

# keep calm, and carry on



In the present recession, the market for housing land has almost come to a halt, and housebuilding must now be at its lowest level for a hundred years.

Well fed and well housed grumpy local planning authority councillors, who always suspected that the need for new homes was trumped-up nonsense devised by a Labour Government specifically to spoil their locality, are showing a worrying tendency to slow down their plan-making, and to refuse planning applications for housing just for the hell of it. They are encouraged in this childish irresponsibility by the prospect of a new Conservative government that has promised to abolish regional planning and housebuilding targets, leaving 'local people' (actually the aforementioned well fed and well housed grumps) to do what they want. 'Why press on with this expensive and unpopular Core Strategy,' they are saying, 'when that nice Mr Cameron is going to take all this housing away?'

Well, Mr Cameron (or anyone else) can't take away the need for additional homes. It is a need driven by demography. And, in these fragile political times, it is good to see the present Government being up-front about it. This stuff should be posted up like Chinese wall newspapers.

The two jewels are first the *Government Response to the Environmental Audit Committee's Report on Greener Homes for the Future?* published in May 2009,<sup>1</sup> and second a letter from the Chief Planner at the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to Chief Planning Officers dated 12 May 2009.<sup>2</sup>

In the first, the Government declares that there is no reason to delay or revise housebuilding targets in the light of the market downturn:

7 *The Government's house building targets remain a priority. They were drawn up recognising the long-term trends in household formation and therefore housing demand.*

*Household projections are for the number of households to grow by 223,000 a year. The decline in the availability of mortgages, and falling house prices, does not, in the Government's view, affect the fundamentals of these demand and affordability pressures. Despite the current market conditions, there is strong pent-up demand for new homes with the potential number of new households still increasing faster than the number of new dwellings. People are living longer, and changing lifestyles and a legacy of undersupply have led to considerable unmet demand and need for places to live. Therefore, the Government does not believe that the long-term assumptions underpinning the housing targets set out in 2007 have altered.*

10 *The NHPAU [National Housing and Planning Advice Unit] will refresh its advice in the light of recent major developments, however, as they have made clear the NHPAU do not expect this work to alter our fundamental position – that as a country we need to build more homes than we are currently planning for. Given that the fundamental drivers of demand and need for new homes remain, when market conditions improve the likely consequence of not providing new homes will be higher house prices and worsening affordability.*

92 *... The fundamental need remains to respond to the long-term increasing demand for homes as our population ages and grows and more people live alone. Regional plans set out housing requirements for a period of at least 15 years. Current and anticipated economic conditions point to a greater emphasis on ensuring development plans are in place to support recovery so that planning authorities can deal with new applications more quickly and efficiently.*

95 *PPS3 sets out a proactive 'plan-led' approach to the supply of land for housing to help achieve the step change in housing delivery required. By 'plan-led', PPS3 requires local*



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authorities to be much more proactive and to identify sites in their plans that are suitable for housing, working with local communities and key stakeholders. Plans should identify land for housing for at least 15 years, with the first 5 years being a continuous, rolling supply of land that is ready to be built upon.

96 By identifying sites for housing in plans rather than relying upon speculative planning applications coming forward randomly, local authorities can provide housing in suitable locations supported by the right infrastructure provision. This will ensure local communities get the right development, in the right place, at the right time, reflecting the principles of sustainable development.'

In the second document, the DCLG Chief Planner Steve Quartermain states:

*'It will come as no surprise... that the Government attaches particular importance to the identification of a good supply of land for housing. Planning Policy Statement 3 was published in November 2006 as a direct response to the Barker review, which drew attention to the problems created by not having enough suitable land on which to build the houses necessary for a growing population. Now is the time to ensure that land supply is in place so that we can deliver more housing as industry returns to health. Continued effort to re-profile schemes as well as getting sound plans in place will help create the conditions to attract capital investment and allow local authorities to guide and steer investment in ways that the community wants.'*

### **Section 106 and Viability**

Now more than ever it is important to help authorities to ensure existing planning permissions are built out. Ultimately, section 106 agreements are contractual agreements between developers and local authorities to deliver what is necessary to make a development acceptable in order to obtain planning consent. Where they are asked to do so, local planning authorities should be carefully reviewing whether obligations agreed through section 106 accord with the five principles set out in B5 of planning circular 05/05.'

So there you have it. Even Mr Cameron can't remove the need for more homes. The case for planning for them, rather than have them rain down upon us in speculative planning applications, is unanswerable. Discussing 'Who plans?' and 'What plans?' must not be used as a smokescreen for inaction.

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### Notes

- 1 *Government Response to the Environmental Audit Committee's Report on Greener Homes for the Future?* Cm 7615. DCLG. TSO, May 2009. [www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm76/7615/7615.pdf](http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm76/7615/7615.pdf)
- 2 'Planning for housing and economic recovery'. Letter from the DCLG Chief Planner to Chief Planning Officers. DCLG, 12 May 2009. [www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/letterhousingeconomic.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/letterhousingeconomic.pdf)