

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

In many villages and rural areas the opportunities for new residential development are going to be limited in the coming years, as local authorities seem to adopt increasingly restrictive planning policies, reflecting Central Government's drive for sustainable development based upon urban concentration. However there is clearly a problem with a lack of affordable accommodation in the rural areas and most planning authorities do operate an exceptions policy allowing for consideration of affordable housing schemes on the edge of settlements where there is a proven local need.

Historically there has been little appetite for selling land for affordable housing, with land values typically being no more than 2 or 3 times agricultural value, and certainly not enough to outweigh the hope value that the land might come for market housing at some point in the future. However recent deals achieved by Henry H. Bletsoe & Son, suggest that affordable housing opportunities are too quickly rejected, and in the current economic downturn, when the bottom has fallen out of the market for housing land, the one area where there is still some activity is in the development of affordable housing. Our experience in working with reputable Housing Associations suggests that it is possible to achieve a significant uplift in the value of agricultural land, by pursuing affordable housing opportunities, and in the longer term it may open up further development potential. With little prospect of an easing of planning policies in the foreseeable future, these kind of opportunities do deserve careful consideration.

Our top tips for those contemplating affordable housing opportunities are as follows:

- 1. Choose the right Housing Association partner** - It is important to choose a reputable Housing Association who will be prepared to fund what can be an expensive and time consuming process, in establishing local need and then obtaining planning permission.
- 2. Be prepared to engage the public** - The success of an affordable housing scheme will depend upon the support of the Parish Council and the public at large. It is important to consult publicly at an early stage, and any reputable Housing Association will be prepared to lead this process with landowner support.
- 3. Look for future opportunities** – It may be that through careful design and siting, it will be possible to create future development opportunities as a result of an initial affordable housing scheme.
- 4. Consider you requirements for any retained land** - It is important to recognise that by selling land you may need to reserve or create rights for access and services to retained land.

For anyone who might think that they have land which would be suitable for an affordable housing scheme, please contact Andrew Middleditch or Peter Moore from this office for a free initial feasibility assessment. We are in regular contact with a number of Housing Associations looking for land throughout the region, and in many cases, they will be prepared to pay landowner's agents' fees if a sale is agreed.