

The planning system shapes what gets built, where, and for whom. In rural areas, planning decisions can make the difference between communities that thrive and those that slowly decline – determining whether new homes serve local need or outside investors, whether local businesses can expand, and whether the character and environment that make rural areas special are protected or eroded.

Yet rural residents often feel that the planning system does not work in their favour. The result is a system that, whatever its intentions, too often fails rural communities.

Key Survey Findings

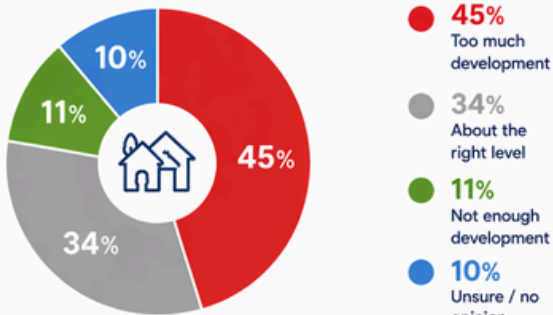
The survey explored respondents' views on local development and the effectiveness of the planning system.

1



LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT

Opinion was divided on the amount of new development locally.



The largest group (45%) felt there had been too much development, while just over a third thought the level was about right. Around one in ten wanted to see more development, with a similar proportion unsure or having no opinion.

2



DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

Asked what type of development they would most like to see, the top priority was:



More housing for local people

1



Improved infrastructure such as roads and broadband

2



No more development needed

3



Better community facilities

4



More business / employment opportunities

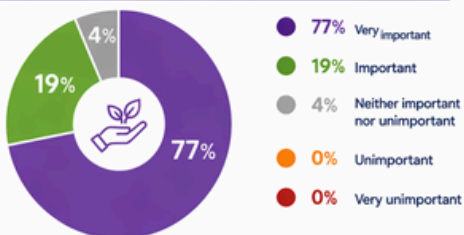
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3



ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Respondents overwhelmingly valued the protection of the local environment in planning decisions.



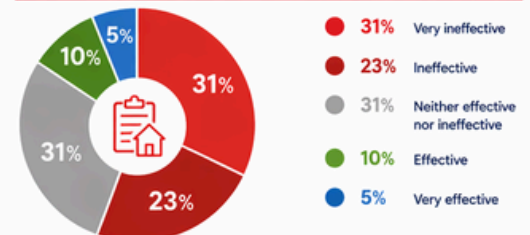
Over three-quarters (77%) said this was very important, with a further 19% rating it as important.

4



PLANNING SYSTEM EFFECTIVENESS

Views on how well the planning system meets community needs were notably negative.



Over half of respondents (54%) rated the system as ineffective or very ineffective.



Participants expressed strong frustration with the planning system, feeling it often favours those with greater financial resources while disadvantaging local people.

Concerns were raised about affordable housing commitments not being upheld, and about the limited influence of neighbourhood plans despite significant community effort. Changes to rural housing were also highlighted, with smaller homes being expanded or redeveloped in ways that reduce affordability and limit access for local residents. Many felt the system does not adequately reflect rural needs, applying approaches better suited to urban areas. There were also concerns about reduced transparency and local oversight in decision-making.

The impact on communities was clear, particularly the loss of younger households and the knock-on effects on local services. The growth of second homes and holiday lets was seen as further restricting long-term housing availability.

Overall, participants called for stronger controls to prioritise local need and make better use of existing housing stock.

WHAT RURAL RESIDENTS TOLD US ABOUT...

RURAL PLANNING

“Right at the end of the development process, the affordable homes suddenly disappear.”



“It's never been verified. We put quite a lot of work into writing this Neighbourhood Development Plan.”



“No one local's going to be able to afford them. The idea of small, traditional houses gradually vanishes.”



“There needs to be some adaptation towards rural needs, rather than a one-size-fits-all.”

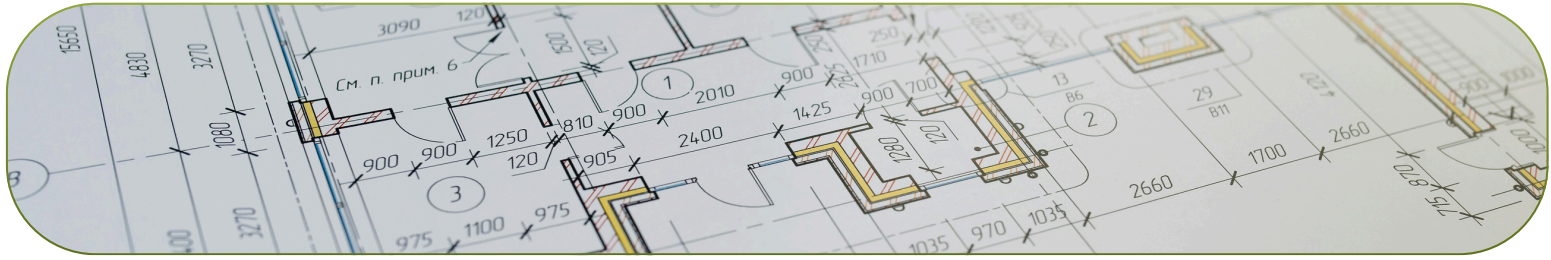


“There's nothing long-term for people to rent.”



“Housing shouldn't be used as an investment.”





KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED

What rural residents told us about rural planning

1

Over half of respondents rate the planning system as ineffective or very ineffective at meeting community needs.



2

Nearly half feel there has been too much development locally, yet more housing for local people remains the top development priority.



TOP PRIORITY:
MORE HOUSING
FOR LOCAL PEOPLE



3

Environmental protection is overwhelmingly valued but seen as inadequately enforced.



4

Developers promise affordable housing but find ways to avoid delivering it.



5

Neighbourhood plans, despite significant community effort, can be ignored if not ratified.



6

Small traditional homes are being extended out of reach of local buyers.



7

One-size-fits-all national policies fail to account for rural distinctiveness.



8

National reforms threaten to further reduce local voice and environmental protections.



9

The planning system interacts with housing, second homes, and demographic change to shape which communities thrive and which decline.



Rural residents want a planning system that listens to local people, protects what makes their communities special, and enables the right homes and development in the right places for a sustainable rural future.

