conditioned. The rate changes little before or after 1980, although it does vary between settlements and open countryside. There is an inverse correlation between the proportion of applications approved in villages where there were likely to be newbuild opportunities and approvals in open countryside. A greater proportion of approvals in areas where newbuild opportunities were likely to be fewer, were not able to have occupancy restriction conditions attached because they were concerned in some way with existing or replacement dwellings and were historically, unrestricted as to occupancy.

The figures appear to indicate that a reduction in the opportunities for newbuild (except for some restricted occupancy cases) has forced people to utilise existing dwellings. This may appear to be an obvious conclusion, but it is important to establish that in rural areas of building restraint, if demand for housing is not satisfied, then pressure appears to be placed on the existing housing stock. This will be investigated further in (g), in relation to types of dwellings.

TABLE 6.7 APPROVALS BY POSITION AND CONDITIONS

1974-84				
Position	No Conditions	Agric/Forestry Conditions	Personal Conditions	Total
Infill villages	197 (94%)	1 (1%)	11 (5%)	209
Other villages	147 (85%)	13 (8%)	12 (7%)	172
Open countryside	140 (62%)	59 (26%)	28 (12%)	227
Total	484 (80%)	73 (12%)	51 (8%)	608
1974-1980				
Infill villages	125 (96%)	0	5 (4%)	130
Other villages	94 (87%)	10 (9%)	4 (4%)	108
Open countryside	79 (62%)	39 (31%)	9 (7%)	127
Total	298 (82%)	49 (13%)	18 (5%)	365
1980-1984				
Infill villages	72 (91%)	1 (1%)	6 (8%)	79
Other villages	53 (83%)	3 (5%)	8 (12%)	64
Open countryside	61 (61%)	20 (20%)	19 (19%)	100
Total	186 (77%)	24 (10%)	33 (13%)	243



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**TABLE 6.8 APPROVALS BY ABILITY TO APPLY OCCUPANCY CONDITIONS**


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1974-1984	Not Conditionable	Conditionable	Total
Infill Villages	41 (20%)	168 (80%)	209
Other Villages	61 (35%)	111 (65%)	172
Open Countryside	78 (34%)	149 (66%)	227
TOTAL	180	428	608
1974-1980			
Infill Villages	25 (19%)	105 (81%)	130
Other Villages	39 (36%)	69 (64%)	108
Open Countryside	42 (33%)	85 (67%)	127
TOTAL	106	259	365
1980-1984			
Infill Villages	16 (20%)	63 (80%)	79
Other Villages	22 (34%)	42 (66%)	64
Open Countryside	36 (36%)	64 (64%)	100
TOTAL	74	169	243

Having established the number of applications not expected to be conditioned for local needs, the figures shown in table 6.7 can be reworked, giving the results shown in table 6.9. When the situation is examined, divided on the basis of applications dealt with before and after the adoption of the county structure plan, a significant difference may be seen. Table 6.9 shows that in the early period around 26% of approvals had occupancy conditions attached to them, compared with 34% in the later period. In the open countryside, some 57% of approvals were conditioned by occupancy in the 1974-1980 period, 45% were restricted to agricultural or forestry workers and the remaining 12% to personal or other conditions. This contrasts with the 1980-1984 period when, for the same open countryside area, over 60% of approvals were restricted by occupancy conditions, but only 31% were limited to agricultural or forestry workers and 30% by personal or other conditions.

This represents an important difference, possibly attributable to changes in agricultural practices which make it far more difficult to disguise a personal need as an agricultural need. The differences may also be attributed to the results of more efficient planning control, which required applicants to support and prove their cases more conclusively in the light of more stringently applied rural housing location policies.

Table 6.9 also shows that some 40% of the cases approved outside settlements were not subject to occupancy conditions. The situation exists in which, statistically at least, the majority of new dwellings in the rural area are able to be sold freely on the open market. It should be noted that this is not necessarily a bad thing, but, referring back to table 6.2 and the average number of rural housing completions of 89 per annum, it may be expected that in crude, overall terms, around 86% of all new rural houses will be unrestricted by occupancy conditions i.e. available on the open market. The fact that outside major villages, over 70% of new or "reconditioned" dwellings were still freely available is more surprising. It would seem that either unrestricted permissions are being or have been given too readily or that permissions relating to local needs have been too carefully restricted. Bearing in mind the fact that the



TABLE 6.9 APPROVALS BY POSITION AND CONDITIONS ADJUSTED  
FOR CASES WHICH COULD NOT BE CONDITIONED

1974-1984				
Position	No Conditions	Agric/Forestry Conditions	Personal Conditions	Total
Infill villages	156 (93%)	1 (1%)	11 (6%)	168
Other villages	86 (77%)	13 (12%)	12 (11%)	111
Open countryside	62 (42%)	59 (40%)	28 (18%)	149
Total	304 (71%)	73 (17%)	51 (12%)	428
1974-1980				
Infill villages	100 (95%)	0	5 (5%)	105
Other villages	55 (79%)	10 (15%)	4 (6%)	69
Open countryside	37 (43%)	39 (45%)	9 (12%)	85
Total	192 (74%)	49 (19%)	18 (7%)	259
1980-1984				
Infill villages	56 (89%)	1 (2%)	6 (10%)	63
Other villages	32 (74%)	3 (7%)	8 (19%)	42
Open countryside	25 (39%)	20 (31%)	19 (30%)	64
Total	112 (66%)	24 (14%)	33 (20%)	169

applications giving rise to these figures had been adjusted to eliminate multiple applications and that table 6.2 refers to all completions including those in major development villages, a figure balanced more in favour of "local needs" in the more rural areas may have been anticipated. It should be noted that the tables are not directly compatible in that table 6.2 refers to completions 1977-86 and table 6.9 refers to approvals for 1974-84. Nevertheless the points made may be considered to be morally if not statistically valid.

(f) Reasons for refusal

Having investigated the chances of gaining planning permission and how this relates to the need for a dwelling or its position, it is important to look at the reasons used when refusing applications (table 6.10). In order to compile the tables efficiently, these were interpreted in terms of current county structure plan policies relating to three main areas of policy concern. The first relating to the direction of houses to particular villages and restrictions elsewhere. The second relating to restrictions in specific areas i.e. green belt and area of housing control around Telford. The third policy concern relates to the agriculture or forestry need of the applicant. Other reasons for refusal were more specific, for example relating to highway, drainage or design reasons. Often more than one reason for refusal was used, but the study took the major reason for the purposes of this analysis. To examine any link between position and reasons for refusal the table was ordered in the same manner as previous tables.

Table 6.10 clearly shows that there is a correlation between the position of the proposed dwelling and the reasons for refusal. Policies intended to direct housing to named settlements were cited in almost 60% of cases and more often in applications outside villages containing "infill" opportunities. Similarly there was a direct link between the use of policies citing local needs and the position of the proposed dwelling. The incidence of use of this policy refusal reason rising from 16% in larger settlements to over 30% in smaller settlements or the open countryside.



TABLE 6.10 REASONS FOR REFUSAL BY POSITION

1974-1984				
Reasons	Infill Villages	Other Villages	Open Countryside	Total
S/plan pols.12-14	(49%)43	(63%)90	(61%)92	(59%)225
G.belt/Ashcat.	(12%)10	(1%) 2	(2%) 3	(4%) 15
Ag/for.need etc	(16%)14	(24%)34	(32%)48	(25%) 96
Highway/traffic	(6%) 5	0	(1%) 1	(2%) 6
Drainage	(3%) 3	(1%) 1	0	(1%) 4
Amenity/design	(12%)10	(8%) 12	(3%) 4	(7%) 26
Other	(2%) 2	(2%) 3	(1%) 1	(2%) 6
Total	(100%)87	(100%)42	(100%)149	(100%)378
1974-1980				
S/plan pols.12-14	(66%)27	(78%)71	(76%)78	(75%)176
G.belt/Ashcat.	0	0	(1%) 1	(1%) 1
Ag/for.need etc	(7%) 3	(12%)11	(20%)21	(15%) 35
Highway traffic	(5%) 2	0	(1%) 1	(1%) 3
Drainage	(5%) 2	(1%) 1	0	(1%) 3
Amenity/design	(15%) 6	(7%) 6	(2%) 2	(6%) 14
Other	(2%) 1	(2%) 2	0	(1%) 3
Total	(100%)41	(100%)91	(100%)103	(100%)235
1980-1984				
S/plan pols.12-14	(35%)16	(37%)19	(30%)14	(34%)49
G.belt/Ashcat.	(22%)10	(4%) 2	(4%) 2	(10%)14
Ag/for.need etc	(24%)11	(45%)23	(59%)27	(43%)61
Highway traffic	(7%) 3	0	0	(2%) 3
Drainage	(2%) 1	0	0	(1%) 1
Amenity/design	(9%) 4	(12%) 6	(4%) 2	(8%) 12
Other	(2%) 1	(2%) 1	(2%) 1	(2%) 3
Total	(100%)46	(100%)51	(100%)46	(100%)43

As may be expected there was a significant change after the adoption of the structure plan in that there was a much greater use of the more specific structure plan policies, for example, relating to the area of special housing control around Telford, or the necessity of proving an essential agricultural or forestry need. In fact this latter policy was used as the main reason for refusal in 15% of pre structure plan cases, compared with 43% after 1980.

Not too much significance should be attached to these figures as it became clear when examining the files that the local planning authority normally used a number of reasons for refusal and in many cases a "direction" policy was cited as the main reason for refusal, with a "local need" policy being an additional reason. The table can be usefully reworked to provide an indication of the incidence of policy : other reasons for refusal. The results are shown in table 6.11. This gives an even clearer indication that policies similar to those contained in the structure plan, concerned with "direction", are cited as the major reason for refusal with increasing frequency outside settlements and that this situation has changed little since the structure plan was adopted in 1980.

#### (g) Types of dwellings

##### (i) Introduction

So far the examination has treated each application as if it were similar in so far as house type is concerned, except for the adjustments made to allow for occupancy conditions. It is clear that there are significant differences in approval rates between applications submitted by individuals claiming certain local needs, and those lodged by people without such claim. This may be expected to lead to people without an accepted local need concentrating on the conversion or the rehabilitation of an existing building. In other words, incomers are attempting to satisfy their need to live in a rural area through existing structures, particularly those offering opportunities for rebuilding or major alteration. This appears to be borne out by the figures shown in table 6.8. Such expectations arise from the assumption that the rural policies operated are geared to the conservation of the countryside and that this will lead to the



TABLE 6.11 REASONS FOR REFUSAL BY POSITION (CONDENSED)

1974-1984				
Reasons	Infill Villages	Other Villages	Open Countryside	Total
Policy	(77%)67	(88%)126	(95%)143	(63%)240
All other	(23%)20	(12%)16	(5%) 6	(27%)138
Total	(100%)87	(100%)142	(100%)143	(100%)378
1974-1980				
Policy	(73%)30	(90%)82	(97%)100	(90%)212
All other	(27%)11	(10%) 9	(3%) 3	(10%) 23
Total	(100%)41	(100%)91	(100%)103	(100%)235
1980-1984				
Policy	(80%)37	(86%)44	(94%)43	(87%)124
All other	(20%) 9	(14%) 7	(6%)3	(13%)19
Total	(100%)46	(100%)51	(100%)6	(100%)143

application of policies more strictly to prevent new buildings in the open countryside and less strictly to prevent the reconstruction or rehabilitation of existing dwellings (if, indeed, planning permission is necessary). Various degrees of conversion or extension of existing buildings lie between these two extremes. The precise form of policies covering these issues has been previously discussed in Chapter 4.

The applications were examined and categorised fairly simply into 8 types ranging from new building through to large additions. It was felt important to pick up applications which obviously changed a simple cottage into a modern "commuter home", but due to the scale of the task, it was difficult to operate a precise, objective, definition of "large addition". The attitude taken was that one or two extra rooms did not constitute a large addition unless they were extra to a previous extension. It was felt more important to avoid picking up fairly standard modernisation by the addition of a bathroom/kitchen and one other room of modest dimensions. For this reason, the "large addition" category includes the more blatant examples of "gentrification", but cannot be claimed to be exclusive. Nevertheless as the situation will be somewhat understated because of this, the figures are felt to be worthy of comment in the context of the remainder of the study.

#### (ii) Summary

It became clear during the analysis, that relatively small numbers of dwellings were concerned with "rehabilitation, rebuilding or replacement". Therefore these cases were amalgamated with "large additions" as all were concerned with the modernisation of an existing dwelling to some degree, whereas conversion and newbuild applications were involved in providing additional dwellings. This overcame the difficulty in distinguishing between applications for replacement dwellings and those involving rehabilitation or rebuild, although it must be remembered that not all such cases need planning permission and the results therefore understate the true situation. This point is explored in more detail later in this section.



For the purposes of data collection, the view taken was not always the wording on the application form, but the situation deduced from the plans accompanying the application. It should be remarked that there were a number of cases supposedly involving the conversion or rehabilitation of an existing building where the plans clearly showed an intention to rebuild. There were also a number of cases which began with an application to rehabilitate or enlarge and ended with an application to rebuild following the collapse of the original dwelling once work had started. Whether the collapse was by design or accident was, in some cases, very debatable.

There was a very clear difference between the types of applications and the rates of approval. Table 6.12 shows the situation for the period 1974-84 when 55% of approvals in "infill" villages were for new build dwellings, compared with 23% and 26% in other villages and the open countryside. On the other hand only 25% of approvals in infill villages were for schemes based on or around existing buildings compared with 62% and 43% in other villages and open countryside. The rate of approval for conversions was similar in all locations, as was the rate of refusal for new build.

When the information contained in table 6.12 is disaggregated to show the situation before and after 1980, a number of differences can be seen. The rate of new build approvals was similar in "infill" villages in both periods. In "other" settlements, however, there was a significant reduction in the rate of new build approvals from 27% in the pre structure plan period to 16% post 1980. Similarly, outside settlements there was a reduction from 31% to 21% in the rate of new build to other types of approvals.

It would appear from this evidence, that there has been a more rigorous application of structure plan "direction" policies in the study area. The change in policy since 1980 has tended to reduce new build opportunities outside settlements. The corollary appears to be that would-be rural dwellers are forced to take up other housing opportunities. Conversion, for example, formed 11% of approvals in "infill" villages before 1980, compared with 16% over the later period.

**TABLE 6.12a APPLICATIONS BY TYPE, POSITION AND DECISION  
1974-1984**

1974-1984						
	New Build/ Outline	Convert	Rebuild/Rehab Replace/Addit	Caravan	Remove Agric Condition	Total
<b>Infill Villages</b>						
Approvals	115 (55%)	28 (13%)	52 (25%)	14 (7%)	0	209
Refusals	70 (80%)	6 (7%)	5 (6%)	4 (5%)	2 (2%)	87
No Decision	5 (83%)	1 (17%)	0	0	0	6
Totals	190 (63%)	35 (12%)	57 (19%)	18 (6%)	2 (1%)	302
<b>Other Villages</b>						
Approvals	39 (23%)	38 (22%)	80 (47%)	13 (8%)	2 (1%)	172
Refusals	110 (77%)	9 (6%)	14 (10%)	8 (6%)	1 (1%)	142
No Decision	3 (50%)	2 (33%)	1 (17%)	0	0	6
Totals	152 (48%)	49 (15%)	95 (30%)	21 (7%)	3 (1%)	320
<b>Open Countryside</b>						
Approvals	60 (26%)	31 (14%)	97 (43%)	35 (15%)	4 (2%)	227
Refusals	117 (79%)	14 (9%)	4 (3%)	11 (7%)	3 (2%)	149
No Decision	5 (50%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	2 (20%)	0	10
Totals	182 (47%)	47 (12%)	102 (26%)	48 (12%)	7 (2%)	386



TABLE 6.12b APPLICATIONS BY TYPE, POSITION AND DECISION  
1974-1980

1974-1980						
	New Build/ Outline	Convert	Rebuild/Rehab Replace/Addit	Caravan	Remove Agric Condition	Total
<b>Infill Villages</b>						
Approvals	72 (55%)	15 (11%)	34 (26%)	9 (7%)	0	130
Refusals	33 (80%)	1 (2%)	2 (5%)	4 (10%)	1 (2%)	41
No Decision	4 (100%)	0	0	0	0	4
Totals	109 (62%)	16 (9%)	36 (21%)	13 (7%)	1 (1%)	175
<b>Other Villages</b>						
Approvals	29 (27%)	18 (17%)	51 (47%)	9 (8%)	1 (1%)	108
Refusals	75 (82%)	5 (6%)	5 (5%)	6 (7%)	0	91
No Decision	1 (33%)	2 (67%)	0	0	0	3
Totals	105 (52%)	25 (12%)	56 (28%)	15 (7%)	1 (1%)	202
<b>Open Countryside</b>						
Approvals	39 (31%)	15 (12%)	55 (43%)	17 (13%)	1 (1%)	127
Refusals	81 (79%)	8 (8%)	3 (3%)	8 (8%)	3 (3%)	103
No Decision	2 (67%)	0	1 (33%)	0	0	3
Totals	122 (52%)	23 (10%)	59 (25%)	25 (11%)	4 (2%)	233

**TABLE 6.12c APPLICATIONS BY TYPE, POSITION AND DECISION  
1980-84**

1980-1984						
	New Build/ Outline	Convert	Rebuild/Rehab Replace/Addit	Caravan	Remove Agric Condition	Total
<b>Infill Villages</b>						
Approvals	43 (54%)	13 (16%)	18 (23%)	5 (6%)	0	79
Refusals	37 (81%)	5 (11%)	3 (7%)	0	1 (2%)	46
No Decision	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	0	0	0	2
Totals	81 (64%)	19 (15%)	21 (17%)	5 (4%)	1 (1%)	127
<b>Other Villages</b>						
Approvals	10 (16%)	20 (31%)	28 (43%)	5 (8%)	1 (2%)	64
Refusals	35 (69%)	4 (8%)	9 (17%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)	51
No Decision	2 (67%)	0	1 (33%)	0	0	3
Totals	47 (40%)	24 (20%)	38 (32%)	7 (6%)	2 (2%)	118
<b>Open Countryside</b>						
Approvals	21 (21%)	16 (16%)	42 (42%)	18 (18%)	3 (3%)	100
Refusals	36 (80%)	6 (13%)	1 (1%)	3 (7%)	0	46
No Decision	3 (43%)	2 (28%)	0	2 (28%)	0	7
Totals	60 (39%)	24 (16%)	43 (28%)	23 (15%)	3 (2%)	153



Not a large increase, but in "other" settlements where new build would have been discouraged on policy grounds, the figure for conversions rose from 17% of approvals to 31%. In open countryside, the comparable figures were 12% prior to 1980 and 16% after - a small, but still important increase, probably restricted by the fact that there were fewer buildings suited to conversion despite far fewer new-build opportunities.

In view of this evidence it may be expected that there would also be an increase in the proportion of applications for large additions, rehabilitation, replacement etc. These figures are not quite so clear, however, forming 26% of approvals in "infill" villages in the early period and 23% after. In "other" villages the comparable figures were 47% and 43% and outside settlements, 43% and 42% respectively. Thus there was a small reduction in the percentage of approvals for rehabilitation, replacement etc., between the two periods. In view of the apparent increasingly stringent application of policies designed to restrict new build, this result was somewhat surprising. However, it should be viewed with caution for a number of reasons. Firstly, the conversion of a building into a dwelling comprises "development" within the meaning of the Town and Country Planning Acts and therefore always requires planning permission. Thus every case should result in an application. Secondly, the rehabilitation of an existing dwelling does not normally require planning permission, nor do small extensions or "repairs" to existing dwellings. Thus in cases where permission for a new dwelling would not normally be forthcoming, for example in the open countryside or in "non development" villages, potential applicants are often advised that a planning application to rebuild, replace or greatly enlarge an existing dwelling would meet resistance on policy grounds. In the circumstances, many people settle for a more modest extension and "repair" the existing dwelling or extend the property in an incremental fashion rather than test the planning system to its limit. Such people thus either avoid the need to apply for planning permission or their applications have not been picked up for analysis in this study. In order to investigate this further, future studies may well need to consider applications for smaller extensions and applications made under the building regulations as well as larger



alterations. It is clear that there are many examples in the study area of dwellings which have been extensively rebuilt on an "incremental repair basis".

(h) Apparent Source of Demand

Having looked at some of the more obvious links between applications and position, it may be appropriate to examine the information with a view to establishing links between applicants' home addresses and the area in which they seek permission. There is no legal reason why an applicant for a particular proposal should live locally, although it seems reasonable to assume that it is more likely that an application submitted by a local person will be for a local need than an application submitted by a person living outside the district. Before commenting on the information contained in table 6.13, it should be remarked that whilst these investigations may help generate a better understanding of local needs issues, they are not expected to prove definitive as they are based on need expressed in terms of planning applications only. For example, it may be that some applicants are merely realising an opportunity to make some money rather than solve a housing need and this is discussed more fully in chapter 8. Initially no particular attempt has been made to eliminate speculative applications, the tables are presented purely to see whether there is a consistent link between local people's wishes expressed as a planning application for a dwelling and whether these are obviously treated differently to an application presented by an outsider.

Table 6.13 shows that there is a clear and consistent link between decisions on applications submitted by people who lived in the parish and people living outside. For example in villages where there might be expected to be opportunities for infilling, local people received 51% of the approvals and people elsewhere in the district, 34%. In villages where opportunities were fewer, locals achieved 67% of approvals and in the open countryside 74%. This clearly indicates a bias towards locals in more rural areas, although it cannot be used to prove the satisfaction of local needs as locals also achieved the highest rate of refusals in all three locations over the period.



**TABLE 6.13a APPLICANT'S ADDRESS BY DECISION 1974-1984**

1974-1984						
Parish Infill villages		District	County	West Mids	Outside	Total
Approved	(66%)105 (51%)	(76%)72 (34%)	(58%)11 (5%)	(76%)13 (6%)	(73%) 8 (4%)	(69%)209
Not approved	(34%)55 (59%)	(24%)23 (25%)	(42%) 8 (9%)	(24%) 4 (4%)	(27%) 3 (3%)	(31%) 93
Total	(100%)160 (53%)	(100%)95 (31%)	(100%)19 (6%)	(100%)17 (6%)	(100%)11 (4%)	(100%)302
Other villages						
Approved	(53%)116 (67%)	(52%)37 (22%)	(80%)4 (2%)	(71%)10 (6%)	(42%) 5 (3%)	(54%)172
Not approved	(47%)102 (69%)	(48%)34 (23%)	(20%)1 (1%)	(29%) 4 (3%)	(58%) 7 (5%)	(46%)148
Total	(100%)218 (68%)	(100%)71 (22%)	(100%)5 (2%)	(100%)14 (4%)	(100%)12 (4%)	(100%)320
Open Countryside						
Approved	(62%)165 (74%)	(42%)28 (12%)	(55%)17 (7%)	(64%)7 (3%)	(77%)10 (4%)	(58%)227
Not approved	(38%)100 (63%)	(58%)38 (24%)	(45%)14 (9%)	(36%)4 (3%)	(33%) 3 (2%)	(42%)159
Total	(100%)265 (69%)	(100%)66 (17%)	(100%)31 (8%)	(100%)11 (3%)	(100%)13 (3%)	(100%)386
Whole Rural Area						
Approved	(60%)386 (63%)	(59%)137 (23%)	(58%)32 (5%)	(71%)30 (5%)	(64%)23 (4%)	(60%)608
Not approved	(40%)257 (64%)	(41%)95 (24%)	(42%)23 (6%)	(29%)12 (3%)	(36%)13 (3%)	(40%)400
Total	(100%)643 (64%)	(100%)232 (23%)	(100%)55 (5%)	(100%)42 (4%)	(100%)36 (4%)	(100%)1008

**TABLE 6.13b APPLICANT'S ADDRESS BY DECISION 1974-1980**

1974-1980						
Infill villages	Parish	District	County	West Mids	Outside	Total
Approved	(70%)64 (49%)	(80%)43 (33%)	(75%) 6 (5%)	(83%)10 (8%)	(78%) 7 (5%)	(74%)130
Not approved	(30%)28 (62%)	(20%)11 (24%)	(25%) 2 (4%)	(17%) 2 (4%)	(22%) 2 (4%)	(26%) 45
Total	(100%)92 (53%)	(100%)54 (30%)	(100%) 8 (5%)	(100%)12 (7%)	(100%) 9 (5%)	(100%)175
Other villages						
Approved	(53%)73 (68%)	(47%)21 (19%)	(100%)4 (4%)	(86%) 6 (5%)	(50%) 4 (4%)	(53%)108
Not approved	(47%)65 (69%)	(53%)24 (26%)	0	(14%) 1 (1%)	(50%) 4 (4%)	(47%) 94
Total	(100%)138 (68%)	(100%)45 (22%)	(100%)4 (2%)	(100%) 7 (3%)	(100%) 8 (4%)	(100%)202
Open Countryside						
Approved	(58%)90 (71%)	(35%)14 (11%)	(55%)12 (9%)	(60%)6 (5%)	(83%) 5 (4%)	(55%)127
Not approved	(42%)65 (61%)	(65%)26 (25%)	(45%)10 (9%)	(40%)4 (4%)	(17%) 1 (1%)	(45%)106
Total	(100%)155 (67%)	(100%)40 (17%)	(100%)22 (9%)	(100%)10 (4%)	(100%) 6 (3%)	(100%)233
Whole Rural Area						
Approved	(59%)227 (62%)	(56%)78 (21%)	(65%)22 (6%)	(76%)22 (6%)	(70%)16 (4%)	(60%)365
Not approved	(41%)158 (64%)	(44%)61 (25%)	(35%)12 (5%)	(24%) 7 (3%)	(30%) 7 (3%)	(40%)245
Total	(100%)385 (63%)	(100%)139 (23%)	(100%)34 (6%)	(100%)29 (5%)	(100%)23 (4%)	(100%)610



**TABLE 6.13c APPLICANT'S ADDRESS BY DECISION 1980-1984**

1980-1984						
Parish Infill villages		District	County	West Mids	Outside	Total
Approved	(60%)41 (52%)	(71%)29 (37%)	(45%) 5 (6%)	(60%) 3 (4%)	(50%) 1 (1%)	(62%)79
Not approved	(40%)27 (56%)	(29%)12 (25%)	(55%) 6 (13%)	(40%) 2 (4%)	(50%) 1 (2%)	(38%)48
Total	(100%)68 (54%)	(100%)41 (32%)	(100%)11 (9%)	(100%) 5 (4%)	(100%) 2 (2%)	(100%)127
Other villages						
Approved	(54%)43 (67%)	(62%)16 (25%)	0	(57%) 4 (6%)	(25%) 1 (2%)	(54%)64
Not approved	(46%)37 (69%)	(38%)10 (19%)	(100%)1 (2%)	(43%) 3 (5%)	(75%) 3 (5%)	(46%)51
Total	(100%)80 (68%)	(100%)26 (22%)	(100%)1 (1%)	(100%) 7 (6%)	(100%) 4 (3%)	(100%)18
Open Countryside						
Approved	(68%)75 (75%)	(54%)14 (14%)	(56%) 5 (5%)	(100%)1 (1%)	(71%) 5 (5%)	(65%)100
Not approved	(32%)35 (66%)	(46%)12 (23%)	(44%) 4 (7%)	0	(29%) 2 (4%)	(35%) 46
Total	(100%)110 (72%)	(100%)26 (16%)	(100%) 9 (6%)	(100%)1 (1%)	(100%) 7 (5%)	(100%)153
Whole Rural Area						
Approved	(62%)159 (65%)	(63%)59 (24%)	(48%)10 (4%)	(62%) 8 (3%)	(54%) 7 (3%)	(61%)243
Not approved	(38%) 99 (64%)	(37%)34 (22%)	(52%)11 (7%)	(38%) 5 (3%)	(46%) 6 (4%)	(39%)155
Total	(100%)258 (65%)	(100%)93 (23%)	(100%)21 (5%)	(100%)13 (3%)	(100%)13 (3%)	(100%)398

The fact that the approval rate does favour locals can be further shown by combining the approval rate for applicants living within the parish with that of applicants living in the district. Table 6.13 shows that between 1974 and 1984 this was 85% in infill villages, 89% in other villages and 86% in the open countryside - a fairly consistent rate of approval overall but with applicants outside the parish, although within the district, receiving a rate of approval diminishing from 34% in infill villages and 22% in other villages to 12% outside settlements.

When comparing the situation before and after the adoption of the structure plan, the table shows that there has been a small but significant change since 1980 in that overall, locals have achieved a marginally better rate of approval. This appears to indicate that locals are achieving a greater proportion of planning permissions than non locals in the face of fewer development opportunities and more stringently applied settlement policies, but this must be considered alongside the results shown in tables 6.7 concerned with local need conditions.

The fact that local needs are being considered can be demonstrated by looking at the comparative proportions of approvals to refusals for the various applicant's groups, i.e. by examining the table on a vertical, rather than horizontal basis. This clearly shows that outside settlements, applicants with an address inside the parish were achieving a 62% approval rate over the period, compared to applicants within the district who could only manage 42%. Figures for other categories were considered to be based on too small a sample to be accurate.

In the pre-structure plan period, local people achieved a 58% success rate, compared with 35% for district applicants. In the later period, this had risen to a 68% approval rate for locals, compared with 54% for applicants with a district address. There was a small sample size for all categories except locals, but it is felt that this proves the point - there is no doubt that applicants from within the parish have consistently achieved a significantly greater rate of approval of applications for dwellings outside settlements than people living



elsewhere. This shows that the needs of people within the parish are receiving different treatment to people living outside when applications for dwellings outside settlements are considered.

It may well be that the only reason for the difference between the "local" approval rate and that of other applicants, is that local people own the land, are more aware of the opportunities available and are applying for their own housing and financial needs via speculative applications. This can be tested to some extent by reassembling the figures looking for the reason given for requiring the dwelling by the address of the applicant.

The results are shown in table 6.14, which demonstrates that over the periods examined, applicants living in the parish accounted for over 60% of all applications, 80% of all applications for agricultural workers and over 80% of applications for personal needs. This contrasts with the rates for speculative applications where locals accounted for 60% of the total, indicating that, on paper at least, local people are expressing their particular needs in the form of planning applications. When the figures for applicants with an address within the parish are combined with those for applicants living in the district, the situation appears even clearer; in the early period, such applicants submitted 87% of applications citing agricultural needs and all the applications for personal needs, compared with 84% of speculative applications.

Following the adoption of the structure plan, the comparable figures for applicants from parish and district were 95% for agricultural needs, 87% for personal needs and 87% of speculative applications. In view of the relatively small numbers of applications involved however, no fundamental significance should be attached to the first two of these changes. It is clear that there are no great alterations in emphasis, but that pressure for development is expressed by applicants living within the district. The figures shown in the table in the column labelled "speculative, holiday etc" contain all those applications where no specific reason was given for wanting the

**TABLE 6.14 APPLICANT'S ADDRESS BY REASON FOR DWELLING NEED**

1974-1984									
Address	Agric for. worker	Other local worker	Retired local	Personal/ relation	Spec/holiday need	Council houses	Gipsy/ Traveller	Misc	Total
Parish	(80%) 117 (18%)	(68%) 17 (3%)	(100%) 3 (1%)	(84%) 52 (8%)	(59%) 445 (69%)	0	(80%) 4 (1%)	(71%) 5 (1%)	(64%) 643
District	(10%) 15 (6%)	(20%) 5 (2%)	0	(11%) 7 (3%)	(26%) 192 (83%)	(100%) 11 (5%)	(20%) 1 (1%)	(14%) 1 (1%)	(23%) 232
County	(7%) 10 (18%)	0	0	0	(6%) 44 (80%)	0	0	(14%) 1 (2%)	(6%) 55
West Mid	(2%) 3 (7%)	(12%) 3 (7%)	0	0	(5%) 38 (93%)	0	0	0	(44%) 44
Other	(1%) 1 (3%)	0	0	(5%) 3 (9%)	(4%) 30 (88%)	0	0	0	(3%) 34
Total	(100%) 146 (14%)	(100%) 25 (2%)	(100%) 3 (1%)	(100%) 62 (6%)	(100%) 749 (74%)	(100%) 11 (1%)	(100%) 5 (1%)	(100%) 7 (1%)	(100%) 1008
1974-1980									
Parish	(80%) 69 (18%)	(71%) 12 (3%)	(100%) 3 (1%)	(85%) 33 (9%)	(58%) 263 (68%)	0	(100%) 2 (1%)	(75%) 3 (1%)	(63%) 385
District	(7%) 6 (4%)	(24%) 4 (3%)	0	(15%) 6 (4%)	(26%) 117 (84%)	(100%) 5 (4%)	0	(25%) 1 (1%)	(23%) 139
County	(8%) 7 (21%)	0	0	0	(6%) 27 (79%)	0	0	0	(6%) 34
West Mid	(3%) 3 (10%)	(6%) 1 (3%)	0	0	(6%) 25 (86%)	0	0	0	(5%) 29
Other	(1%) 1 (4%)	0	0	0	(5%) 22 (96%)	0	0	0	(4%) 23
Total	(100%) 86	(100%) 17	(100%) 3	(100%) 39	(100%) 454	(100%) 5	(100%) 2	(100%) 4	(100%) 610
1980-1984									
Parish	(80%) 48 (19%)	(63%) 5 (2%)	0	(83%) 19 (7%)	(62%) 182 (71%)	0	(67%) 2 (1%)	(67%) 2 (1%)	(65%) 258
District	(15%) 9 (10%)	(12%) 1 (1%)	0	(4%) 1 (1%)	(25%) 75 (80%)	(100%) 6 (6%)	(33%) 1 (1%)	0	(23%) 93
County	(5%) 3 (14%)	0	0	0	(6%) 17 (81%)	0	0	(33%) 1 (5%)	(6%) 21
West Mid	0	(25%) 2 (13%)	0	0	(4%) 13 (87%)	0	0	0	(4%) 15
Other	0	0	0	(13%) 3 (27%)	(3%) 8 (73%)	0	0	0	(3%) 11
Total	(100%) 60	(100%) 8	0	(100%) 23	(100%) 295	(100%) 6	(100%) 3	(100%) 3	(100%) 398



dwelling or where a holiday home was specified. In the 1974-1980 period, 17% of applications of this type were submitted by applicants from outside the district, but during the 1980-1984 period, this had reduced to 13%.

It appears, that if there is pressure for speculative development in the study area, then it is expressed in an oblique fashion via people already living in the district. A number of possible theories may be advanced about this and the subject is re-examined in the conclusion to this section. However, before leaving the subject of addresses, it would be interesting to examine those applications submitted via an agent. This may reveal a little more on the subject of external housing pressure than the applicant's address. For example, it may be that agents from outside the area are responsible for persuading local people to apply for planning permission on rural sites.

(i) Address of agent

It is normal practice for someone who wishes to submit an application to do so via a third party who acts as their agent in filling in forms, writing supporting letters, negotiating with the planning authority etc. This happens more often if the applicant is not aware of the procedures involved, or seeks the advice of someone who may counsel him on the rules and policies operated in the area. Frequently local firms of estate agents, surveyors or solicitors are used. Often an applicant from outside the area would use an agent from his home area.

Each application was examined and the address of the agent (if any) was classified into 4 categories depending on whether the address was in the district, the county, elsewhere in the West Midlands or elsewhere in the country. When the information was analysed, however, it became clear that most applicants either did not employ an agent, or used one within the district. The remaining categories were therefore gathered together to produce the results shown in table 6.15.

TABLE 6.15a AGENT'S ADDRESS BY DECISION 1974-1984

1974-1984				
Infill villages	No Agent	District	Elsewhere	Total
Approved	(70%) 76 (36%)	(71%)100 (48%)	(62%) 33 (16%)	(69%)209
Not approved	(30%) 32 (34%)	(29%) 41 (44%)	(38%) 20 (22%)	(31%) 93
Total	(100%)108 (36%)	(100%)141 (47%)	(100%) 53 (17%)	(100%)302
Other villages				
Approved	(51%) 67 (39%)	(54%) 80 (47%)	(59%) 25 (14%)	(54%)172
Not approved	(49%) 64 (43%)	(46%) 67 (45%)	(41%) 17 (12%)	(46%)148
Total	(100%)131 (41%)	(100%)147 (46%)	(100%) 42 (13%)	(100%)320
Open Countryside				
Approved	(50%) 89 (39%)	(65%) 91 (40%)	(68%) 47 (21%)	(58%)227
Not approved	(50%) 89 (56%)	(35%) 48 (30%)	(32%) 22 (14%)	(42%)159
Total	(100%)178 (41%)	(100%)139 (46%)	(100%) 69 (13%)	(100%)386
Whole Rural Area				
Approved	(56%)232 (38%)	(63%)271 (45%)	(64%)105 (17%)	(60%)608
Not approved	(44%)185 (46%)	(37%)156 (39%)	(36%) 59 (15%)	(40%)400
Total	(100%)417 (41%)	(100%)427 (42%)	(100%)164 (16%)	(100%)1008



**TABLE 6.15b AGENT'S ADDRESS BY DECISION 1974-1980**

1974-1980				
Infill villages	No Agent	District	Elsewhere	Total
Approved	(75%) 52 (40%)	(74%) 58 (45%)	(71%) 20 (15%)	(74%)130
Not approved	(25%) 17 (38%)	(26%) 20 (44%)	(29%) 8 (18%)	(26%) 45
Total	(100%) 69 (39%)	(100%) 78 (45%)	(100%) 28 (16%)	(100%)175
Other villages				
Approved	(52%) 44 (41%)	(52%) 80 (42%)	(64%) 18 (17%)	(53%)108
Not approved	(48%) 41 (44%)	(48%) 43 (46%)	(36%) 10 (10%)	(47%) 94
Total	(100%) 85 (42%)	(100%) 89 (44%)	(100%) 28 (14%)	(100%)202
Open Countryside				
Approved	(46%) 51 (40%)	(61%) 47 (37%)	(66%) 29 (23%)	(55%)127
Not approved	(54%) 61 (58%)	(39%) 30 (28%)	(34%) 15 (14%)	(45%)106
Total	(100%)112 (48%)	(100%) 77 (33%)	(100%) 44 (19%)	(100%)233
Whole Rural Area				
Approved	(55%)147 (40%)	(62%)151 (41%)	(67%) 67 (18%)	(60%)365
Not approved	(45%)119 (49%)	(38%) 93 (38%)	(33%) 33 (13%)	(40%)245
Total	(100%)266 (44%)	(100%)244 (40%)	(100%)100 (16%)	(100%)610

**TABLE 6.15c AGENT'S ADDRESS BY DECISION 1980-1984**

1980-1984				
Infill villages	No Agent	District	Elsewhere	Total
Approved	(62%) 24 (30%)	(67%) 42 (53%)	(52%) 13 (17%)	(62%) 79
Not approved	(38%) 15 (33%)	(33%) 21 (46%)	(48%) 12 (21%)	(38%) 48
Total	(100%) 39 (30%)	(100%) 63 (50%)	(100%) 25 (20%)	(100%)127
Other villages				
Approved	(50%) 23 (36%)	(59%) 39 (53%)	(50%) 7 (11%)	(54%) 64
Not approved	(50%) 23 (43%)	(41%) 24 (44%)	(50%) 7 (13%)	(46%) 54
Total	(100%) 46 (39%)	(100%) 58 (49%)	(100%) 14 (12%)	(100%)118
Open Countryside				
Approved	(58%) 38 (38%)	(71%) 44 (44%)	(72%) 18 (18%)	(65%)100
Not approved	(42%) 28 (53%)	(29%) 18 (34%)	(28%) 7 (13%)	(35%) 53
Total	(100%) 66 (43%)	(100%) 62 (41%)	(100%) 25 (16%)	(100%)153
Whole Rural Area				
Approved	(54%) 85 (35%)	(66%)120 (49%)	(59%) 38 (16%)	(61%)243
Not approved	(46%) 66 (43%)	(34%) 63 (41%)	(41%) 26 (17%)	(39%)155
Total	(100%)151 (38%)	(100%)183 (46%)	(100%) 64 (16%)	(100%)398



The table shows that over the entire period, 41% of applicants did not employ an agent at all, 42% employed an agent from within the district whilst the remaining applicants used agents from outside the district. In the earlier period, 44% of applicants did not employ an agent, compared with 38% after 1980. A change which might perhaps be attributed to the application becoming more important to the applicant, although there is no indication as to whether this was due to pressing local need or an increase in the value of housing plots in the rural area.

On examining table 6.15, it can be seen that in the early period around 40% of approved applications were submitted by applicants without an agent, there being little difference in this rate either inside or outside settlements. The approval rate for applications submitted by agents from within the district reduced from 45% in "infill villages", to 37% outside settlements, whilst agents from outside the district received 15% of the approvals in "infill villages", 17% in other villages and 23% in the open countryside.

After 1980, there is a consequential change in that the rate of submission of "no agent" applications which were subsequently approved, fell, being 30% in infill villages, 36% in other villages and 38% in the open countryside. This would appear to suggest that either applicants for dwellings outside settlements take a greater personal interest in the application or that perhaps they are unable to afford professional advice. The percentage of approved applications submitted by agents from within the district dropped from 53% in villages to 44% in the open countryside, but this represents an advance on the rate for the earlier period. Agents from other areas attained an average of 16% of approvals over the 1980-84 period, similar to the earlier period.

The more interesting situation is shown when the tables are analysed to show rates of approval/refusal rather than rates of total approvals (i.e. analysed vertically rather than horizontally). In the early period, applicants employing no agent, received a 75% approval rate in infill villages, 52% in other villages and 46% outside settlements. The comparable figures for those employing an agent from within the



district were 74%, 52% and 61%. In the later period this figure alters considerably with "no agent" applicants receiving a 62% approval rate in "infill villages", 50% in other villages and 58% outside settlements. Comparable figures for applicants employing a "district agent" were 67%, 59% and 71%.

It seems that in the early period, amateur applicants were able to achieve results on a par with professionals, gaining approval rates very close to the average. The exception occurs in the case of applications for dwellings in the open countryside where the professionals achieve significantly higher success rates.

In the 1980-1984 period, there is a clear difference with professionals consistently attaining above average rates of approval in all types of settlement, whereas non professionals only just managed to match the average approval rate in infill villages.

The reasons for the difference are not entirely clear, but this study is concerned with settlements where there have been (in theory at least), a finite number of development opportunities over a ten year period. It is assumed that an agent would be employed because he is better able to prepare, present and argue a case for his client. Therefore it is suggested that the differences between the figures may represent an early indication of increasing pressure for development. Local people have been able to "pick off" all the easy sites without professional help in the early years except outside settlements, where because of planning restrictions and fewer development opportunities, professional assistance was required more often.

In the later period, the development opportunities which exist were fewer in number, less easy to identify and therefore more difficult for an inexperienced person to prepare, present and argue. However, development opportunities outside settlements rely on local needs issues and therefore a genuine case should stand on its own merits and should not be unduly influenced by the manner in which the case is argued.



(j) Parish Councils' attitude

In order to look further into the issue of local need, the figures can be combined to show a local third party view towards applications. Information was collected on the attitude of neighbours to development proposals, but the results were not capable of useful interpretation in that most neighbours tended to object to new development, apparently on principle. Parish councils, on the other hand, appear to have acted in a more objective manner, considering proposals seriously and offering comment which could be recorded for analysis, but which was not necessarily acted upon by the local planning authority when taking a final decision.

Results of consultations with parish councils shown on the files examined were recorded under separate headings covering: "support for the application", including conditional support; "objection"; and a "neutral" stance, often expressed as "no objection". The analysis is contained in table 6.16.

(i) Attitude of Parish Council towards applications

Between 1974 and 1984, parish councils supported some 16% of applications in infill villages, 14% in other settlements and 16% in open countryside. When this figure is examined more closely, however, there is a significant change in attitude between the early period and the post structure plan period. Between 1974 and 1980, the figures indicate a 10% support rate in infill villages, 12% in other villages and 12% outside settlements. After 1980, however, the comparable figures are 25% for infill villages, 17% for other villages and 22% outside settlements. Whilst, apart from these figures, there is no direct evidence to account for this change, it could be that parish councils are now taking more interest in applications. This may be expected to show up in the "no comment" column as a decrease over the years. Instead the figure shows that parish councils made no comments on 62% of applications in infill villages, 46% in other settlements and 54% outside settlements in 1974-1980, but the comparable figures for 1980-1984 are 58%, 68% and 67% respectively.

**TABLE 6.16a PARISH COUNCIL'S ATTITUDE 1974-1984**

1974-1984					
Decision	No Comment	Neutral	Support	Object	Total
<b>Infill Villages</b>					
Approve	(72%) 132 (63%)	(90%) 26 (12%)	(73%) 36 (17%)	(37%) 15 (7%)	209
Refuse	(25%) 46 (53%)	(10%) 3 (3%)	(27%) 13 (15%)	(61%) 25 (29%)	87
No Decision	(3%) 5 (83%)	0	0	(2%) 1 (17%)	6
Total	(100%) 183 (61%)	(100%) 29 (10%)	(100%) 49 (16%)	(100%) 41 (14%)	302
<b>Other Villages</b>					
Approve	(53%) 91 (53%)	(75%) 51 (30%)	(55%) 24 (14%)	(17%) 6 (3%)	172
Refuse	(45%) 77 (54%)	(24%) 16 (11%)	(45%) 20 (14%)	(83%) 29 (20%)	142
No Decision	(2%) 5 (83%)	(1%) 1 (17%)	0	0	6
Total	(100%) 173 (54%)	(100%) 68 (21%)	(100%) 44 (14%)	(100%) 35 (11%)	320
<b>Open Countryside</b>					
Approve	(61%) 140 (62%)	(58%) 38 (17%)	(66%) 41 (18%)	(26%) 8 (4%)	227
Refuse	(36%) 82 (55%)	(38%) 25 (17%)	(32%) 20 (13%)	(71%) 22 (15%)	149
No Decision	(3%) 6 (60%)	(4%) 2 (20%)	(2%) 1 (10%)	(3%) 1 (10%)	10
Total	(100%) 228 (59%)	(100%) 65 (17%)	(100%) 62 (16%)	(100%) 31 (8%)	386



**TABLE 6.16b PARISH COUNCIL'S ATTITUDE 1974-1980**

1974-1980					
Decision	No Comment	Neutral	Support	Object	Total
Infill Villages					
Approve	(76%) 83 (64%)	(89%) 24 (19%)	(88%) 15 (12%)	(36%) 8 (6%)	130
Refuse	(20%) 22 (54%)	(11%) 3 (7%)	(12%) 2 (5%)	(64%) 14 (34%)	41
No Decision	(4%) 4 (100%)	0	0	0	4
Total	(100%) 109 (62%)	(100%) 27 (15%)	(100%) 17 (10%)	(100%) 22 (13%)	175
Other Villages					
Approve	(51%) 47 (44%)	(74%) 49 (45%)	(46%) 11 (10%)	(5%) 1 (1%)	108
Refuse	(47%) 44 (48%)	(24%) 16 (18%)	(54%) 13 (14%)	(95%) 18 (20%)	91
No Decision	(2%) 2 (67%)	(2%) 1 (33%)	0	0	3
Total	(100%) 93 (46%)	(100%) 66 (33%)	(100%) 24 (12%)	(100%) 19 (9%)	202
Open Countryside					
Approve	(57%) 71 (56%)	(61%) 36 (28%)	(54%) 15 (12%)	(24%) 5 (4%)	127
Refuse	(42%) 53 (52%)	(37%) 22 (21%)	(43%) 12 (12%)	(76%) 16 (15%)	103
No Decision	(1%) 1 (33%)	(2%) 1 (33%)	(3%) 1 (33%)	0	3
Total	(100%) 125 (54%)	(100%) 59 (25%)	(100%) 28 (12%)	(100%) 21 (9%)	233

**TABLE 6.16c PARISH COUNCIL'S ATTITUDE 1980-1984**

1980-1984					
Decision	No Comment	Neutral	Support	Object	Total
<b>Infill Villages</b>					
Approve	(66%) 49 (62%)	(100%) 2 (3%)	(66%) 21 (27%)	(37%) 7 (9%)	79
Refuse	(32%) 24 (52%)	0	(34%) 11 (23%)	(58%) 11 (23%)	46
No Decision	(2%) 1 (50%)	0	0	(5%) 1 (50%)	2
Total	(100%) 74 (58%)	(100%) 2 (2%)	(100%) 32 (25%)	(100%) 19 (15%)	127
<b>Other Villages</b>					
Approve	(55%) 44 (69%)	(100%) 2 (3%)	(65%) 13 (20%)	(31%) 5 (8%)	64
Refuse	(41%) 33 (65%)	0	(35%) 7 (14%)	(69%) 11 (22%)	51
No Decision	(4%) 3 (100%)	0	0	0	3
Total	(100%) 80 (68%)	(100%) 2 (2%)	(100%) 20 (17%)	(100%) 16 (14%)	118
<b>Open Countryside</b>					
Approve	(67%) 69 (69%)	(33%) 2 (2%)	(76%) 26 (26%)	(30%) 3 (3%)	100
Refuse	(28%) 29 (63%)	(50%) 3 (7%)	(24%) 8 (17%)	(60%) 6 (13%)	46
No Decision	(5%) 5 (71%)	(17%) 1 (14%)	0	(10%) 1 (14%)	7
Total	(100%) 103 (67%)	(100%) 6 (4%)	(100%) 34 (22%)	(100%) 10 (7%)	153



This would appear to indicate that they are interested in commenting on applications but are directing their comments more specifically and that perhaps a "no comment" is sometimes a tacit form of approval. If this were the case, then it may be expected that the rate of objection would also have significantly altered. This has happened, but not to the extent which might have been expected in the circumstances.

In the early period, parish councils objected to 13% of applications in infill villages, compared with 15% in the later period. The comparable figures for other villages were 9% and 14% and for applications outside settlements 9% and 7%, respectively. No great significance should be attached to these changes as the numbers of applications involved are relatively small, but it is important to note that when it comes to an application for a new dwelling in a rural area, the locally elected parish council are nowadays more likely to register their support for the applicant than to object to his proposals.

(ii) Attitude of Planning Authority to Parish Council comments

Table 6.16 has been ordered and used to show the parish councils' rate of support or otherwise for applications. The figures can also be used to indicate how often the parish attitude was reflected in the final decision, the rates being calculated on a vertical rather than horizontal basis.

The extent of correlation varied. For example, over the entire period in "infill villages", 73% of applications supported by the parish councils were approved, as were 72% of applications on which they made no comment. Conversely, 61% of applications to which the parish councils objected were refused. This difference is probably to be expected. There are, by definition, some development opportunities in such villages and it might be expected that some would occur in settlements where parish councils would object, but where in fact there was no legitimate policy or land use based reason for the proposal to be refused.



The more interesting situation occurs in villages where there were not expected to be development opportunities and outside recognised settlements, in other words, where local needs issues might be expected to be more crucial. In the former there was a very high correlation between parish council wishes and refusal, 83% of applications to which the parish council objected were refused. On the other hand, only 55% of "supported" applications received approval, 53% of "no comment" applications and 75% of "neutral" applications. This would appear to indicate that there is a considerable difference in opinion between parish councils and the district council as to what constitutes a "local need".

Outside settlements, the situation is a little more even, with 71% of "objections" refused and 66% of "supported" applications approved. Whilst this appears to indicate a more convergent approach than previously, there is still a considerable difference between parish and district in terms of the sheer numbers of applications for new dwellings which were not objected to at the parish level - but which did not receive planning permission - involving some 136 applications outside recognised settlements.

When the figures are compared, before and after 1980, there are some important differences to be seen, although care must be taken as some of the rates are calculated from very small numbers of applications. There is an increase from 54% to 76% in the rate of parish supported approvals outside settlements. There is also an increase in the rate of approval of "no comment" cases from 57% to 67% and a corresponding reduction in the refusal rate. This would appear to indicate that the district council is exercising its discretion and is now more likely to support local opinion than previously. There are considered to be too few cases in each category to draw many more conclusions from table 6.16, although the figures can be reassembled to try to assess the overall numbers of applications where there were differences of opinion between the local parish council and the planning authority. This is more clearly illustrated by table 6.17 which condenses the information in table 6.16 to a simple approved/not approved and objection/no objection form.



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**TABLE 6.17 PARISH COUNCIL'S ATTITUDE (CONDENSED) 1974-1984**


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decision	No objection	Objection	Total
<b>Infill Villages</b>			
Approved	(74%)194 (93%)	(37%) 15 (7%)	209
Not Approved	(26%) 67 (72%)	(63%) 26 (28%)	93
Total	(100%)261 (86%)	(100%) 41 (14%)	302
<b>Other Villages</b>			
Approved	(58%)166 (97%)	(17%) 6 (3%)	172
Not Approved	(42%)119 (80%)	(83%)29 (20%)	148
Total	(100%)285 (89%)	(100%)35 (11%)	320
<b>Open Countryside</b>			
Approved	(58%)219 (96%)	(80%) 8 (4%)	227
Not Approved	(42%)157 (99%)	(20%) 2 (1%)	159
Total	(100%)376 (97%)	(100%)10 (3%)	386
<b>Total Rural Area</b>			
Approved	(63%)579 (95%)	(34%)29 (5%)	608
Not Approved	(37%)343 (86%)	(66%)57 (14%)	400
Total	(100%)922 (91%)	(100%)86 (9%)	1008

Overall, then, there were 1008 applications, parish councils objected to almost 9% and did not object to the remaining 91%(922). However the local authority were only prepared to approve 63% of these, leaving 57% (343) in contention. Table 6.17 shows that of these, 80% (276) were outside villages where there were expected to be infill opportunities. In these areas it may be expected that issues of local need would be more important than elsewhere and that in appropriate circumstances, parish councils would be prepared to support such cases. In fact, over the 10 year study period, there were only 41 applications outside infill villages where the local authority refused planning permission despite parish council support. Only 15 of these refusals occurred in the 1980-1984 period.

Within the study area, the statistics appear to show that parish council's views are important issues in the consideration of planning applications concerned with new dwellings. The more rural the area, the more importance appears to be attached to the parish view. Judging by the differences in approval rates between applications receiving tacit approval and active support, the conclusion to be drawn is that applications which have the active support of the local parish council are more likely to receive planning permission. Clearly then, the locally elected parish councils can affect the outcome of a planning application in the rural area despite their lack of executive powers. Their views influence the final decision taken by the district councillors, normally through their planning sub-committee or, for important or controversial applications, through their planning and highways committee. In extreme cases neither committee will resolve the case and will recommend a decision to the full council. However, this description of the democratic, legal hierarchy omits to mention one of the most important factors in the outcome of the application - the recommendation of the planning officer.

### (iii) Recommendation of Planning Officer

In order to investigate whether the officers' recommendation was always followed by elected members and whether there was any variation between different types of settlements, the figures were



run in similar format to previously. Table 6.18 shows the results, again, split to show the entire period both before and after structure plan adoption.

The tables show that in most cases, the planning officer's recommendation was adhered to and that there was little difference between the earlier and later periods. In fact, over the entire period, members overruled the planning officer on only 16 occasions. Five times they resolved to refuse an application recommended for approval and 11 times, they approved applications recommended for refusal. About the only other noteworthy conclusion which can be drawn from the figures is that since 1980, members have tended to refuse fewer applications recommended for approval and to approve a higher proportion of applications recommended for refusal. As the figures involved were small, however, it would be inappropriate to attach any major significance to them. It can be suggested, however, that since the structure plan policies were introduced, members appear to be more prepared to back applicants in cases of doubt.

**TABLE 6.18a APPLICATIONS BY DECISION BY RECOMMENDATION  
OF PLANNING OFFICER 1974-1984**

1974-1984				
	Recommend Approve	Recommend Refuse	Recommend No Recommend	Total
<b>Infill Villages</b>				
Decision: Approve	206 (99%)	3 (1%)	0	209
Refuse	0	86 (99%)	1 (1%)	87
No Decision	0	0	6 (100%)	6
Total	206	89	7	302
<b>Other Villages</b>				
Approve	169 (98%)	3 (2%)	0	172
Refuse	3 (1%)	139 (98%)	0	142
No Decision	0	1 (17%)	5 (83%)	6
Total	172	143	5	320
<b>Open Countryside</b>				
Approve	220 (97%)	5 (2%)	2 (1%)	227
Refuse	2 (19%)	147 (99%)	0	149
No Decision	0	2 (20%)	8 (80%)	10
Total	222	154	10	386



**TABLE 6.18b APPLICATIONS BY DECISION BY RECOMMENDATION  
OF PLANNING OFFICER 1974-1980**

1974-1980				
	Recommend Approve	Recommend Refuse	Recommend No Recommend	Total
<b>Infill Villages</b>				
Decision: Approve	129 (99%)	1 (1%)	0	130
Refuse	0	40 (98%)	1 (2%)	41
No Decision	0	0	4 (100%)	4
Total	129	41	5	175
<b>Other Villages</b>				
Approve	107 (99%)	1 (1%)	0	108
Refuse	3 (3%)	88 (97%)	0	91
No Decision	0	0	3 (100%)	3
Total	110	89	3	202
<b>Open Countryside</b>				
Approve	122 (96%)	3 (2%)	2 (2%)	127
Refuse	1 (1%)	102 (99%)	0	103
No Decision	0	0	3 (100%)	3
Total	123	105	5	233

**TABLE 6.18c APPLICATIONS BY DECISION BY RECOMMENDATION  
OF PLANNING OFFICER 1980-1984**

1980-1984				
	Recommend Approve	Recommend Refuse	Recommend No Recommend	Total
<b>Infill Villages</b>				
Decision: Approve	77 (97%)	2 (3%)	0	79
Refuse	0	46 (100%)	0	46
No Decision	0	0	2 (100%)	2
Total	77	48	2	127
<b>Other Villages</b>				
Approve	62 (97%)	2 (3%)	0	64
Refuse	0	51 (100%)	0	51
No Decision	0	1 (33%)	2 (67%)	3
Total	62	54	3	118
<b>Open Countryside</b>				
Approve	98 (98%)	2 (2%)	0	100
Refuse	1 (2%)	45 (98%)	0	46
No Decision	0	2 (29%)	5 (71%)	7
Total	99	49	5	153



## 6:6 Summary and Conclusion

Previous research, in general terms, has been critical of current rural settlement policies. In particular, policies dealing with local needs issues have been criticised for being less effective than they might be. Before considering this issue in the context of the study, it should be remembered that its empirical sections have been concerned exclusively with one rural area and within it, only planning applications for housing outside major settlements and the conclusions drawn and comments made must be tempered by this qualification. The study has looked at a fairly narrow section of the planning system and, thus far, has not questioned its validity or efficacy. In addition, it should be pointed out that the results of the study are not necessarily conclusive. In particular, some categories contained small numbers of applications. In such cases there could be justifiable criticism of the statistical significance of the results and therefore an attempt has been made to avoid drawing conclusions in such circumstances.

Nevertheless, the results clearly indicate that, in the rural area studied, there was a sustained demand for housing outside the major villages. Of the applications examined, 74% were apparently wanted for reasons other than local need and 60% of these were granted planning permission. The same rate of approval applied to the remaining 26% of applications which, it was claimed, were wanted to serve some sort of local need (tables 6.4 and 6.5).

Over the study period only 34% of approvals were for dwellings in villages where there were infill opportunities. Some 28% of approvals were in other settlements and a surprising 38% outside settlements altogether (table 6.6). It might be expected that the latter approvals would be those relating to local needs. That this is not so can be seen from the fact that 155 applications for housing claiming to be meeting some sort of local need were approved over the study period, but 227 applications were approved outside settlements. In fact over 70% of all planning permissions granted over the period



were free of any conditions relating to occupancy, although a greater proportion of approvals outside settlements had occupancy conditions attached. In view of its importance, this feature is examined in more detail in chapter 7.

There is clear evidence that the situation with regard to new housing has become more difficult since 1980. All the figures show that whilst there have been opportunities for building in the rural area, most of the "new build" choices have been in villages where there were expected to be infill sites available. By definition, these sites are limited in number and new plots will not replace those which have been built upon unless present policies are changed. Demand for rural housing continues, however, and the results of the research indicate that diminishing opportunities for new build tend to transfer demand to the existing building stock by means of rehabilitation, extension and even conversion of non residential buildings.

There appears to have been a steady demand for speculative housing opportunities, in both periods examined. These formed some 75% of all applications and accounted for around the same proportion of refusals and approvals. Similarly, there was a steady demand for local needs houses with a similar rate of approval or refusal. It must be expected that a continuing demand for speculative housing, diminishing opportunities for new build and a finite supply of existing or potential conversions will lead to a shortfall of supply over demand and price rises. This type of situation has been described by Cloke (1983), Clark (1982), Shucksmith (1981) and other contemporary commentators and does not augur well for local people on low rural incomes, particularly those who may be unable to argue the case for an essential local need. However this must be weighed against the results of the present study which show that local people, if not those with defined local needs, achieved a substantial proportion of the planning permissions granted. There is firm evidence that people living locally receive a higher rate of planning application approval than non locals and, clearly, some of their needs for housing outside identified settlements are being met (tables 6.7, 6.8, 6.9, 6.13, 6.14).



It has not, of course, been possible to identify local needs other than those made known in the planning applications examined, but if the views expressed by parish councils are considered to reflect local need, then it is very rare for the local authority to refuse an application outside a settlement which has been supported by the parish council (table 6.17). There is evidence that in cases of doubt, the planning committee were more likely to approve an application recommended by the planning officer for refusal, than refuse an application recommended for approval (table 6.18). There is no doubt that in borderline cases, the decision is often made in favour of the local person. There is also evidence to show that, as the situation has become more difficult, local people have achieved a greater rate of application approval, significantly so, outside recognised settlements.

Whilst this appears to be proof that local needs are being catered for, if not satisfied, outside settlements, care should be taken in drawing conclusions from the tables. As explained previously in (h), pressure for development appears to be expressed mainly through applicants who live in the district. Rather than assume these to be local people, an alternative theory may be that incomers tend to move into the district in order to be in a better position to exploit opportunities to achieve their eventual rural home. Whilst the possibility cannot be investigated empirically by this present study, through dealing with enquiries from members of the public in the course of his job, the writer is aware of such interest shown by many people. They wish to move from Shrewsbury's urban area, or from some of its major villages, into a rural cottage, "preferably with a little piece of land". Living within the district seems to enable people to investigate opportunities more thoroughly and such action appears to be directly comparable with the in-migration pattern noticed in the Stratford-on-Avon area where incomers favour the existing housing stock (Stratford-on-Avon District council 1983).

A further factor which has not yet been mentioned in relation to local need, is the "knock-on" effect caused by people from outside the parish moving into villages where there are development opportunities and either displacing local people or encouraging those



with some form of justifiable local needs case, to move on to smaller settlements. This does not show up clearly in the tables, but in reading through the case studies in order to prepare the tables, there were examples of farmers employing workers or relatives living in a nearby village on a satisfactory basis for many years. The decision to apply for a dwelling to accommodate these people on the holding, often seems to coincide with the "discovery" of local needs issues and the purchase of additional land or some other major investment on the holding. Whilst there is only anecdotal evidence, it would appear that a local need which might easily result in a planning permission for a dwelling is often used as an excuse to sell off an unrestricted dwelling in order to release capital. This is obviously more advantageous in a rising housing market such as that occurring in a pressured area. In fact, there is a case on file in which the applicant for a new farm dwelling clearly stated that he had sold his existing house in order to provide the capital to purchase some 60 acres of land which he intended to farm. There are also examples of local need houses being built in order to accommodate a cowman (who was often a son, brother or partner also) and the farm then selling off its milk quota (and therefore having no reason to accommodate a herdsman on the holding). Cases such as these are examined more systematically in chapter 7.

A situation exists in which increased demand for rural housing leads to pressure for development. Current restrictive policies limit rural housing supply, prices rise and locals who cannot afford to buy in the free market, begin to argue for special treatment for local needs cases, whilst locals who may be already adequately housed, but could nevertheless legitimately argue a local need case are tempted to harvest their profits.

It can be argued that the act of creating a planning situation in which local people are afforded priority, will in itself create local needs. Few people, whether in need of finance, or merely in receipt of expert advice, will be able to ignore such an opportunity. In the current situation where house prices are rising but farm incomes are falling, many farm rationalisations have to take place as loans are called in, or new loans negotiated. Professionals and "experts" are



used (often by the banks) to give advice and to provide valuations. A few redundant buildings of character, with permission to convert to housing, can often provide sufficient income to avoid borrowing in the first place.

This study has so far made no attempt to quantify genuine or non genuine need, but the tables show that the planning authority appears to have issued decisions which are biased towards locals in very rural areas and the cases examined ranged from genuine employment need, through hardship cases, to those which might best be described as financially rewarding. The results show a local authority genuinely concerned with local needs issues, but there is no particular evidence to reveal any understanding of the expression other than in agricultural or personal need terms. It is clear that locals receive a better rate of planning application approval than others and that agents, able to argue a better case, achieve a better rate of approval for locals than locals acting on their own behalf. The system appears to be flexible enough to permit some needy cases to be accommodated, but is also subject to manipulation by unscrupulous (or well advised) people. However, there is no evidence to suggest this latter point is sufficiently large in overall terms to present a problem in the district under study at the moment.

There is some evidence that the presence of special treatment creates an artificial demand for "local needs" which in other circumstances would not be expressed. Otherwise the majority of applications were not concerned with local needs. There were housing opportunities available in the rural area, although these appeared to be reducing in number as sites were developed and not replaced by new land allocations. There was also evidence of localised shortages of housing opportunities and it is clear that certain parts of the study area were under increasing pressure from commuters and incomers.

The statistical analysis has uncovered many potential avenues of research but should be read in the light of the caveat at the beginning of this chapter. It is only concerned with a small part of the rural housing system and may not be representative. However it



does illustrate the way in which housing demand pressure was building up in one rural area and the manner in which this was expressed through local people. It appears from the evidence examined that the area was in the early stages of the phenomenon and it may be beneficial to repeat the study in a number of years time.

The research methods used have a number of limitations, not least of which is the inability to discover who lives in or moves into the houses constructed as a result of the permissions granted. There are no checks built into the system at Shrewsbury and Atcham and, with one officer responsible for enforcement matters over the whole Borough, it is a very rare thing to check for compliance with a planning condition which is not very obvious or cannot be seen. In other words, unless a complaint were received, the planning officer would have no means of testing the efficacy of conditions or agreements restricting housing to particular categories of people. The writer has worked for more than fifteen years in a rural area but, has never known anyone to be prosecuted for falsely occupying a house restricted to agricultural/forestry occupancy. This need not be seen as too severe a limitation however, as it is clear that local people keep an eye on the situation and will often quote cases which appear to be in contravention of the rules when presenting their own cases. However, it is clear that there is a need to examine such matters in more detail if a study of this type is to cover all the issues. For these reasons then, the following chapter reports the results of an examination of a sample of approvals in the rural area in an effort to assess the effectiveness of local needs policies. It also examines, so far as is possible, the authenticity of those cases which were conditioned as to occupancy and resulted in the construction of a dwelling. The chapter also considers the issue of local needs in more detail.



CHAPTER 7

LOCAL NEEDS  
CASE STUDIES



7:1    Introduction

The examination of a rural area and the detailed look at the treatment of certain planning applications in part of it, has answered some questions, although the results raise others. The fault lies mostly with the lack of original research in this direction. Whilst this study alone cannot hope to investigate all of these problems, a number of important issues have been raised which would benefit from closer examination. The implications of the term local need, for example, can be discussed in more detail in relation to the needs expressed by applicants or deduced from the case study.

The crucial question in an evaluation of the effectiveness of local needs policies is whether the dwellings built as a result continue to perform their originally intended function, or whether their first occupants have been able to sell them on to other people who may not have agricultural or local links. These questions can only be answered by visiting each dwelling and asking the occupants, or by contacting local people who know the personal circumstances of each household. This chapter summarises the results of such a survey of a sample of houses constructed as a result of the application of "local needs policies". These related to the dwellings approved over the study period outside settlements which were or were not conditioned as to occupancy.

7:2    Occupancy Conditions

As explained in the previous chapter, section (e), it is common practice for a planning authority to apply conditions to some planning approvals which restrict the occupancy of new dwellings in some way. Normally such restrictions are added to the list of conditions attaching to the original outline consent and limit the occupancy of the dwelling to "a person employed or last employed in agriculture/forestry or a widow/widower of such person." The



condition can be modified to suit it to other local trades or even to tie it to a particular person. The latter is often done in the case of a caravan or portable building which would not normally be permitted, but is required for, say, an elderly or infirm relative.

The main guidance on the application of occupancy conditions is contained in D.O.E. Circular 1/85, concerned with the conditions attaching to planning permissions. The circular clearly sets out the government view that (except for agricultural or forestry needs):

*"There will seldom be any good reason on land-use planning grounds to restrict the occupancy . . . to a particular type of person (such conditions distinguish between) new houses or new conversions and existing houses (without such restrictions)." (DOE Circular 1/85 para. 77).*

The circular continues to give reasons and to state:

*". . . such conditions should therefore not be imposed save in the most exceptional cases where there are clear and specific circumstances that warrant allowing an individual house (or extension) on a site where development would not normally be permitted." (DOE Circular 1/85 para. 77).*

This clearly sets out government policy, but there have been many cases in the past where a dwelling has been permitted for local needs, but where that need is no longer required. Without including all such cases, the circular indicates that:

*"if the need for such a dwelling for the accommodation of an employee, for example, disappears, there will normally be no justification for requiring the building to stand empty or to be demolished." (DOE Circular 1/85 para. 79).*

The circular continues to link this to houses "within the curtilage of another building" where a "material change of use occurs" if the buildings were to be occupied separately so that planning permission would be required for such a proposal even in the absence of a condition. Nevertheless, this is a fairly clear indication of the government's view, particularly when combined with previous advice in the same circular to the effect that domestic occupancy conditions:



*"may deter housebuilders from providing homes for which there is a local demand and building societies from providing mortgage finance. It may also impose hardship on owners who subsequently need to sell . . . (and represents) too great an interference in the rights of individual ownership." (DOE Circular 1/85 para. 77).*

This advice contrasts with that offered in respect of agricultural dwellings in the same circular:

*"It may happen that the circumstances of a case justify the restriction of occupation of residential accommodation to an agricultural or forestry worker. This may arise in a case where the land is in an area where policies of restraint on development apply . . . (but where for special agricultural or forestry reasons it is considered) . . . appropriate to grant planning permission. (In such cases, where the construction of a house would not normally be permitted) . . . a condition may be imposed requiring that the house be occupied only by a person engaged in agriculture or forestry." (DOE Circular 1/85 paras. 80, 81).*

The advice is followed by a note to the effect that, where properly imposed, such conditions should not be removed, except where:

*". . . the long-term need for dwellings for agricultural workers, both on the particular farm and in the locality no longer warrants reserving the house for that purpose." (DOE Circular 1/85 para. 81).*

This advice also contrasts with more recent pronouncements contained in Circular 16/87 which states:

*"Changes in the scale and character of agriculture in response to market changes may well affect the requirement for dwellings for occupation by agricultural or forestry workers. Such dwellings should not be kept vacant simply by virtue of planning conditions restricting occupancy which have outlived their usefulness. Applications for the removal of such conditions should be considered on the basis of realistic assessments of the continuing need for them. There is no virtue in keeping dwellings unoccupied if they are no longer needed for their original purpose." (DOE Circular 16/87 para. 9).*



Thus there is fairly clear government advice which discourages planning authorities from using local needs conditions, except for some agricultural or forestry needs. However, if a house has been constructed and conditioned but the original need no longer obtains, then outdated conditions should be removed.

Occupancy conditions are registered with the local land charges office and, in the case of a change of ownership, will show up on the land charge searches normally carried out by the purchaser's solicitor. As the restriction effectively reduces the size of the market bidding for the property, its value is affected and for this reason and, perhaps due to the possible difficulties of selling the restricted property in the event of default, building societies are usually reluctant to offer mortgages on them. The matter is, to a certain extent, academic, because so far as the writer is aware, no person in the study area has ever been evicted from a property so conditioned because they did not comply with the definition. Were such a dwelling to be purchased without a mortgage by a person who did not comply, for example, it is doubtful whether the authority would find out, or take enforcement action if it were drawn to their attention, particularly in view of the advice offered by circular 16/87 and the possibility of having to pay an appellant's costs.

Despite these current problems, the issue has regularly arisen in the study area and tables 6.8 and 6.9 illustrate the frequency with which local needs conditions were attached to planning permissions. Section (e) of the previous chapter has covered the matter in a theoretical sense, but there is a need to examine the figures in a more practical manner in order to put the data to the test.

### **7:3 New dwellings approved without occupancy conditions**

During the course of the study, results and their implications were discussed with officers from the development control section of the planning authority. A number of tables caused surprise as officers could not recall some permissions, especially those granted without occupancy conditions and it was considered important to test their

accuracy against individual files. This would, to a certain extent at least, help to inspire confidence in the remaining data. Concern was primarily expressed at the number of cases approved outside settlements to which no occupancy conditions were attached, in particular during the period 1980-1984. In order to test this matter it was felt appropriate to look at either a sample of such cases in each of the village categories, or to look at all such cases outside settlements. In the event, the latter course was considered likely to be more useful, as there were expected to be such approvals in settlements, but there were not likely to be so many in the open countryside. The 1980-1984 period was chosen as being more likely to offer a useful comment on presently operated rural policies and to avoid problems which may have been caused "outside the memory" of contemporary officers.

Table 6.9 shows that there were 25 such cases. These were traced back through the 398 cases examined for 1980-1984 and each decision notice was inspected. Any case which was not adequately explained by the decision notice, was investigated in more detail via the planning files. Table 7.1 shows the basic result of such investigation.

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**TABLE 7.1 APPROVALS WITHOUT OCCUPANCY CONDITIONS  
CASE STUDIES 1980-1984**

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Conversions	New dwellings	"Granny flats"	Total
13 (52%)	10 (40%)	2 (8%)	25

(a) Conversions

More than half the cases concerned the conversion of an existing building. When these were examined in greater detail the result was as shown in table 7.2.



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**TABLE 7.2 AN EXAMINATION OF CONVERSIONS**

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"Existing" dwellings	Historic buildings	Others	Total
4	6	3	13
(21%)	(46%)	(23%)	

(i) Conversions to Historic Buildings

No doubt it would have been theoretically possible to apply occupancy conditions to such cases, but there were likely to be far greater costs involved in carrying out these conversions than in constructing a conventional dwelling. Therefore, in order to preserve the building, the applications were approved without such conditions. They consisted of the conversion of:

1. A timber framed barn.
2. A Victorian school building.
3. An old mill.
4. An old estate office.
5. A stone "engine" house (ex-mining area).
6. A timber framed barn.

The records show that each case was carefully considered in the light of currently operated settlement policies but, because of the architectural or historic value, position and likely conversion costs, approval was given without occupancy conditions. In at least two of these cases, the applicants were not "local people", but were determined to "save the building". It may well have been the case that familiarity breeds contempt and local folk were not particularly interested in refurbishing an expensive relic. Whatever the reasons, however, there is no evidence of a flagrant disregard for settlement policies by the local authority, nor of an influx of local people being outbid by incomers for such housing opportunities as these historic buildings provided. In fact, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the availability of "local needs" permissions may make such conversion opportunities less attractive to local people.

### (ii) Existing dwellings

These four cases consisted of the upgrading of existing cottages and in each case two cottages were converted into one dwelling. As the existing cottages had a previous use as dwellings (in other words, that use had not been abandoned), it was considered that occupancy conditions could not be attached to the permissions as there were no occupancy conditions previously. Again, whatever the merits of these cases in terms of local need, the law is explicit - a new dwelling is not being created if an existing dwelling is being repaired, but the regulations define conversions of one dwelling into two and two into one as development which requires planning permission. For this reason, the study picked them up in the sweep of applications as new dwellings, although strictly speaking each represents the loss of one dwelling.

### (iii) Others

The remaining three cases concerned the conversion of buildings, two of which had previously been dwellings, but where the use had been abandoned. The structure plan defines these as buildings which have not been used as dwellings for five years or more. Legally this definition is suspect, but, nevertheless some applications are made based upon it.

One of these cases concerned the bringing back into residential use of a small railway cottage, probably of historic and architectural interest but not actually included on the statutory list. Whilst it would have been theoretically possible to condition its occupancy, it really could be classified with the six historic buildings discussed previously. At the time of its conversion, there was no evidence on file of a queue of local folk waiting to lavish money on its preservation.

The last two cases concerned agricultural buildings. The first involved the conversion of an agricultural store into a dwelling. The store was a listed building and it was felt more important to preserve it than to quibble about restricted occupancy conditions. The second case related to the conversion of some farm buildings also, but was a renewal of a previous permission originally granted



in 1971. There would appear to be no particular reason for the lack of an occupancy condition in this case, but the conversion was attached to an existing farmhouse and the applicant had stated that it was intended for his family, not for sale.

Thus there is no evidence that the conversions examined have been a major problem in so far as the application of local needs conditions are concerned. Most of them were historic buildings which were considered to be worth preserving and the majority of the remainder had been dwellings at some time in the past and in strict legal terms could not be conditioned as to occupancy.

(b) New dwellings

Ten cases were involved in this category, with four relating to local needs issues. The first of these concerned a dwelling adjacent to a garage, the second, a dwelling for an agricultural engineer. Neither were conditioned as to occupancy and there seems to be no adequate explanation other than that the dwellings are part of the business premises and that it would be difficult to market them independently (see previous comments on circular 1/85). The third case involves an agricultural worker's dwelling which had been previously approved in outline. In theory it should have been conditioned as to occupancy because the original outline permission (on which there was no occupancy condition either), had time expired. The final case also involves an agricultural worker's dwelling and, like the third, outline permission had been previously granted.

Of the cases remaining, two were dwellings which formed part of a small string of houses attached to one particular village and were permitted originally by the County Council prior to local government re-organisation in 1974. They were picked up in the survey because of their positions. The houses could not legally be conditioned as to occupancy as they were part of a group of fairly new dwellings constructed in compliance with a long standing planning permission which had been validated, i.e. part of the permission had been implemented, therefore it was not restricted to the usual 3 or 5 year life. Two of the four remaining cases were concerned with existing



cottages. Both applications originally intended alterations and additions, but in each case, these were so substantial as to be considered rebuilds from the point of view of this study. As the existing cottages were not conditioned as to occupancy, the replacement could not be conditioned.

The two remaining cases include one dwelling which might best be described as infilling on the edge of a village. Any occupancy condition would have been irrational in this case. The final case consists of one dwelling granted on appeal to the Secretary of State (but again on the edge of a settlement). It could be that as these were so close to an existing settlement, they should not have been picked up in this study, but it is probably inevitable that some marginal cases should arise in an investigation of this nature.

(c) "Granny flats"

The final two cases were concerned with extensions to existing dwellings which, because of the facilities incorporated, were technically separate dwellings. Better described by the generic term "granny flats", such cases are rarely restricted as to occupancy because the enforcement of such conditions would be virtually impossible, and the independent sale of such units would normally affect the value of the main house more than the value of the unit. Thus such permissions are used whilst they are needed and then either sold to a person with a similar need, or incorporated into the main dwelling. They have been picked up by the survey because it was designed to reveal all applications for new dwellings.

(d) Conclusions

There have been a number of circumstances in which dwellings have been permitted in the countryside, outside settlements and where occupancy conditions have not been applied. In very few cases can this be said to be without sound reason. Even in those cases where, perhaps with the benefit of hindsight, such conditions might



have been used, the study has revealed no evidence that the claim for a special need, for example the agricultural engineer, or the agricultural worker, has been compromised by such omission.

#### 7:4 Dwellings approved with occupancy conditions

##### (a) Introduction

Perhaps the most interesting part of this study is that concerned with the present use of dwellings approved under this heading. Checks have previously been made to test the general accuracy of the information collected and analysed, but one of the main objectives of the study was to look at the use of local needs policies in practice. Chapter 6 has demonstrated that local people express their housing needs in terms of planning applications, that the parish council often backs the local applicant and that locals generally have achieved a generous proportion of planning permissions. This section is concerned with the situation relating to one specific aspect of local need, agricultural occupancy conditions.

Table 6.9 shows that some 73 cases were approved during the study period with agricultural or forestry occupancy conditions attached to them. Each of these cases was followed up to discover how many resulted in the construction of a dwelling. This was done initially by rechecking the files for detailed planning applications and then by a discrete site visit. The occupant of each house was then contacted by personal visit to discover whether the person presently living there was employed or last employed in agriculture or forestry or indeed had any local connections. It should be remarked that in some cases, particularly now that the value of agricultural land is relatively low, applicants with legitimate local needs are often unable to raise sufficient finance to construct dwellings which are conditioned as to occupancy. In other cases, permissions appear to have been sought in order to establish a principle "in case" such a dwelling were needed. In many cases, then, it appears that for one reason or another, a permission does not always lead to the construction of a dwelling.



(b) Method

The 73 permissions were traced back through the 1008 cases used to provide information for the main study. Each file was extracted and examined in detail to identify the location of the proposed dwelling, the reason given for its need and any other information thought relevant for the study. A list containing this information, and a map showing the location of the dwelling were prepared and each site was visited to check that the dwelling had been constructed and was in occupation.

In view of the sensitive nature of these issues at the present time, it was felt that occupants would be reluctant to co-operate in a survey which might indicate that they were in breach of planning conditions. For this reason the list and map have not been published as part of this study. Such fears would apply even if people were reassured that the information would not be made available to the local planning authority, except in a "general form" so that individual cases could not be identified. The original intention was to contact the occupant of each house and undertake a pilot study for a more general survey of the rural area. In the event this proved a most difficult task and to some extent unnecessary because, in the majority of cases, there was no doubt about the occupancy of the dwelling following an initial site visit. Contact was made with each occupier and it was explained that the interviewer worked for the planning authority and was checking on the completion of rural dwellings, as indeed he was. They were asked a number of questions relating to the original permission as part of a general conversation and this revealed relationships and other details in a manner which avoided more formal questions. The results thus gained were confirmed also by the style and siting of the dwelling. For example, experience in the area has shown that affluent commuters are not yet attracted to modest bungalows forming an integral part of a farm complex. Other details were gained in conversation with occupants or neighbours or as a result of personal knowledge gained during visits to parish meetings. Virtually all of the 43 parishes were covered by the writer's rural area local plan consultation activities and so contact



was made with local chairmen and secretaries as a matter of course. This contact enabled the subject of rural housing needs to be easily broached and it proved possible to obtain very detailed local information in a discrete fashion. The writer's knowledge of the local planning permissions which parish chairmen had been asked to support, coupled with the chairman's knowledge of which local people had asked for parish backing in support of an application for rural housing, proved an invaluable source of information. It should be remarked that parish councillors and chairmen rather than parish clerks proved to be very useful sources of local information. The parish clerk often takes on the job as a means of providing a part time income and in Shropshire, the clerk of the busier parishes often lives outside the area and administers several parishes. Local gossip before or following a parish council meeting which has considered rural issues, also revealed a great deal of useful information.

(c) Results

The 73 applications approved with occupancy conditions resulted in the construction of 54 dwellings and the siting of eight caravans. To explain the situation more clearly, cases concerned with permanent dwellings were aggregated for analysis on the basis of the need claimed by the applicant. This is shown in Table 7.3.

TABLE 7.3 DWELLINGS APPROVED WITH OCCUPANCY CONDITIONS '80/84

Reason	Built	Not Built	Total Permissions*
Relative/Partner	18	4	21
Stockman/Herdsman	8	3	10
Agricultural worker	17	2	17
Agricultural contractor	2	-	2
Replacement dwellings	5	-	5
Intensive husbandry unit	3	2	5
Farmhouse	1	1	2
<b>Total permanent dwellings</b>	<b>54 (77%)</b>	<b>12 (17%)</b>	<b>62 (88%)</b>
Caravans	8	-	8
<b>Total cases</b>	<b>62 (88%)</b>	<b>12 (17%)</b>	<b>70 (100%)</b>

\*NB: Some permissions were for 2 dwellings. Three cases proved to be reapplications and the figures have been adjusted to take this into account, thus the columns do not always total across.



(i) Relative/Partner

The table shows that 62 permissions granted on the grounds of specific local need, resulted in the construction of some 54 houses. It is significant that the majority of cases fell in the "relative or partner" category. At least one additional dwelling could have been added to this group, as one of the agricultural contractors was also the son of a farmer and built his bungalow on his father's holding. Several others may also have been in this category, but this was not disclosed on the original application.

On closer analysis, applicants for 15 of the 17 dwellings constructed claimed to need accommodation for a son of the family, often on his marriage. One farmer received permission to house his daughter, one holding needed two dwellings for family members.

On inspection there was little evidence to doubt the authenticity of the majority of these cases, however, retired farmers were living in at least three of the dwellings. One house was empty, although it was in the centre of a village and could in any case, be classed as infilling within a settlement. One dwelling was situated close to the centre of a popular commuter village which was within the Area of Special Housing Control. It was inhabited by a farm manager, the son of the farm owner, who also happens to be the director of a Midlands building firm (some of the letters on the planning application file were written on his firm's headed notepaper). An application for the removal of the restricted occupancy condition which attached to the original application was received (and refused) in 1985 on the grounds that the tenant (son) wished to purchase the house from the owner (father) but could not get a mortgage because of the presence of the occupancy condition.

It is clear that the last two cases, both in villages, were prime candidates for applications for occupancy conditions to be lifted if they were "no longer required for agricultural purposes", and that, according to current government circulars, such applications would probably be granted (at least on appeal to the Secretary of State). It is also interesting to note the three retired (or semi-retired) farmers living in new dwellings with "agricultural occupancy"



conditions. They had exchanged houses with their sons who now run the farms. This ties in with the results of the initial analysis and comments made on the low numbers of "retired locals" appearing in table 6.4, chapter 6. It seems that a positive and unchallengeable case can be made to house a partner who is a farmer's son on the holding, but there is far less of a case for an elderly farmer to have a retirement dwelling on the holding. Indeed there may well be a case for such folk to be closer to medical services or local services. However, in practice, it seems that locals in such circumstances make a case for the son and build a retirement home for the father rather than risk a planning refusal on "essential need" grounds.

The detailed investigation also revealed an interesting series of letters on file concerning one of the "relative" applicants who received planning permission, but whose house was not built. The farm tenant had claimed he needed a dwelling for his son and partner, but a neighbour objected on the grounds that the applicant really wanted a retirement home for himself. In the event a site could not be agreed with the estate owner and the dwelling was never constructed as the application was withdrawn before a decision was issued.

#### (ii) Agricultural worker

This catch all phrase seemed to be used to cover a multitude of situations. No specific pattern emerged on closer analysis, but there were certainly several anomalies which led one ageing farmer to sell off 120 acres of his land and his farmhouse in order to "concentrate on dairying". He was granted permission for a new farmhouse (see table 7.1), which he built and also permission for a dwelling for an agricultural worker. Both these dwellings are on the edge of a popular commuter village. There is no direct evidence to prove anything is wrong, but the farmhouse has been constructed as a pleasant retirement home.

The next case concerned a house built for a person running a butchery business and a smallholding. Permission was granted for a dwelling for an "agricultural worker" on the holding, despite comments from the local parish council to the effect that the holding



already had a cottage attached to it. In 1987, an application was received (and approved) for the occupancy condition to be removed on the grounds that the business was no longer viable.

The majority of other cases appeared to be quite genuine, but again there were anomalies. For example, the owner of one small farm persuaded the local authority to permit a farmworker's bungalow on the holding. Four years later, the building was empty, fences had been erected to separate it visually from the holding and "informal enquiries" had been made concerning its sale without occupancy restrictions because the entire holding had been sold and the bungalow was no longer needed to house a farmworker. In addition, some of the dwellings erected under this heading were in pleasant positions in villages and housed elderly folk, whether or not they claim to be actually retired.

(iii) Stockman/Herdsman

The conditions attached to this relatively small category of permissions appeared to have been well respected, although the occupier of one pleasant bungalow was a retired farmer, having exchanged houses with his son and this possibility was not revealed in the original application. The occupier of another was noted to be approaching retirement age. Such cases seem to arise, as remarked previously, to make sure there is no question of the planning application being refused because it is easier to make out a good case for an essential worker's house, than for a retirement bungalow.

(iv) Agricultural contractor

Both these cases appeared genuine and were dwellings for well respected local men who work for large numbers of local farmers on specific tasks such as liming, ploughing, draining etc. It should be noted that on close examination of the circumstances, it was found that one applicant claimed to be unable to raise sufficient capital to build the permitted dwelling. He asked for the occupancy conditions to be removed. In the event, the case was reconsidered and the condition widened to include agricultural workers, forestry workers etc. The original "agricultural contractor" condition apparently being considered by the mortgagor to be too restrictive to permit the



property to be resold in case of default. The widened condition was considered likely to enlarge the market sufficient for the required loan to be recouped if necessary.

(v) Replacement dwellings

There is a structure plan policy specifically permitting the replacement of a dwelling. In practice, it is not always wise for a planning authority to refuse planning applications for replacement dwellings. Such refusals often result in poor quality repairs or unsuitable extensions and accretions erected under the tolerances permitted by the regulations. It is often more sensible to negotiate a better design or siting for a new house. Most of the cases picked up in this study concerned a replacement on a different site, or with a different type of dwelling.

Two were prefabricated bungalows, one of these for an elderly farmer who could no longer cope with a large old house. Another was also for a farmer who found his house too large and dilapidated to manage. There was also a permission for a local garage owner to replace a house in poor condition, although on inspection it was noted that the new dwelling had been constructed and was occupied and that the house which this was meant to replace was in fact being refurbished.

(vi) Intensive units

One of the three dwellings built as a result of claiming a need under this category was rather large (five bedrooms) and would appear to be stretching incredulity somewhat as it is a second dwelling attached to a small pig unit, however there is no evidence to suggest a breach of the occupancy conditions, although since the survey was carried out, inquiries have been made to build houses on the unit because:

*"the alternative is to increase the capacity of the unit as it is not profitable and the neighbours who are presently complaining about the smell from the operations carried out there, will not appreciate an intensification of the use."*  
(summary of applicant's letter on planning file. 1989).

This illustrates one more dilemma faced by planning authorities in such cases. Regulations and subsidies alter from time to time and may rapidly change the viability of a holding, particularly those dealing with intensively reared stock such as pigs or chickens.

(vii) Caravans

The eight applications for caravans claimed to fulfil some agricultural need, ranging from student accommodation to temporary space for a poultry unit manager. On inspection it was found that only two of these were in the use originally envisaged, the remainder having been removed.

(d) Summary and Conclusions

54 permanent dwellings resulted from the 73 applications examined in detail. When they were inspected, all but four were in use by people employed (or last employed) in agriculture. There were three cases where retired farmers were living in conditioned dwellings and several other cases where this may have been so, but where it was not so admitted to the interviewer. It also became apparent that only one elderly farmer described himself as "retired", the others appeared to take an active interest, if not an active part, in the running of their holdings. It seems that there are few "retired" farmers, their role merely decreases as they become older. Thus there may be a problem of description rather than an intention to deceive, which perhaps accounts for the very low apparent need for dwellings for "retired farmers", see table 6.4.

It was also clear from the type of house constructed, its position in relation to the farm complex and the nature of the agricultural enterprise, that a wide variety of incomes and life styles were represented. For example, the type of buildings put up as a result of the planning permissions investigated in detail, varied from modest, prefabricated single storey dwellings, to 5 bedroomed houses with double garages.



It was also apparent that there was not necessarily a direct or obvious connection between the size of the farmholding and the size of house. Whilst there is no direct evidence to suggest that the rules are being circumvented, it would appear that, in a few cases, the income generated from some small agricultural holdings alone would not normally be expected to support the cost of construction of such a large house. This may have something to do with people trading on an historic cost basis and sometimes inheriting a family farm on which there is no mortgage and being able to raise money on the value of the land. On the other hand, there were "second generation" educated farmowners who also had interests other than their agricultural holding, one running a thriving insurance broking business and very interested in making his land available for building purposes, for example.

Judging by the type of house constructed in many cases, their position in attractive villages, the present age of the occupants and current and anticipated agricultural employment levels, many of these dwellings may be expected to become surplus to requirements within the next 10 years or so. This is particularly the case as the present government's views on the matter become more widely known. There is no evidence to suggest that such houses are sold at a reduced price to local people. In view of the wide range of issues involved, the next chapter draws together the conclusions which can be made as a result of the study and the discussion which has followed each section.

CHAPTER 8  
A SYNOPSIS OF  
CONCLUSIONS





**8:1    Introduction**

The previous seven chapters of this study have looked at matters ranging in scope from the original idea of present day town and country planning, to the operation of rural policies in terms of numbers of houses constructed and who lives in them. During the examination of each of the issues, a number of comments have been made, sometimes in passing, but more often in the conclusions to the various sections. Before the final two chapters, it would be useful to consolidate this reasoning in an attempt to reach a conclusion which might further the consideration of rural issues in practice.

Chapter two included comment to the effect that rural areas have experienced fundamental changes since the concept of planning, as it is practiced today, was introduced. Such changes have not been sufficiently influential in affecting the workings of the planning system and planning methods used in the 1980's are still those conceived in the interwar period, geared to crude policies of restraint and protection with recreation and landscape matters as side issues. Practitioners and researchers are agreed that there is a need for a re-examination of the role of the countryside, perhaps as fundamental as that which resulted in the original legislation of the late 1940's, dealing with agriculture, planning and access to the countryside. There is little evidence to indicate that the present planning system is or has been capable of addressing the questions raised by this study effectively, although there has been relatively little research into such matters.

The reasons for this neglect of rural issues or the failure to anticipate the onset of rural change are not easy to explain, but can be demonstrated by looking back on, for example, changes in commuting patterns, shopping habits, fuel prices, road building and so on. The effects of each tended to take place gently, over a period of time and was difficult to detect and quantify on an



individual basis. However, their cumulative effect on where people chose to live and therefore on rural areas can be seen clearly in the late 1980's. As an example of the importance of these issues, the following quotation illustrates the present role of England's rural areas:

*"Country areas offer homes and jobs to 10 million people: a fifth of the population. Nine out of ten of the people who live and work in England's country areas are not involved in farming. Some are commuters or retired people but the vast majority make a living by producing in these areas goods and services that other people want to buy. Businesses located in rural areas form a valuable and growing part of our national economy. These days engineering and high technology firms are just as likely to be found in rural locations as traditional craftsmen." (Promoting jobs and communities in rural England. Rural Development Commission 1989).*

This role is considerably different from the pre-war and immediate post-war period, when food production was paramount and the relative prosperity of the 1980's could not be anticipated.

## 8:2 A summary of changes

There have been changes in agricultural techniques which have revolutionised the amount and type of labour needed for food production. It is apparent, for example, that modern industrialised farming methods need no longer take place in the open countryside, many intensive activities may be better accommodated in less sensitive areas. It has also become clear that the aesthetic and recreational roles of the countryside are not always compatible with modern farming methods.

The rural dweller who might have been considered typical in 1950 probably lived and worked in the country. The occupants of a large and growing number of rural houses in 1990, are more likely to be middle class incomers purchasing environment rather than shelter and being either retired or able to commute to an urban work base. The circumstances have altered to suit contemporary conditions, but the planning rules have not. Planning policies have restricted housebuilding in certain areas. Such policies, originally designed to



protect rural areas from the outward spread of towns, have been extremely successful and have ensured that attractive villages are available close by most conurbations. Transport improvements in terms of roads and vehicles, coupled with a general increase in prosperity since the 1960's, have enabled more people to exercise their choice to live in rural areas and there has been slow but steady pressure on indigenous local people in attractive rural areas to sell out to incoming house purchasers. While there were still reasonably priced housing opportunities available, this was not too serious, especially while local authorities were able to build some council houses to help in the worst cases or most expensive areas. This option has been removed as a matter of government policy and following large increases in house prices, especially in the 1980's, the situation became serious for disadvantaged locals in many areas. This has culminated in many rural people not being able to afford to buy or rent a modest local house, even at a considerably subsidised price. In this situation, people who must earn their living from the land and are able to claim special treatment under the planning acts, have successfully argued the case to be treated as a special local need who should be granted permission for a dwelling in circumstances where other people would be refused. In the period when rural housing demand was not especially high, such special needs were catered for from time to time, but when rural housing demand began to rise, in the early 1970's, for example, the issue began to grow in importance as alternative accommodation was not always easy to find. There is some evidence that the presence of such special treatment creates an artificial demand for "local needs" which in other circumstances would not be expressed.

### 8.3 The need for research

Chapter three of this study, has illustrated the dearth of basic research into policy performance. The research which has been undertaken in this study goes someway towards improving this situation, for example, by looking at how decisions are interpreted



"on the ground" and how effective policies have been in providing houses for local needs. Much more basic research is needed however and it is suggested that studies of this kind could be set up fairly simply to address criticisms and assist where researchers have been:

*"constrained by a situation where the only detailed evidence of policy performance available for assessment was that relating to key settlements." (Cloke 1979 p.234).*

Or where:

*"Some difficulties arose in assembling data at a sufficiently disaggregated level to show the development trends and the effects of planning decisions. Thus . . . the investigations into change were based upon enquiry and circumstantial evidence, as much as on hard statistics." (Martin, Vorhees et al 1980 p.7).*

The study has provided some detailed evidence of policy performance in a subject which has also been described by Phillips and Williams as receiving:

*"relatively little detailed research attention" where "There has been a general neglect of rural housing issues....very little is known about basic features of rural planning and rural problems." (Phillips and Williams 1982).*

Previous rural planning researchers have been forced to remark that their efforts have been hampered by a lack of detailed information on planning issues and policy performance and it this aspect of the problem which the study has examined. By examining the performance of policies on the ground, the study has also addressed the criticism that:

*". . . emphasis on written policy statements can be inappropriate since often these do not have a telling influence upon the decisions taken by agencies and individuals on the ground." (Hanrahan and Cloke 1982 p.13).*

The examination of previous research concluded that policy performance at the detailed, local level, the practical working of settlement policies and the efficacy of policies designed to cater for local needs or to provide support for local services has hardly been investigated at all. What little previous research there was has had to be based on statistics relating to relatively large areas, often



incorporating urban as well as rural districts and the true impact of rural housing policies has been masked. Moreover, those statistics which were produced to monitor the effects of such policies, often failed to do so in an objective manner, since policy implementation and monitoring were usually carried out by the same agency responsible for policy development.

#### 8.4 The results of the research

The examination of individual cases and the follow up and interview of present occupiers of "local needs" houses carried out in this study, was a direct attempt to answer previous criticism. It did so in a manner which could possibly point to methods and sources of information which had not been tapped in the past as well as a means of discovering answers to the questions raised in the study area concerning policy performance. The advertising of a readily available source of information which is accessible to a greater or lesser degree in all planning authority offices, is of equal importance to the research results. Whilst it may not always be possible to examine the case notes which proved so useful in this study, the basic information relating to the reason for needing a house, the planning decision and whether or not it resulted in the construction of a dwelling should be obtainable with a fairly quick scan of the appropriate register and a few site visits. Such basic information would be a great improvement on what is currently available.

The results of the local need investigation, showed a local authority genuinely concerned with local needs issues, but with no particular evidence to reveal any understanding of the expression, other than in agricultural or personal need terms. The information gathered showed that local people received a better rate of planning application approval than others and that agents, able to argue a better case, achieved a better rate of approval for locals than locals acting on their own behalf. The system appeared to be flexible enough to permit some needy cases to be accommodated, but could be manipulated by unscrupulous (or well advised) people. There was no evidence to suggest this latter point was large enough in overall



terms to present a problem in the district under study at the moment. The conclusions may not be startling, but they do provide a platform from which to judge priorities for future research directions. For example, it appears that the local needs policies currently in operation in the study area are not the subject of widespread abuse, local people are responsible for realising most local development opportunities and parish council's opinions are, by and large, reflected in the performance of planning policies at the local level.

### 8.5 Conclusions

The planning situation in which local people can be afforded priority, in itself tends to encourage the creation of local needs. When land prices are high, few people, whether in need of finance, or merely in receipt of expert advice, are able to ignore such an opportunity. In a situation in which house prices are rising but farm incomes are falling, many farm rationalisations have to take place as loans are called in, or new loans negotiated. Professionals and "experts" are used (often by the banks) to give advice and to provide valuations. A few redundant buildings of character, with permission to convert to housing, can often provide sufficient income to avoid borrowing in the first place.

The situation exists in which increased demand for rural housing leads to pressure for development. Currently operated restrictive policies limit rural housing supply, prices rise and locals who cannot afford to buy in the free market, begin to argue for special treatment for local needs cases, whilst locals who may be already adequately housed, but could nevertheless legitimately argue a local need case are tempted to harvest their profits by selling off the unrestricted property. This might be termed the "knock-on" effect as people from outside the parish move into villages where there are unrestricted development opportunities and either displace local people or encourage those with some form of justifiable local needs case, to move on to smaller settlements.



To plan for any rural area independently of the urban area which is responsible for causing housing pressure within it, may be considered to be wrong and it is suggested that the present concept of urban or rural planning may therefore be in need of re-examination. There has been a tremendous reduction in the gap between urban and rural lifestyles and it may well be that we should now be considering advantaged and disadvantaged sections of society across the rural/urban spectrum rather than continuing to attempt differentiation by location. It may be time to ensure the application of social policies to all disadvantaged people regardless of location and to consider all rural areas as being influenced to a greater or lesser extent by people from nearby accessible conurbations. Such people put pressure on available rural housing stock in various forms, for example, by bidding for family housing in smaller "no development" villages or by purchasing the small number of housing plots available to build retirement homes. This pressure is not always recognised in the policies which are applied by planning and housing authorities or, if it is acknowledged, then policies frequently attempt to deal with it by restricting housing opportunities either in number or by introducing local needs policies which often fail to deal with the problem satisfactorily.

When considering the problems of housing demand from incomers to rural areas, there seems to be a tendency for researchers to dwell on the opposite extremes of policy performance, whereas it is important to distinguish between high quality environment, no growth, conservation villages and major villages with estate development. The difference between the two extremes is not often recorded in available research. This disparity in performance is expressed in the form of housing opportunities for local people. At one extreme, few are available and at the other, there is relatively wide choice. In the former case, "commuters and spiralists" have an economic advantage over locals and at the other, their pecuniary superiority is less obvious. It should also be remarked that local people may also be commuters and/or spiralists and that as Newby has pointed out, there has been a blurring of the differences between urban and rural groups (Newby 1980). Indeed, the



comprehensive education system, coupled with the recent years of relative prosperity for farmers (and hence the ability to afford private and further education) has led to the growth of what may be termed "indigenous spiralists".

It is apparent that few researchers have related the changes taking place in the countryside (as outsiders move in) with the parallel phenomenon of the narrowing of the gap between urban and rural lifestyles. This is coupled with the fact that until very recently, there has been an increase in farm incomes and that the communications revolution has enabled indigenous rural dwellers to reach urban areas as well as commuters to live in rural areas. The links work in both directions. It is interesting to compare the effects which these issues and the "right to buy" legislation are having on housing for local people in rural areas, with Newby's statement concerning the extensive social polarisation which has taken place since 1950. In the writer's district it can certainly be argued that the effect of central government action over the past ten years has been to consolidate and accelerate such polarisation.

Against this background must be considered the attitude of incomers to their environment. For example, the consultation report prepared as part of the Shrewsbury and Atcham Rural Area Local Plan (SABC 1989), summarises letters expressing the concern of some present village dwellers (often the articulate middle class incomers) to prevent further development which they see as threatening either their view, their investment, or both (Newby's affluent majority)? This attitude, often characterised as "NIMBY" (not in my back yard), contrasts strongly with that expressed by established residents (often employed in the area and having to live there), who would like to see a reasonable social mix, a choice of housing and employment opportunities for local people and adequate service provision. The balance is further swayed by local builders and landowning locals (sometimes even absentee landowners) who see further development of rural communities as a means of making money or of maintaining farm



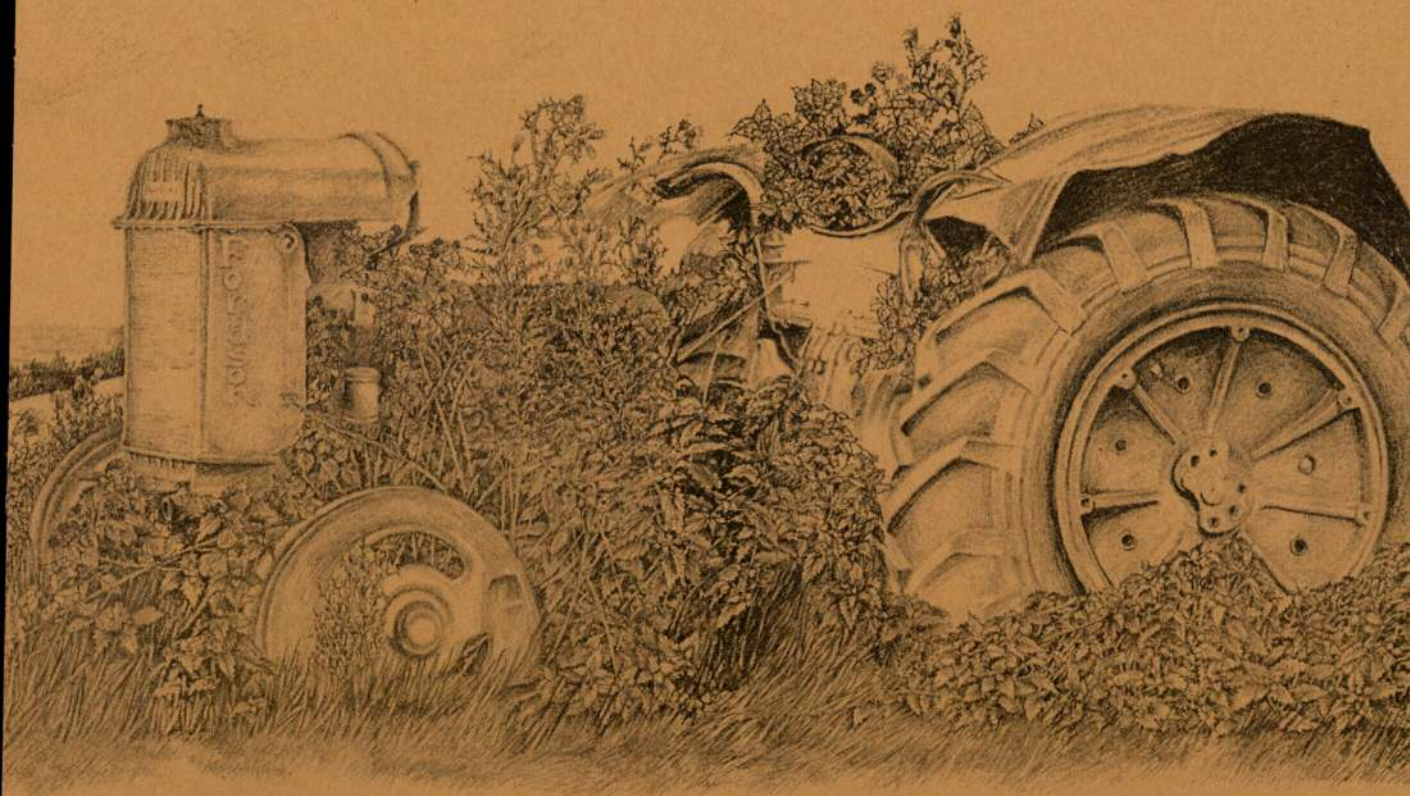
income in a period where diversification may be more rewarding financially than agricultural production. This latter group is aided and abetted by local agents with an eye on the market, their commission and little else.

The consultations carried out during the preparation of the rural area local plan in the writer's district indicate that indigenous local people are concerned about the effects of settlement policies, claiming, perhaps with some justification, that the severe restriction on building new dwellings in certain areas makes these villages even more desirable from the point of view of some incoming residents. There is evidence that in pressured areas, a guarantee of no growth coupled with the declaration of a conservation area encourages the process of "gentrification" (i.e. the purchase of houses by affluent in-comers, to the detriment of indigenous locals in terms of housing opportunities).

The issues raised by this study have been becoming more and more public as it has progressed, culminating in the inclusion of a section concerned with the latest developments in dealing with local need. It has become apparent however, that the housing or planning approaches taken so far have not addressed the issues in a manner likely to suggest a long term solution. The study has raised matters which are not being examined as part of the present concern which appears to be focussing on one small section of need. For example, it is apparent that there are a number of different types of local need and that some can be satisfied in the market place, others cannot be so easily dealt with, yet all the issues appear to be discussed as if they were one and the same. In view of the importance of this point, the following chapter takes the matter up and considers the different types of rural housing need in an attempt to form a definition which might be acceptable. An understanding of the several and often interrelated forms of local need is an essential prerequisite to the formation of policies which might be expected to deal with them. At present, the lack of a suitable definition is a clear barrier to the discussion of the subject, especially at the parish level. The writer has experience of discussions with many rural groups, including parish councils and

amenity groups about the issue and there is considerable difference in opinion as to what constitutes a "local need", a "low cost" home, an "affordable" house or any of the several other terms used in discussing the matter. For example, local farmers seem to think in terms of housing suitable (affordable?) by agricultural workers or a relative of theirs, on land which they own. Local vicars seem to think in terms of a number of cheaper family houses in or close to the village, attractive to people who are likely to support the church in an active manner. Amenity groups in "up market" villages tend to think in terms of any house which might be worth less than theirs (which could still be valued in six figure sums). Other parish meetings have referred to the need to provide housing for families who would be likely to support the local primary school, with no thought as to price or where the incomers live at present. Such issues must be resolved before fruitful discussion can take place.





*Fordson Cadoza*

## CHAPTER 9

### TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF LOCAL NEEDS



### 9:1 Introduction

In order to gauge local opinion on a variety of issues connected with rural planning, especially those connected with rural housing and settlement policies, the writer visited each of the 43 parishes in the district, attending parish meetings and discussions. In many parishes, the opinions expressed made it clear that there is dissatisfaction with the current settlement policies operated by the Borough because they are not felt to take sufficient account of the needs of individual villages, people, or parishes. For example most parishes have clearly experienced the demographic changes taking place over most of the county and cited the need to attract young families to support the local school, church, shop and other community services. This view was mentioned in all but two "commuter villages", where most residents were committed to preventing further growth, unless it were small scale.

A further view put forward was that many plots which are released for housing development are sold to retired incomers who can afford to outbid locals, but who do not support local services as much as incoming families. Many rural parishes also mentioned the need to provide some housing opportunities for established local families, especially for young people and local retired folk. The problem here, of course, is that in a rising market, the temptation to sell on a plot to a non local who can pay more for it, often outweighs other considerations. The study clearly shows that during the period studied, local people were responsible for submitting most planning applications and therefore likely to be responsible for realising most new housing opportunities and for selling the resultant plots or houses. The last major point put forward by parishes concerned the fact that local needs issues are not clearly laid down. Interpretations of the present rules frequently seem to vary and outsiders often have difficulty in understanding these variations.



## 9:2 Local Needs Defined

Following attendance at parish council meetings as an observer and a participant and having looked at the interpretation and operation of such policies in detail, it seems that some order can be arrived at by considering local needs under several separate, but interrelating headings:-

### (a) Overall need to support rural services

This covers the necessity of ensuring sufficient demand in rural communities to support schools, shops, libraries, clinic, etc. This is of particular importance at the present time when the government is advising education authorities to consider the future of small schools in the light of falling roles because:

*"The social effects of (school) closure must . . . be seen in the wider context of social and economic changes which are taking place in the rural areas, within which the reorganisation and rationalisation of educational facilities are merely elements."*

and

*"There is . . . some indication that changes are occurring in the population structure of settlements which have lost facilities like schools and that, as a result, their residents are increasingly those who have a relatively high degree of mobility and are therefore less sensitive to the availability of local services." (Cloke (editor) 1987 p.51).*

In other words, the withdrawal of services exacerbates the social changes which are in any case taking place.

There is no doubt that a small estate of (relatively) inexpensive family type houses can attract families with children, whereas a similar estate of bungalows will almost certainly attract retired folk. The former can help keep open the local school, whereas the latter will not. Similarly in very rural areas, a small housing estate of, say, ten modest houses attached to each of five or six villages, can also transform the congregation at the local church, the activity at

the local village hall or the viability of the local post office, bus service or railway station. In addition, if such growth is relatively gradual, i.e. there is a phased release of building sites, then such development also creates local job opportunities in the building trades.

It is felt important to attach the words "modest" or "inexpensive" to housing need provided to support rural services. Whilst current government policy discourages local authorities from interfering with the local housing market, most local people questioned expressed the need to ensure there are housing opportunities in rural areas for people who, for example, need to use local schools (rather than houses for retired folk from other areas). In the writer's district, parishes have complained that the few housing opportunities which previous restrictive policies have permitted, have nearly all been taken up by people who are relatively well off and retired or, if they do have young families, affluent enough to be able to afford to educate their offspring at private schools in town. Such people have been described as buying "environment, not shelter". A typical example occurred in the writer's district in the village of Dorrington in 1988, where a site allocated for residential uses and expected to be developed with 15 or 20 "modest" houses, in fact yielded five large detached houses marketed at around £200,000 and more. Whether it is true or not, less affluent locals consider that such incomers do not support local services sufficiently. This issue has been previously mentioned and is well documented in other studies, but is included here because there may be methods of addressing it in a constructive manner, despite present central government policies.

(b) Housing needs of people with local connections

There is a clear difference between people who might help support local services but otherwise have no local connections and people who perhaps should, ideally, be able to live in rural areas. This category might include the families of people engaged in agriculture or other local industry, or retired local workers. Similarly there may be a



case for permitting houses for bona-fide part time farmers or smallholders. There are many cases on file where an application for a dwelling to meet an essential agricultural need was not approved by the planning authority because the applicant's smallholding was not large or profitable enough to provide sufficient income to support a family. For this reason permission for the construction of a dwelling was refused. Yet in many genuine cases, such dwellings would have provided homes for the very people needed to support local services.

This category might also include local employers other than farmers and might also accommodate key workers other than agricultural or forestry workers. This is of growing importance now that planning authorities are being encouraged to consider alternative sources of employment as part of the need:

*"to foster the diversification of the rural economy so as to open up wider and more varied employment opportunities."*  
(DOE Circular 16/85).

(c) Housing opportunities for people who would like to live  
in a rural area

To some extent this category caters for people who are also included in category (a). However it specifically covers those cases which are excluded from (a) because they may not support local services sufficiently to be actively encouraged in certain areas (for example where local schools are in greatest danger of closure). The group would include such people as retired incomers with no local connections and perhaps the more affluent commuters.

It has been argued that this category cannot be described as a need, but is more of a demand (i.e. a non essential need accompanied by the ability to pay). Whilst this is true, such demand pressure, if not satisfied, is clearly transferred to the existing housing stock to the detriment of less affluent, but more "service supporting" people. For these reasons it may be prudent to consider making such housing opportunities available in places where they will do least harm, in

other words to vent off market pressure. It should not prove impossible to plan for an occasional "new settlement", or a few carefully expanded villages. In fact, a planned new settlement can be better than the continual incremental expansion of an existing village and could lead to the provision of some "social housing" by way of "planning gain".

(d) The need to provide housing opportunities for people who must live locally

The group includes those people investigated in this study, they comprise the traditional recipients of local needs permissions in rural areas, farmers and their workers needed for animal husbandry and security purposes. The category should also be expanded to cater for some more up to date rural occupations such as those employed running bona-fide tourist facilities, local services and other businesses, although, it may be that an easier or wider route to permission should be accompanied by a much stronger attitude to removing occupancy conditions in cases when the need has been "outgrown".

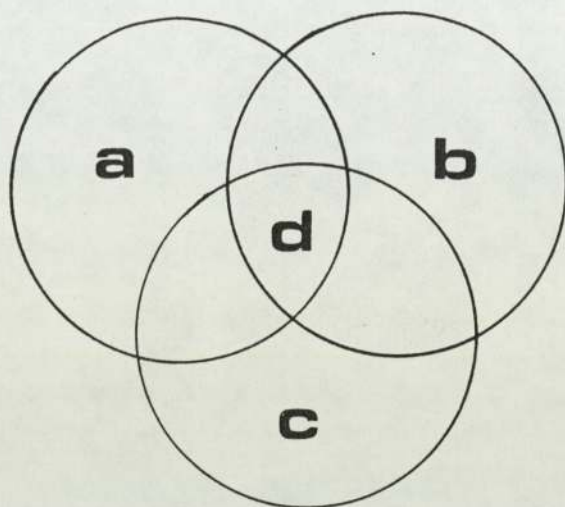
It is this latter category which is normally referred to by local planning authorities when catering for local needs, but it is often categories (a) and (b) which are included by lay persons or parish councils when considering such issues. Thus people discussing the matter often have different definitions in mind and are therefore not able to resolve the issue in a satisfactory manner. The categories may be represented diagrammatically as a series of independent needs which are in some circumstances interrelated (Fig. 9.1). The diagram clearly illustrates the manner in which some needs overlap and others remain independent. In theory, it should be possible to quantify each category and to calculate where and in what numbers, houses need to be built to satisfy each need. It should also be possible to decide which category of need has greatest priority.



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**FIGURE 9.1 LOCAL NEEDS RELATIONSHIPS**

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- a) Overall need to support rural services.
- b) Housing needs of people with local connections.
- c) Housing opportunities for people who would like to live in a rural area.
- d) The need to provide housing opportunities for people who must live locally.

### 9:3     Housing need : Financial need

The four categories discussed, cover virtually the entire spectrum of housing need in rural areas. The categorisation of the majority of housing need into these groupings presents little difficulty, although there will always be some cases which cause problems. For example, at what stage does a tourist attraction become sufficiently important to warrant a separate dwelling for the proprietor, or is a farmer who has taken "set a side" money to use his land for other purposes still in an agricultural occupation? Questions like this have arisen in the writer's district in relation to riding stables, butterfly farms or rare breeds collections, for example. Although current policy guidance notes do help, for example in making it clear that the use of land for the grazing of horses for recreational purposes is not necessarily an agriculture use (DOE. 1989). When does a farm warrant two dwellings, or a third dwelling? Planning policies cannot be written which indicate the circumstances in which the need for a new dwelling will be triggered in such a manner as to be fair to each applicant in all circumstances.

The issues have so far been considered from the viewpoint of a local authority, or at least, a third party. Before continuing to suggest ways of dealing with these matters it may be prudent to take account of the position of the developer or landowner.

The four categories identified, define the housing needs of the groups involved. They do not allow for the need of a landowner to realise a financial asset. For example, in reading through the files used to form the basis for this research, there were a number of cases which involved a claim for an agricultural needs dwelling, but where the need was occasioned by the division of a farmholding. Often this was the result of the retirement or death of the owner, or a bankruptcy. For example, an application for residential development would be submitted by the executors of an estate who were liquidising the assets in order to fulfil the terms of a will. Alternatively a farm may have to be divided amongst a family. Some



legatees may have no interest in the area or in farming and may wish to dispose of their land in the most profitable fashion. There have been cases in the study area, for instance, where a farmer has left his son(s) the land and his daughter(s) a potential housing plot.

Such issues are viewed by the people concerned as local needs as important as the four previously mentioned. Whilst the rural housing situation is changing as people working outside the rural area move in, the rural land situation is also altering for example, as smaller holdings are amalgamated and businesses buy land for investment purposes. Perhaps the scale of change is slower, but nevertheless, for every farmer who wishes to continue with farming by traditional methods, there is another who wishes to maximise the potential earning capacity of his assets to the exclusion of other issues. The writer has experience of conversations with land agents and valuers who advise owners and managers of large country estates. Their valuations take account of development potential and it is clear that as agricultural tenancy agreements become due for renewal, potential development opportunities are separated from farm holdings. There is also evidence of a long term view being taken of development opportunities in that farm buildings are often erected away from existing complexes. Often not needing planning permission individually, by using an accretion of the agricultural permitted building tolerances, large units can be incrementally transferred from sites which then become redundant. An efficient agent will ensure a steady supply of potential sites, conversions and income for the estate by careful management.

This project has not been designed to take full account of these particular issues. They have been introduced in order to make it clear that whilst there may be pressure from disadvantaged local people who want housing for particular types of local need, there is also pressure, but of a different type, to provide the opportunity to raise capital from the sale of development land and that these factors could be made mutually self supporting in order to increase the supply of rural housing land in some areas. Two more points should be mentioned before leaving this topic. The first concerns the fact

that land agents are often paid by results. It is in their interests to realise valuable financial opportunities for their clients, even to the extent of "doorstep selling" their services. There is evidence on file that many of the housing opportunities in the rural area under study, were initially rooted out by agents acting speculatively or on behalf of purchasers, rather than owners deciding to develop assets. This is particularly true in relation to plots for single houses in small villages. The writer has dealt with agents in the course of his job, who have brought in maps with potential development opportunities marked on. They sought informal planning advice as to the likelihood of permission being granted for houses on plots which they had searched out in a speculative fashion.

The second point is that the two separate demands (for certain types of housing opportunities and for financial gain) are not necessarily mutually compatible. Agents invariably prefer a straightforward planning permission for residential development uncomplicated by conditions or agreements as to house numbers, type or size. Such permissions involve them in least work and maximum financial gain.

#### 9:4 Potential Solutions

##### (a) Introduction

This study was intended to investigate various issues raised by planning for rural housing and to provide information about local needs matters based on an examination of planning applications in one rural area. It has not been designed to suggest solutions to the problems raised, although the subject should not be closed without some discussion of the possible direction in which potential answers may be found. The categorisation of needs into four separate headings, offers the opportunity to cater for them using different priority criteria.



(b) Catering for Need

The overall need to support rural services, for example, may be a general objective of an authorities' local plan, and may be used as a reason for choosing to release particular sites, or at least to show them as suitable for development in a local plan. Far more difficult is the task of ensuring that the type of dwelling built on the allocated site is likely to be attractive to a young family, or an elderly couple, or whatever. The government has made it clear to planning authorities that they should refrain from "social engineering", yet it is equally clear following a wide range of meetings with rural parishes, that this is precisely what many people who live in the smaller villages want.

It is suggested that it may be possible to achieve a reasonable compromise by releasing land in an incremental fashion, following discussions with owners, agents, developers and builders. It is a fact that local businessmen in the development industry are reliant on a continuing supply of developable land if they are to prosper in the long term. It is also suggested that local councillors have considerable powers to release land and grant planning permissions. A reasonable solution to the need for say, family type houses in a particular village, is to discuss the problem with the owners/agents involved and agree to release a small site, or part of a larger site, provided a particular size/type of house is constructed. Local people will normally agree to a small scheme if they can see that it will attract the families they consider their village needs. The site is released on the understanding that no further land will be allocated in that village unless the site is developed in the manner envisaged. Most local developers will see the sense in the arrangement which is dependent on the cooperation of local people in the planning process and is more likely to ensure a continuing supply of housing land than a system which merely allocates sites and leaves everything else to market forces. This method will not work in every case and cannot guarantee a cheap source of housing, but it is a step in the right direction and could be tried as a means of eventually



introducing legislative powers, perhaps permitting planning authorities to specify house types or sizes, for example, which may be a more certain method of achieving local objectives.

At the same time as the policy outlined above is working, it is important to have a good and steady supply of unrestricted new housing in other villages if this can be arranged. There are many villages which are not especially beautiful and which could easily be expanded to provide additional housing for people who would rather live outside a town. In fact, the steady expansion of a few villages can often result in the provision of more and better services. It appears that there is often an assumption that every village expansion scheme, or estate development, will be the last and resources are poured into preventing or resisting further expansion when this would often be a perfectly acceptable alternative to development restrictions which will usually force up prices and often price out locals. The frequent acceptance of small, incremental developments in many Shropshire villages can be said to have delayed the development of improved infra-structure so that more satisfactory future schemes can be arranged. It may well be better to choose a few suitable villages and to admit that they will be expanded to meet structure plan needs, whilst operating the policy outlined above in other villages. A commensurate reduction in the expansion rate of the towns can be made. It must be said that the main housing problem is insufficient supply in the places where people wish to live. If demand could be satisfied, then the price would be much easier to control and it may be that the founding of a number of new villages will be necessary, but if people continue to want to live in rural areas, then this fact must be faced and catered for. This subject was recently graphically illustrated by the director of the Housebuilders Federation in comparing the British system with that in America:

*"In most of the major growth markets (in the USA), whenever shortages of housing appear in the market, more land is allocated. As a result, in most markets a price rise brings forward increased supply and, quickly the price rises flatten,*



*and before long the builders are competing hard on price and quality to sell. Land price is 10-15 per cent of sale price.....Most of the builders....are struggling to make 5 or 6 per cent return....(in England) the housebuilder looks to 20-25 per cent return." (Humber RTPI journal p.16. 76/7 1990 ).*

The market situation and supply of land in the U.K. does not really permit a direct comparison to be made, but the point that the ability to increase housing supply tends to keep prices down comes across clearly.

However, these approaches do not tackle the problem of housing for local people who are unable to compete in the open market. Such people could, perhaps, best be assisted by either subsidising them in the local housing market, or by building local authority houses to rent. Local authority housing has, in the past, provided an adequate means of dealing with such problems, and whilst the concept of universal owner occupation has a lot to commend it, there will always be some people for whom this is not suitable, or some areas in which some people will find it difficult to compete. A great deal could be done to assist rural areas if rural council dwellings were simply exempt from the "right to buy legislation" and housing authorities were permitted to spend the receipts from urban council house sales on general needs housing in rural areas. This is discussed further in the final chapter in relation to current initiatives.

Some combination of the measures discussed above should cater for the needs of all but those people who must live locally, normally for employment reasons. It is considered that the study has clearly shown that the presently operated system works quite well, such local needs are laid down in policy, applications are made and locally elected councillors make the final decision on the merits of each case, conditioning the approval to suit the specific local need it is intended to meet. It may be that more care could be taken so that fewer applicants come back asking for restrictive conditions to be removed so it can be sold at current full market price, or perhaps such dwellings could only be sold with restrictive conditions attached. This would make sense in very rural areas, as it is clear that whilst there is even a remote chance of such dwellings being

sold at open market prices, owners and their agents (paid by commission) will fight tooth and nail not to find a suitable local person who can buy with the condition attached. The writer has anecdotal evidence of at least one potentially suitable local person being "severely discouraged" from inspecting such a property.

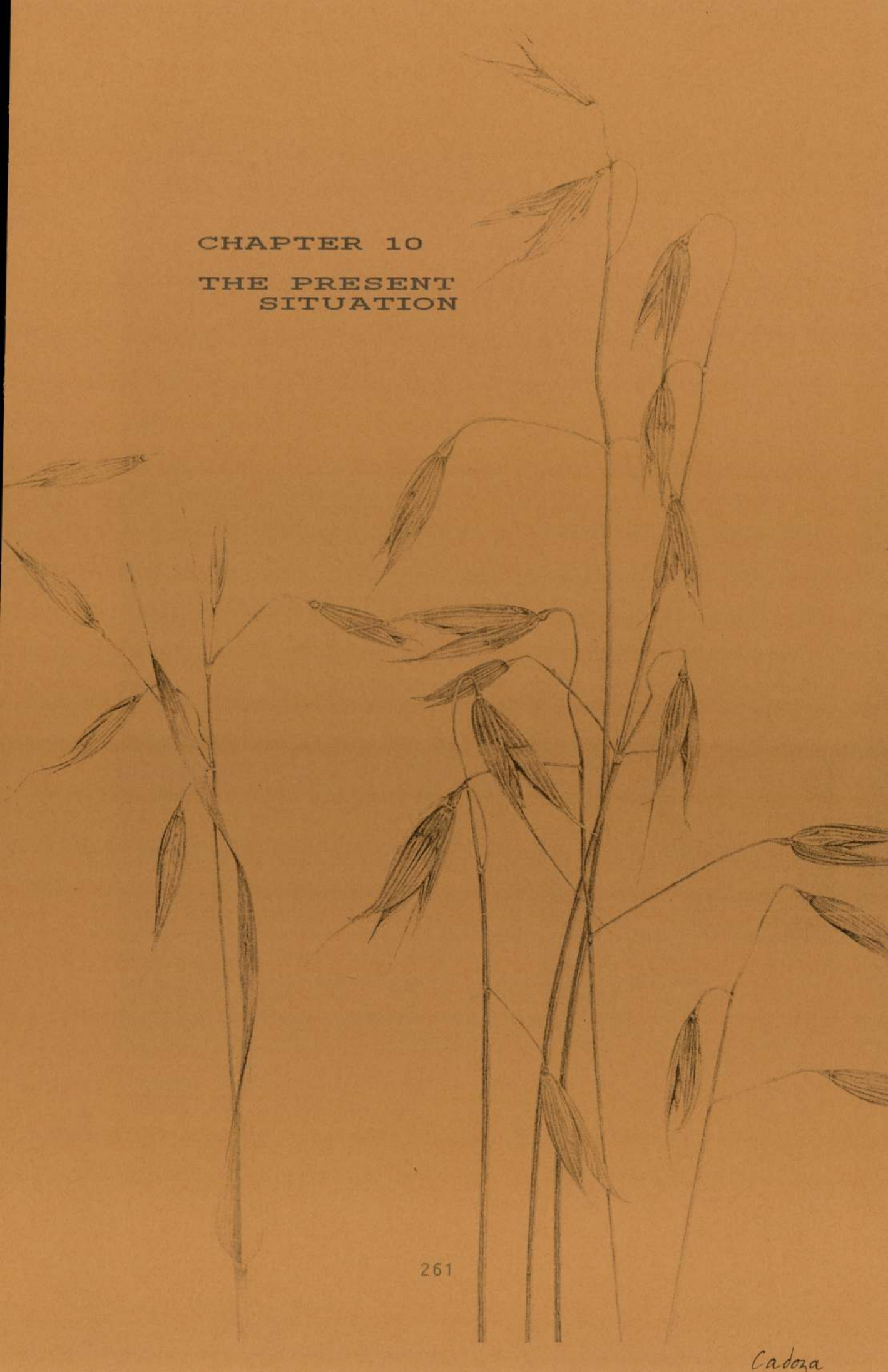
(c) Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to summarise the different issues which were introduced as "local needs" during the course of this study. It is clear that there is no consistent definition of the term and that as a result, great care must be taken in discussing the matter. A number of factors have been introduced in order to suggest ways in which the rural housing situation might be improved, although this study is not intended to provide definitive solutions. It is clear that policies alone cannot solve the problem of low cost housing in rural areas. They tend to be "blunt tools" which need careful tailoring and implementation to suit local circumstances. There is a need to complement such policies with other more positive measures so that the problems experienced in rural areas can be addressed. The following chapter reviews some recent initiatives which are being taken in an attempt to deal with the affordable rural housing issue which is seen as growing in importance as the price of houses and interest rates increase, at the same time as government restrictions prevent housing authorities from tackling the problem by, for example, building houses suitable for low waged people needing to live in rural areas, or by restricting the right to buy in such areas.



CHAPTER 10

THE PRESENT  
SITUATION



### 10.1 Introduction

Since this study was begun, rural housing issues have grown in importance. Indeed a recent study of social attitudes in Britain, summarised by Young, indicates that:

*"We are witnessing some significant long-term shifts in public opinion as a result of which the countryside is likely to become a political issue in a deeper and more profound sense than ever before....There is now a high degree of awareness of change.....it is steadily becoming more general throughout the various social groups."*

*(Young.K. Countryside Commission News. p3, 12/88).*

In all spheres there appears to be a greater awareness that a problem exists for local people living in rural areas. Over the past four years or so, the problem has become endemic, spreading from the more prosperous South East, to all parts of England and much of Wales and Scotland. There is now general concern for the fate of less affluent locals in rural areas and much energy has been expended on examining planning initiatives which are apparently expected to compensate for the run down of local authority housing over the past ten years. It is no longer unusual for the local government press to carry articles on the subject, for example:

*"Where....are new low income households meant to turn as council homes vanish into owner-occupation and no more are built, while house prices soar beyond reach? There is a desperate extra edge to the question when it comes from the countryside." (Morton J. Local Government News. p61, 6/89.*

It is quite apparent, however, that the problems and therefore the answers, do not lie in the planning sphere alone. This chapter summarises recent events and sets them in the context of the thesis, commenting on the prognosis for contemporary initiatives in the light of the results of the study and the experience gained whilst undertaking it. It does not cover all issues involved, as the situation is changing day by day as new initiatives are mooted.



## 10:2 Current Issues

There is general agreement that Central Government has so far, failed to address directly many of the important issues raised in earlier chapters, such as council house sales, the diminishing public sector building programme, release of local authority receipts from house sales to replace general needs housing stock and/or the need for greatly increased funding for Housing Associations via the Housing Corporation. To these perceived problems must be added the consolidation of previously identified trends which were expected to affect the status of rural areas. For example, such matters as population movement from urban parts of England and the consequent outward spread of suburbs and existing smaller towns, agricultural surpluses, reductions in family size etc.

At the same time, there has been a nationwide general increase in prosperity, although seemingly geared towards already affluent groups. This fact, combined with relatively low interest rates during the late 1980's and well funded building societies following the period of contingent prosperity, has led to a steady increase in demand for houses in virtually all parts of the country between 1985 and 1989. Described as "the northward drift of the house price spiral" (NACRT, 1989), it has affected virtually all categories of the housing market.

These factors have combined to bring about what would appear to be an intensification of the rural housing dilemma. The issues of local needs and "affordable housing", formerly problems perceived by a few local people and well informed academics, have become a political "hot potato", even in areas of traditionally inexpensive housing. There are even reports from Wales where cheaper housing has attracted people realising very high values from property sales in the South East who are outbidding locals in town areas as well as villages. There is growing awareness of the government's failing in this matter, for example, the community council for Shropshire commented on the Secretary of State's pronouncement on rural housing, making public their response which was reported in a local Shropshire paper in the following manner:



*"The Community Council of Shropshire has accused the government of being complacent towards the dilemma of rural people unable to afford a home in the countryside. In answer to the Environment Secretary's recent statement on housing in rural areas, the council (blames) the government for having an urban and south east perception of the problem and a "blinker approach".....if market forces rule, the low earner in rural areas will never be able to afford housing, being outbid by an influx of outsiders attracted by house prices in Shropshire, compared with their own locality". (Shrewsbury Chronicle. 4/11/88).*

With very few exceptions, the private sector has failed to address the issue, (despite encouragement from central government to provide houses to rent) and local authorities are prevented from doing so in an effective fashion, apart from dwellings specially adapted for the needs of the elderly or disabled. The scene has been set for an initiative which would at least indicate the problem existed and, hopefully, lead to suggested solutions from the private or the voluntary sector without the need for central government financial involvement. Whilst the problem has been acknowledged by the government and the housing acts have been worded so that rural problems may be recognised, in practice these measures fail to appreciate the nature of the difficulties. It is apparent to the practitioner in a rural area, for example, that the problems occur in individual villages and may be very small in scale or widely distributed. Over whole districts, such housing stress may not appear to be particularly significant in statistical terms, especially when swamped by figures for the remainder of the area.

Against these arguments, must be balanced the demands of existing, often well off, rural residents to prevent development in their village. Previously described as the "NIMBY" factor, this issue has been addressed by Newby, for example, who asks in a recent article, "who are the village people?":

*"As the number of farming jobs continues to decline, most villages are no longer home to predominantly agricultural communities...Such "newcomers" are no longer, in many areas, so new. They are firmly entrenched in a clear numerical majority and, most significantly, in the political ascendancy....(this is)....a social transformation taking place across most parts of rural England." (Newby H. Rural Focus p3. Autumn 1988).*



## 10:3 Initiatives

### (a) Introduction

The issues have been addressed by a number of different agencies, each looking at them from a different point of view and, to some extent adopting independent definitions. Central Government has issued a policy statement which absolves it from all responsibility, apparently independent of the present planning system.

The National Agricultural Centre Rural Trust (supported by the Rural Development Commission) has looked at the problem from the housing association viewpoint. The House Builders federation has tackled the matter from the private sector "profit making" point of view, whilst various local authorities have attempted to make new policies in line with divergent government statements on housing, rural conservation and planning.

### (b) Central Government Response

Following considerable pressure and a growing realisation that the problem was becoming worse, and that the various ad-hoc measures attempted by planning authorities in their local plans were not entirely successful, in February 1989, a ministerial statement was made by the Secretary of State in a written answer to a parliamentary question:

*"In preparing their local plans authorities must ensure that adequate provision is made, consistent with the structure plan, for housing demand of all kinds. As was made clear in Circular 1/85, planning controls are concerned with the use of land rather than the identity of the user. The question as to who is to occupy premises for which permission is to be granted will normally be irrelevant.*

*I recognise, however, that in some rural areas there are genuine difficulties in securing an adequate supply of low cost housing for local needs. In such areas the need for low cost housing and the existence of arrangements made by the developer, or between the developer and the landowner or the local authority, to ensure that new low cost housing is made available for local needs could be material considerations which the authority would take into account in deciding whether to grant planning permission. Such considerations might be particularly relevant to the release of small sites*



*within or adjoining existing villages which would not otherwise be allocated for housing. Since planning conditions cannot normally be used to impose restrictions on tenure or occupancy, the planning authority would need to satisfy itself before granting planning permission that other secure arrangements to that effect would be made. Examples of such arrangements might be the involvement of a village trust or housing association with a suitable lettings policy; or covenants designed to give priority to first time buyers from the locality; or an agreement between the planning authority and the developer under section 52 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971. It would be important for schemes to ensure that the benefits of low cost provision pass not only to the initial occupants but to subsequent occupants as well.*

*Local plan policies should make clear that the release of such sites to secure provision of low cost housing for local needs will be additional to the provision made in the plan for general housing demand, recognising that particular local needs may justify the release of land that would not normally be allocated to meet general housing demand. It should be made clear that land allocated in the plan to meet general housing demand will not be confined to local needs only, and planning permission for such land should not be refused on the grounds that the developers or landowners are not prepared to enter into arrangements to secure provision for local needs.*

*The case for releasing additional land which would not normally receive planning permission for housing, in order to secure provision of low cost housing for local needs, will be essentially a matter for local judgement. Where a planning authority refuses permission for such development, and the matter goes to appeal, I and my inspectors will bear in mind the essential local nature of the decision, though each case will be considered on its merits." (Hansard 3/2/89).*

This approach could work if it could be assumed that no further development would take place in villages and that the difficulties were small in scale. The minister has identified the problem of too few affordable houses in rural areas, but he has failed to recognise the scale of the problem or to indicate how or where they could be built. It is important to understand that if a site is adjacent to a village, physically suitable and environmentally acceptable for housing, then it could at any time in the future be allocated for housing purposes in a local plan. It has hope value and there can be little expectation of sites being brought forward for such "non profitable" development in sufficient quantity to satisfy a need estimated by the NACRT to be in the region of 50,000 dwellings and by the Rural Development Commission to be around 376,000 households.



### (c) The Housing Association Approach

The National Agricultural Centre Rural Trust (supported by the Rural Development Commission) was set up to arrange the formation of housing associations in rural areas. Dating from 1976, its present work may be linked to the National Federation of Housing Associations' Working Party on Rural Housing. This organisation has, by default, become the main national agency for change. Apart from their housing schemes in small villages, their "Practical Guide To Providing Affordable Village Housing" (1989), represents the housing association attempt at drawing together those elements which might lead to a solution to the problem. The report summarises the present situation and provides practical advice on a variety of relevant matters ranging from the role of a parish councillor to the tax situation for private landowners. The organisation is also responsible for attempting to place the matter in context by estimating the number of dwellings which might be needed to provide affordable housing for first time households:

*"there are probably around 8,000 villages in England of a size which would require some affordable housing for people on modest wages and working in local service and other industries .....(assuming six dwellings per village, there is a likely need for)....some 50,000, but scattered over some 8,000 small developments" (NACRT, 1989 p2).*

It would be difficult to criticise such a suggestion as the Association has adopted an open approach, organising a number of national conferences in order to promote widespread awareness of the issues involved and encouraging interested people to participate. They have also been responsible for lobbying on behalf of rural parishes and fostering local self help initiatives such as rural housing surveys and setting up Housing Associations. The organisation has been responsible either directly or indirectly for the construction of many rural housing schemes and their experience in this sphere is second to none.



(d) House Builders Federation

As might be expected, the organisation which represents the housebuilding industry has also taken a keen interest in the provision of additional rural housing. This interest has been heightened by the Secretary of State's statement of 3rd February 1989 which included the concept of making building land available for local needs housing which was "additional to the provision made in the (local) plan" (Hansard 3/2/89).

The Federation issued a policy statement in July 1989 which addressed the matter by enterprisingly linking it with other, wider issues. The statement was headed "Policy Statement on The Role of The Private Sector in Meeting *Community* Housing Needs" and referred to "implications for wider problems associated with the provision of *social* housing" (HBF. 1989 p1). A criticism of this approach will be made towards the end of this chapter, but it must be said now, that the Federation are as concerned with the release of additional profit making land for the use of their members as in tackling the problem of local needs housing. Their attitude as expressed in this document is that all low cost housing, whether rural or urban, has to be subsidised and that this can only be provided in rural areas by linking suitable schemes with the release of valuable "free market housing" land and the use of cross subsidisation:

*"...social housing....cannot be provided without subsidy .....resources are inadequate and (there is a) need to tap into additional subsidy from the private sector. Land can provide just such a subsidy, from the values created by planning consent.....with additional funding from the Housing Corporation, the Rural Programme has been increased to 600 rented houses in the current financial year, rising to 1,100 units in 1991/92. Were that to be sufficient, then there would be no need for further policy initiatives. But clearly that scale of development meets the needs of only a few villages and the bulk of social housing needs outside the major urban areas goes unmet." (HBF. 1989).*

This statement, so far, agrees with the scale of the problem and with the need to subsidise, but it takes the Minister's February statement one step further by taking his second paragraph and interpreting it as follows:



*"...local authorities may, if they wish, negotiate with developers and landowners on additional land to provide a mixture of market and social housing - using the value created by housing sold at open market price, built on land acquired at well below its value, had it been allocated on plan."(HBF 1989).*

This approach is in direct conflict with that of the government and of NACRT, who consider that there should never be cross subsidisation on sites "extra" to the current planning requirements so that landowners are willing to release land which otherwise has little "hope" value for development:

*"In terms of the February Statement cross subsidy is definitely not acceptable because it runs against the object of the policy and would increase "hope value". It is, however, possible that on sites with general housing permission, cross subsidy could be used to provide local needs housing."*

*(Christopher Chope. M.P. NACRT seminar report 1989).*

*"...it is difficult to set ...cross funded schemes in the context of a lawful exceptional permission for local needs housing.....compromise on one site will lead to all other landowners in the area seeking the same benefit. Precedent will be set which will be difficult to deny and gradually the strength of the policy will be diminished."*

*(NACRT 1989 section 2 p10).*

A number of documents advertising the possibility of housing "extra to allocations" and inviting approaches from interested people have been published by the Federation. For example, the following is an extract from the "New Homes Review, a publication issued by the private housebuilding industry for MPs, Local Councillors and Officers," which advertises the publication of their discussion paper "meeting Community Need. The New Challenge.":

*"Local Authorities can apply that principle, not just in villages, to unlock significant new sources of finance for social housing in many non - metropolitan areas which currently face housing shortage, if they will use land where current allocation policies exclude hope value." (New Homes Review. H.B.F. 1989).*

Perhaps realising that this approach was open to criticism, the Federation commissioned David M Clark, a countryside consultant with wide experience of rural housing issues, to prepare a builder's guide to affordable rural homes (Clark. 1990). This clearly sets out the steps needed to prove local housing need and advises builders of the options available, how to make local contacts, approach councillors,



negotiate agreements and so on. The private industry's answer to the NACRT publication mentioned in the previous section, this document places the issues in context without concentrating on the profit making aspects of housebuilding. The cross subsidisation issue is discussed as one of a number of options which also include selling properties to a charitable housing association (thus avoiding "right to buy" complications).

*"An element of open market housing, or even high proportion shared equity units can be included in a scheme to finance the other measures of social housing. It can pay for the servicing of the site and provides a direct subsidy to the development costs of the social housing units. A number of developers are pursuing this option in partnership with housing associations. It offers an alternative way of achieving genuinely low cost housing, but the concept of "cross subsidy" is not yet understood by many local planning authorities."*  
(Clark.D 1990 p3).

Clark continues to point out that the onus is on the builder to prove the need for an element of cross subsidy and that planning authorities are not likely to accept a "token number of low cost units" in a larger scheme of open market houses. He suggests using section 52 agreements:

*"to reassure the local authority that open market sale housing will only be developed to the extent which is necessary to fund the social housing."* (Clark.D. 1990 p4).

This is a more gentle approach to that suggested by the Federation's earlier efforts, which, by tending to emphasise cross subsidy, conflicted with government advice. However, the caveats expressed by the Minister and housing associations and discussed in the previous section, must still be considered, i.e any hope of additional profit, cross subsidy or open market housing is bound to prejudice potential schemes in other villages, where such measures may be inappropriate.



(e) The Housing Corporation

It is largely through the efforts of NACRT that Housing Corporation funding for the provision of subsidised rented housing in rural areas has been increased and:

*"now targets the smaller villages in which housing need can be demonstrated. Housing need in the villages is no longer measured by reference to the characteristics of surrounding areas which generally include medium to large towns and Rural Development Areas are no longer assumed to describe areas of greatest rural housing stress. Much more attention is paid to the results of local village surveys of the housing circumstances of local people." (NACRT 1989 section one p1).*

There is perhaps little cause for excitement as lower levels of capital grant have been introduced and this is expected to lead to increased rents. In addition, the Housing Corporation's budget for village housing has risen from less than 1% in 1986/7 to 2% in 1988/9 (enough to fund about 300 houses). It is expected to result in the construction of around 600 houses in 1989/90 and some 1100 in 1991/2. A total hardly sufficient to address the problem which is estimated by NACRT to need in the region of 50,000 new homes.

Other issues which must be considered in the context of the Minister's February statement and might best be discussed under this heading, involve a tenant or a shared owner's right to buy his house, either all or in part, under the housing acts (known as "staircasing", after the tenant's right to proceed to full ownership step by step). Tenants are often entitled to a subsidy which can be worth a considerable sum of money. NACRT comments that:

*"Unfortunately, the need to retain long term control is incompatible with the right to staircase and subsidised forms of shared ownership cannot take advantage of this source of cheap land." (NACRT 1989 p5).*

Clearly, central government has a right to operate policies which encourage home ownership for all, but in rural areas where housing supplies are limited, there is a danger of depriving some people of local housing opportunities. It is also clear that if the subsidised price of a rural house cannot be passed on to second and subsequent purchasers, then there is not only a constant loss of



housing supply, but there are clear indications that some landowners will release limited amounts of land to meet strictly local needs on a once only basis. By so doing they either forgo considerable profit, or, under the government initiative discussed earlier, release land not likely to be allocated for "free market" housing purposes. They are not willing to see their community "charity" become a windfall profit for an astute tenant or a fortunate housing association. The government has also removed from housing associations their previous exemption from the provisions of the Leasehold Reform Act. This means that the occupier of leased property also has the right to buy the freehold. This matter was raised following an address by the Under Secretary of State, Michael Howard at a recent seminar arranged by the National Agricultural Centre Rural Trust.

*"We are not in favour of putting an end to staircasing in shared ownership properties. We do not favour putting a ceiling on the proportion of the property which the person concerned can own.....However, in those rural areas where replacement of a shared ownership dwelling may be difficult, or where a private landowner has contributed a site on condition that it be retained for low cost housing, we have in mind giving housing associations a pre-emptive right to buy back the dwelling at full market value". (NACRT Seminar 1989).*

It is doubtful whether this pre-emptive right to purchase at full market value will assist in ensuring a supply of cheaper houses in rural areas and it can only be agreed that NACRT are correct in their assumption that land released as a result of the Minister's February 1989 statement is unlikely to result in the construction of many houses by housing associations. The reason is that in cases where the tenant has exercised his right to purchase, the original "cheap land" subsidy cannot be passed on to the next person, because the house must be purchased at full market value. Thus in areas where there may be a considerable advantage to the tenant, or at times of extreme market volatility, there will be no price advantage to the housing association, nor the next tenant. However, to be fair to the government, the latest indications are that additional money has been promised through the Housing Corporation for the repurchase of such houses and that this approach is considered sufficiently binding to take the Housing Corporation to court if the funds were not forthcoming.



This change of heart was set out in the House of Commons by Michael Howard when debating the reinstatement of a clause of the Local Government and Housing bill following an amendment by the House of Lords in October 1989:

*"Our policy is that shared owners (who own part of their home and rent the remainder) should be allowed to become full home owners.....We recognise the strong concerns that have been expressed on both sides of the House about the need to provide and retain low cost housing for local needs in rural areas. The government produced a re-purchase scheme designed to ensure that housing associations could keep properties in rural areas in the low cost housing sector, but there was a legitimate concern that the proposal might not work satisfactorily. The department has been working with those most closely involved to see how we can improve the scheme. As a result of those discussions we have come up with improved arrangements which I shall invite the Housing Corporation to implement.....I can give the House an assurance that the Corporation will fund, on demand, housing associations that want to re-purchase properties within this scheme.....re-purchase funds will not be found from the amounts set aside within the Housing Corporation's programme for rented accommodation or shared ownership in rural areas."*  
(Hansard. 8/11/89).

It seems from the evidence, that the rules of the new wave rural housing supply are being worked out as the government goes along. It may be that further changes will be introduced as the government are encouraged by an impending election. It is apparent, for example, that the Association of District Councils, in conjunction with the organisation, Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), are currently lobbying. They call on the government:

*"to allow districts to use their capital receipts to benefit their chargepayers as a means of combating the problems facing rural areas...(by means of) co-operation between districts and rural community councils to tackle problems as diverse as agricultural job losses and the shortage of affordable low cost housing."* (ADC. 12/1989).

It can only be said that the situation is dynamic. Most Local authorities have realised that schemes for local need/low cost housing could assist their problems and many are attempting to introduce such schemes, or policies which will permit them, into their plans.



(f) Local Planning Authority Approaches

As the rural housing situation has been more clearly perceived as a crisis of considerable proportions, a variety of different methods have been suggested as a means of increasing the supply of rural houses at the lower end of the market. Such initiatives include the allocation of more housing land, releasing unallocated sites with strict occupancy conditions or a mixture of the two using cross subsidisation to keep prices down to affordable levels. A variety of policy approaches have been attempted, but in terms of the numbers of dwellings constructed which may be considered suitable in the longer term for the needs of less affluent locals, little success has been achieved so far, although some are discussed below.

Until the early 1980's it was often possible for local planning authorities to negotiate with developers at the stage when they submitted their outline planning applications in order to influence house types and densities for example. This ploy was often successful on larger sites, where negotiations could ensure that a proportion of the dwellings built were at the lower end of the market. The developer would gain an "easy ride" through the planning system, the support of local councillors and the opportunity to tackle further sites as they were released. And they would be released if "suitable" houses were included. Many of the larger villages in Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough contain examples of such estates, constructed during the 60's and 70's, (Bayston Hill, Minsterly, Pontesbury, Hanwood, Condover etc.). The 1980's brought a reaction against bureaucratic controls of all descriptions and government circulars and appeal decisions on housing sites made it clear that planning departments were not expected to become involved in the workings of the housing market. In any case, as house prices rose and the flight from the cities became more frantic, incomers began to compete with locals even at the less expensive end of the market.



In more remote rural areas, or in those places where, for aesthetic reasons, new building was severely restricted, the situation is even more desperate. Before, say, 1980, planning authorities often tackled the housing needs of locals who applied for planning permission in remote areas by granting permission following an examination of the circumstances prevailing. Permission for a dwelling, a caravan or other cheap accommodation would often be granted with conditions attached restricting the occupancy to a particular person or occupation. The main body of this study examines examples of this approach. The government, however is opposed to this because:

*"As was made clear in Circular 1/85, planning controls are concerned with the use of land rather than with the identity of the user. The question of who is to occupy premises for which permission is to be granted will normally be irrelevant."*  
(Hansard 3/2/89).

Having been warned off this method of providing for some of the more obvious local needs, local authorities turned to legal agreements under section 52 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971. A dwelling would only receive permission if the owner agreed to sell or let it to a person in circumstances agreeable to the planning authority. However it became clear following legal decisions that such agreements may not be conditional on a planning permission being granted. However, there are examples of applicants offering to enter into such agreements on a voluntary basis prior to an application being made. Such an approach has formed the foundation of policy operated in the New Forest whereby the affiliations which people eligible for such housing are expected to have and those villages where such housing is needed, are incorporated into the written agreements. Safeguards which permit the dwellings to be offered to people living elsewhere when the original need has ceased are also included. These are designed to offer such accommodation to local folk in the same categories as originally intended but on an incrementally widening basis until a suitable priority case is housed. By March 1989, three schemes had been permitted under this policy, all were for 8 or 9 dwellings, involving a housing association providing houses for elderly people or starter homes. In essence, the policy enables the authority to make an exception to their normal restraint and conservation policies to permit local needs houses on sites where housing would not normally be permitted, provided:



- "1. The dwellings are intended for an identified group of local people whose needs cannot be met in any other way (the onus is on the applicant to prove the local need).*
- 2. The dwellings are guaranteed to remain available to such people in the long term (i.e they must be exempt from the "right to buy" legislation), and*
- 3. there is no breach of major environmental constraints."*  
*(New Forest District Council. 1989).*

There is a problem in that the approach is based entirely on the goodwill of the parties involved and has not yet been tested to its limit. The method is not likely to lead to the construction of a sufficient number of dwellings to meet probable demand as estimated by NACRT. The amount of time involved in tailoring agreements and in policing the ensuing tangle of dwellings and people is no substitute for simpler legal controls on ownership or even the ability to construct a council/housing association dwelling to meet the need.

Other authorities are introducing similar policies, but it is not appropriate to reopen the study to consider their effectiveness. The detailed research has been concerned with more specialised local needs and these are not necessarily likely to be affected by the types of need being discussed here. However, it must be stated, that if such initiatives do result in the construction of low cost houses in many villages, then it could be that they will provide a more suitable source of housing for "agricultural or forestry" workers etc. and that such needs could be phased out except in very rare circumstances.

Before reaching a final conclusion, it is appropriate to briefly consider the approach which local authorities might now adopt in their local plan policies, as it is through the planning system (or in addition to it), that local needs housing sites are expected to be provided. However before setting out to discuss this, it should be mentioned that the planning system cannot hope to do more than help along the agencies and organisations interested in providing rural housing. Planning authorities do not have housing powers and there must be additional, positive measures introduced which enable housing to be provided for a number of disadvantaged groups in rural areas. Planning tends to be a negative force in that it is not



intended to initiate change, but to react to other agencies' initiatives in the light of negotiated policies. Such policies must be acceptable to the majority of people and, like justice, must be seen to be fair.

It is apparent, so far, that members of the public in rural areas are willing to put up with the constraints which a planning system necessarily brings, provided they are involved in choosing or agreeing housing sites or rates of village growth. The planning system can only go so far in agreeing to the release of sites which have not been included in village plans as sites which should be allocated for housing. If sufficient land is to be released "in addition to general housing need" to solve the rural housing problem, then it is likely that there will be considerable resistance from established locals and enormous difficulties in controlling the future occupation of this additional tier of "special housing".

The planning system must not be expected to solve, nor be blamed for contributing to a national housing problem. It is likely that a better solution may be arrived at outside the planning sphere and that the residential development of rural housing sites "which would not otherwise be released" will be a nightmare for all involved. However, it is clear that if special sites are to be made available, then this must be in the light of policies which set out precisely the reasons why these sites are exceptional. It is also important that such land is only released under the protection of appropriate agreements which ensure it remains in use to provide housing to satisfy local needs and that these are clearly identifiable priority groups. At the same time, case law indicates that such an agreement cannot be a condition of granting a planning application. Quite how these rules will work in practice is not yet clear, but as with the various initiatives previously discussed, it is difficult to see how sufficient schemes will be brought forward in the absence of profit or equivalent subsidy. In the writer's district, a policy has been introduced into the draft local plan for the rural area (Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council, 1990 policy 11), intimating that local needs schemes will be considered on suitable sites, subject to section 52 agreements and that the houses are within the price range of first time buyers (figure 10.1). The policy will need fine tuning, to



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FIGURE 10.1 SHREWSBURY AND ATCHAM LOCAL NEEDS POLICY

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POLICY 11 AS AN EXCEPTION TO OTHER HOUSING POLICIES, THE COUNCIL WILL CONSIDER GRANTING CONSENT ON LAND WHICH IS NOT OTHERWISE IDENTIFIED AS A RESIDENTIAL SITE, SPECIFICALLY FOR "LOW COST" HOUSING FOR "LOCAL PEOPLE", SUCH PERMISSIONS BEING SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:

1. THE SITE IS WITHIN OR ADJACENT TO A SETTLEMENT IDENTIFIED IN POLICIES 2-5;
2. THE SITE IS CONSIDERED BY THE BOROUGH COUNCIL TO BE APPROPRIATE FOR SUCH A DEVELOPMENT AND THE PROPOSAL SATISFIES OTHER NORMAL DEVELOPMENT CONTROL CRITERIA;
3. A BINDING AGREEMENT MUST BE ENTERED INTO WITH THE BOROUGH COUNCIL, PRIOR TO THE GRANTING OF PLANNING PERMISSION, SECURING THAT:
  - i. THE DWELLINGS PROVIDED WILL BE FOR RENT, PURCHASE OR EQUITY SHARING AT A COST WITHIN THE RANGE AFFORDABLE TO MOST FIRST TIME BUYERS IN THE RURAL AREA
  - ii. PERSONS PURCHASING SUCH ACCOMMODATION FOR THEIR OWN OCCUPATION (INCLUDING SUBSEQUENT PURCHASERS) WILL BE FIRST TIME BUYERS.
  - iii. OCCUPIERS WILL BE EXPECTED TO HAVE LIVED WITHIN THE PARISH OR A PARISH ADJOINING THE DEVELOPMENT FOR THE LAST 10 YEARS AT LEAST.

Policies 1 to 10 are intended to meet the general housing demands in the rural area and meet Structure Plan allocations until 2001. Policy 11 recognises that a housing problem exists for some local people in the rural area and attempts to meet particular local needs in a way which is achievable through the planning process. Schemes permitted by this policy would be exclusively reserved to meet local needs on a permanent basis.

Proposals involving schemes with some "local need" dwellings and some speculative dwellings on such sites or other similar "trade-offs" will not normally be permitted unless they comply with other policies. Schemes which offer dwellings at a discounted initial purchase price only will not normally be considered to be within this policy because the price of housing cannot be controlled through the planning process.

source:SABC 1990



include old people, for example, but initial signs are that some schemes will come forward. Two schemes have so far been proposed and negotiations are presently under way to progress them. In total they would provide over 70 low cost houses. Whether they are successful in the long term, remains to be seen, but there are clear indications at present that there is a major problem with the provision of what may be termed "normal" mortgage finance. Building societies have declared that they would not loan money to purchasers of houses restricted by policy 11 because it is considered to severely restrict the resale market.

#### 10:4 Summary and Conclusion

This research has covered a small part of a complicated subject. It must be said that the most often recurring theme throughout is that there are problems in rural areas especially in relation to poorly paid locals wishing to enter the housing market in the face of increasing competition from town waged incomers. The present planning system is not designed or enabled to tackle such issues in a satisfactory manner. Solutions must be considered on a regional level at least and must cover such issues as the reasons for the flight from the towns and how to accommodate people who wish to live outside cities. It is vital to increase the supply of suitable houses available to disadvantaged priority groups in sufficient numbers to satisfy demand whilst not compromising important conservation issues and appreciating the probable short term nature of the present agricultural crisis.

Whilst there appears to have been a widespread recognition of the rural housing problem, this has not yet resulted in a satisfactory solution. The general concern for the fate of less affluent locals in rural areas has not been translated into policies or the provision of finance which would lead to the construction of houses to satisfy their needs. There are signs that local authorities are attempting to grasp the nettle, that housing associations are more aware of the possibilities available and that other initiatives are being brought forward for discussion and possible trial. However, it is clear that



there is very little public money available for public sector or housing association construction and that even the smallest element of public subsidy ensures the dwellings thus provided will be subject to the "right to buy" provisions of the housing acts. At the same time, there is unlikely to be much land made available for such housing whilst landowners have any hope of achieving a full market price, either now, or in future years. Similarly, landowners who anticipate even the possibility of a "cross subsidy" scheme, as suggested by the Housebuilder's Federation in their 1989 statement and in Clark's 1990 report, will not wish to release land without a full market value element. Thus a local authority which might take advantage of such a project in one village, may thereby compromise a "local needs only" scheme in other settlements by encouraging the owner to hold out for an analogous deal.

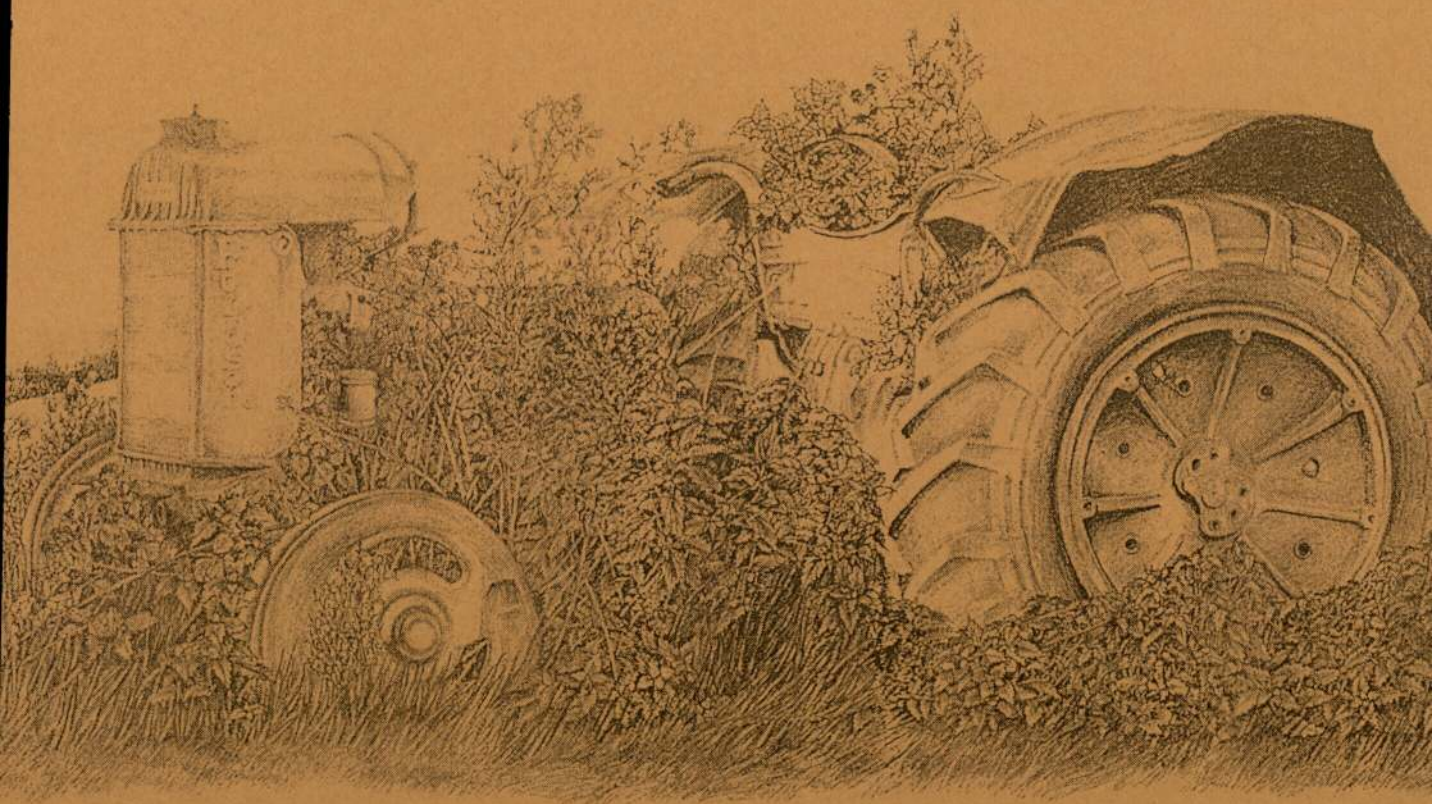
It seems that the government's suggestion to secure provision of low cost housing for local needs by releasing land that would not normally be allocated to meet general housing demand has introduced a further elaboration into an already complicated situation. Having effectively ruled out the construction of general needs council housing, encouraged the reduction of public owned housing stock and refused to fund sufficient housing association building, they are relying on the profit motivated private sector to fill the gap. Yet the only way to ensure that a sufficiently inexpensive source of housing becomes available is to remove the profit motive and even to subsidise the costs of building. It would seem that this is no recipe for a short or long term solution. Even the Housebuilder's Federation agree that:

*"low cost housing or social housing....defined as housing for people who cannot afford market housing - cannot be provided without subsidy." (HBF 1989).*

These issues are far too important to be left to district councils alone and there is a need for a greater understanding of the factors at work and a national policy to address them. The present system appears to have paid scant attention to major changes in the social structure of Great Britain. The problems raised so far in relation to local needs issues are therefore likely to continue to increase until



they are recognised and dealt with at the national level, despite current initiatives which have yet to be proven in practice. Judging by the reaction of most of the agencies involved, in a situation which assumes some degree of planning control, the key to the problem is to be found in more housing in total, coupled with some form of subsidy for low cost rural housing and an assurance that such subsidised accommodation will always remain available for letting to people who may be in need. At the present time, it must be said that there are no signs of this being achieved under the present regime.



*Fordson Cadoza*

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National Parks and Access to  
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Planning Policy Guidance 1  
General Policy and Principles

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Planning Policy Guidance 2  
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Planning Policy Guidance 3  
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Planning Policy Guidance 3  
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D.O.E. 1989

Planning Policy Guidance 4  
Industrial and Commercial  
Development and Small Firms

D.O.E. 1988

Planning Policy Guidance 7 Rural Enterprise and Development	<i>D.O.E. 1988</i>
Planning Policy Guidance 12 Local Plans	<i>D.O.E. 1988</i>
Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976	<i>D.O.E. 1976</i>
Report of The Royal Commission on The Distribution of The Industrial Population	"The Barlow Report" <i>M.O.H.L.G. 1940</i>
Report of The Expert Committee on Compensation and Betterment	"The Uthwatt Report" <i>M.O.H.L.G. 1941</i>
Report of The Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas	"The Scott Report" <i>M.O.H.L.G. 1942</i>
National Parks in England and Wales	"The Dower Report" <i>M.O.H.L.G. 1942</i>
Report of The National Parks Committee	"The Hobhouse Report" <i>M.O.H.L.G. 1947</i>
Report of The Planning Advisory Group	The Future of Development Plans <i>M.O.H.L.G. 1965</i>
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**Explanation of Abbreviations.** (Where not obvious from context).

A.C.R.E.	Action With Communities in Rural England
A.D.C.	Association of District Councils
D.O.E.	Department of Environment
H.B.F.	Housebuilder's Federation
J.U.R.U.E.	Joint Unit for Research into Urban Environment
M.O.H.L.G.	Ministry of Housing and Local Government
N.C.V.O.	National Council for Voluntary Organisations
R.D.C	Rural Development Commission
R.T.P.I.	Royal Town Planning Institute