

Smallholdings and local food

There are a number of factors that make this one of the most important issues to be addressed by the NDP:-

- The desperate shortage of opportunities for people to join the food growing industry – especially the young.
- The prohibitive cost of both land and suitable housing,
- The carbon emissions attributable to the food supply chain from plough to plate,
- The significant support for the idea of smallholding and ‘local food’ identified through the household survey – that is probably a reflection of demand within the nearby urban areas (where opportunities are obviously more limited).

Although not normally considered a planning matter, (hence the difficulty in finding a policies to follow), creating opportunities for the establishment of horticultural enterprises should be a matter for the NDP and planning control. Whilst the growing of crops is not development over which there is any control, the buildings involved in agricultural activities represent development for which permission is required (in some circumstances deemed permission through the General Permitted Development Order). The availability and affordability of housing for agricultural workers is also a planning matter as are the employment opportunities in growing, processing and distribution (including retailing).

There is legislation that could enable parish councils, with the assistance of county council (that used to manage a significant number of smallholdings in the area), to be proactive in the establishment of larger allotments (up to 2 acres) and smallholdings. However, the provision of land for horticultural use could also be required of landowners seeking permission for residential development.

Residential development significantly reduces the productive potential of the land, the ability of the land to sequester carbon and produces demand (from new occupiers) for food products. The use of nearby land for smallholding(s) can reasonably be required due to the increase in productivity, the likelihood of being less carbon intensive, the retention or increase of the carbon in soils, and the reduction of carbon emissions associated with the food supply chain.

Support for the growth of small scale and agro-ecological farming can be found in the growth of Community Support Agriculture (CSA - under the auspices of the Soil Association, the Ecological Land Cooperative and the Permaculture Association. The village could adopt a 15 year vision of providing fruit and vegetables to all its residents (area requirement – depending on land quality – about 40 acres/16 ha) and employment opportunities for at least some of the 200 people making positive replies to the village survey. There are models of CSAs where all members are producers and consumers.

A policy facilitating the creation of smallholdings on the village fringe for economic, environmental and social reasons would clearly align with the presumption in favour of sustainable development and would also make it

unnecessary to support the opportunistic applications for smallholdings in the open countryside where cheaper land can be found but which can harm the appearance of the open countryside and isolate the farming families. Suitable housing could be secured by restricting the occupation of dwelling(s) on new developments on the edge of the village to those employed in agriculture. Occupancy conditions obviously reduce the sale or rental value of such properties so should logically form part of the affordable housing requirement. The following policies could be met buy land and housing being rented or sold – with adequate security of tenure.

Policies

1. Every application to develop 0.5 ha or more of agricultural land is required to include proposals for how the loss of this land to development will be balanced by the provision of land for horticultural use in the vicinity.
2. The application for residential development of sites of 0.5 ha or more must in its Housing Assessment include details of the dwelling(s) to which an agricultural occupancy condition will apply – such dwelling(s) to be accepted as part of the required proportion of affordable housing.