

# Housing is Not a Disease: Reflections on PPG 3 and Regional Guidance

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## Introduction

This paper will argue that there is a fundamental contradiction in Government policy on housing. On the one hand it argues that there should be a “decent home for all”, while on the other it consciously under-supplies new housing, thus creating a mismatch between demand and need and supply. For many years Governments had based the quantity of new housing provision on estimates of newly forming households; thus acknowledging the need to loosely match demand and supply. From 1998 onwards, however, the Government has bowed to pressures from environmentalists and has allowed levels of housing provision to be determined in part from the “bottom up”. A consequence of this, particularly in the pressured counties of southern England, has been a tendency for local authorities to press for a lower level of provision than estimates of newly formed households would suggest is required.

The significance of this is that under-provision of housing has real consequences for those affected:

- House prices are likely to rise further as demand exceeds supply.
- Involuntary household sharing increases, creating misery for some.
- Local authorities may resort to extreme tactics—for example, shipping households to other parts of the country.
- More people are forced into private renting and social housing; the first generally a squalid sector and the latter grossly underprovided.
- The “key worker housing” problem gets worse, threatening the economies of some of our most successful localities.

This paper will return to these consequences later.

## Household Projections and Housing Numbers

Although the origins of housing provision numbers in Government household projections are well known, there is no harm in reiterating the procedure and trying to bring estimates up to date. This is because the projections provide a neutral, rational basis for estimating levels of provision, compared to the ideological and political approaches that are used to counter the projections. Others will disagree with this view, seeing the projections as some kind of conspiracy between statisticians and housebuilders.

The debate about household growth and housing provision can be simplified by considering two sub-debates: over scale and location. The *scale debate* concerns the validity of the household projections and their conversion into a housing provision number.

## The Scale of Housing Requirement

Household projections for England are produced at national, regional and county levels, based on the population projections at these same scales. The household projections are based on population

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projections. Just as the population projections are based on past trends in natural increase and migration rates, so the household projections also build in these assumptions. Projections of the propensity of certain age/sex groups in the population—based on past changes in such propensities—are applied to the projections of numbers of people in these groups to give numbers of households.

In recent years two sets of household projections have proved to be controversial. The 1992-based projections, published in 1995,<sup>1</sup> envisaged an additional 4.4 million households in England over the 25 year period from 1991; a growth of 23 per cent. Over the 25 year period to 2016, the population of England was expected to rise by 7.7 per cent, while households would increase by nearly 23 per cent. Average household size was expected to decline by 12 per cent from 2.47 to 2.17 persons. This projected growth of 4.4 million households—or at least the assumed implication for housing growth—shocked many people and started the debate that continues through to the present.

Table 1 shows the factors that contribute to the 4.4 million. Approximately half is accounted for by growth in the adult population and some 900,000 by age structure changes. Changes in household representative rates—the propensity to form households—give 1.2 million of the increase. Thus, population growth rather than changing household size is the major contributor to the change. This population growth arises in part from new assumptions about in-migration to England. In previous projections this has been assumed to be zero. In the 1992-based population projections this assumption has been changed to a net in-migration of 50,000 per year in the early years of the projections, declining to zero in later years, as explained earlier. The effect of these migration assumptions is to add half a million households to the projections. This migration assumption has been very controversial—but will be more so in the future as new population projections assume a constant level of net in-migration rather than a declining one.

**Table 1: Components of Projected Net Increase in Households, 1991-2016 (thousands)<sup>2</sup>**

Total	Adult Population	Age Structure	Major Components:		Remainder
			Marital Status	Household Representative Rates	
4,384	2,023	932	108	1,207	113

The 1996-based projections, published in 1999<sup>3</sup> (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 1999), suggest a growth of 3.8 million households from 1996-2021. Although this total projected growth is lower than that suggested by the 1992-based projections, it has still generated considerable antagonism from people who fear that the consequence will be the concreting over of the English countryside.

<sup>1</sup> Department of the Environment, *Projections of Households in England to 2016*, (HMSO, London, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Projections of Households in England to 2021*, (DETR, London, 1999).

Critics of the use of household projections argue that:

- Past rates of population growth and household formation are not a good guide to the future.
- Assumed net international migration rates into England are much too high and that Government policy can be used to stop such migration.
- High rates of divorce and separation are driving household formation and should be stopped.
- The future state of the economy will inhibit household formation because fewer people will be able to establish separate households.
- Low levels of supply of housing will inhibit household formation and reduce pressure on land.

Although some logic has been used in objecting to the use of household projections, most critics rely on instinct—they simply do not like the consequences of an apparently high demand for housing. Where the above logic has been used, it can be dealt with quite readily. Past rates of change have always been used as the basis for projections. They are generally acknowledged to be the best basis on which to make judgements about the future; and certainly the short term future. The history of Government household projections suggests that, if anything, this approach leads to an underestimate of change, rather than exaggerating it as many would suggest. Household projections have consistently underestimated actual household formation.

The notion that the Government can simply stop international migration by turning people back at Dover is naïve. It is true that net movements to England are at an all-time high and that they are subject to considerable variation. However, a pattern does seem to have been established of high rates of net movements. The movements are largely by people who have right of residence in the U.K., either because they are E.U. citizens or because they come from traditional sources such as the Indian subcontinent. Whilst the Government is processing many asylum seekers, the majority of these will not remain in the U.K. It is legitimate migrants who are boosting our population numbers and hence adding to the demand for housing.

Just as the idea that migration can be stopped is naïve, so is the notion that a moral crusade can stop divorce and separation and hence reduce new household formation. It is difficult to imagine how a Government would legislate to do this. Even if formal divorce became harder to obtain, it would probably simply boost the number of couples living separately—thus doing nothing to reduce household numbers.

A further argument put forward is that economic pressures will make it harder for people to form separate households in the future, and hence that fewer will form. The basis for this argument is not clear. Perhaps it is just wishful thinking. Certainly, it is not obvious in the U.K. that the economic climate in the immediate future will be any worse than in the immediate past. Mortgage rates for example, are now at an all-time low. Some critics argue that the household projections have no economic constraints built into them. Strictly speaking this is not true. In adopting past rates of household formation as the basis for new projections, the economic conditions prevailing in the immediate past are built into the projections. In addition to these economic arguments, there is a moral issue that arises here. There is evidence to suggest that generally households are not inhibited from forming during periods of economic difficulty. Rather, they form and remain concealed because they are forced into sharing housing. Thus, for example, young couples, perhaps even married couples, live with their parents when they would dearly love to be independent. Forced sharing can be miserable.

The question of misery arises again if we consider the consequences of simply under-supplying housing. This is a route that some are happy to follow. They argue that if we resist the pressures for

housing then somehow people will cope and greenfields will be saved from development. In effect, Government has accepted this line by accepting that regional guidance and development plans might plan for levels of new housing below those suggested by household projections. But the consequences of this have already been rehearsed: further upward pressure on house prices; greater rates of sharing; more pressure on an inadequate social housing sector; more people forced into an inadequate private renting sector; greater and greater problems in housing key workers in our strongest economic areas.

Table 2 attempts to summarise initiatives that have been suggested for reducing household numbers and for minimising the effect of new households on the number of new housing units that have to be provided. Moving from left to right, the diagram shows first how an initial projection of new households—say 3.8 million—might be reduced. The third column then shows how the reduced household figure might in turn be subject to initiatives that might house this figure in the minimum number of new dwellings. Vertically, the diagram shows a continuum between acceptable and unacceptable interventions. Different commentators would place initiatives in different places. This commentator rejects the extreme measures that might reduce household formation—a moral crusade, restricted in-migration, and a deliberate policy of undersupply. The only benign intervention might be to persuade more students to live at their parental home, thus reducing the number of new households formed every October.

**Table 2: Acceptable and Unacceptable Interventions in Household and Housing Numbers**

<b>Household Projection</b>	<b>Adjusted Household Projection</b>	<b>Housing Provision</b>	
	Students living At home	More conversions Living over the shop VAT changes on conversions	<b>Acceptable</b>
	Moral crusade Stop immigration Under-supply housing	Billeting “Widow cleansing”	<b>Unacceptable</b>
3.8 million	?	?	

In the move from households to houses there are more legitimate interventions. Some of these—incentives for conversions of larger property to flats, more living over the shop initiatives, changes to VAT to encourage more conversions, *etc.*,—have been introduced by the Government as part of its urban renaissance agenda. But even here some sensitivities need to be respected. Forcing widows to give up their large homes to facilitate conversion, for example, is unacceptable. The issue at this stage is about land as well as numbers of dwellings. Thus, the more urban land is reused to accommodate household growth, then the more acceptable is that growth.

The most recent household projections have been produced by Alan Holmans (2001).<sup>4</sup> He has taken the 1996-based official projections, produced in 1999, and updated them to use a 1998 base. He refers to these as the “1998 unofficial projections”. A major change relative to the 1996-based official projections is the use of 1998-based population projections as the basis for the new household

<sup>4</sup> Holmans, A., *Housing Demand and Need in England 1996–2016*, (Town and Country Planning Association, London, 2001).

projections. The significant feature of these 1998-based population projections for England is that they produce a total population at 2016 that is almost 1 million higher than that shown by the 1996-based projections. This is largely due to an assumed higher level of net international migration to England, plus a faster fall in death rates. This issue of net international migration was controversial in the 1996-based household projections—it is even more so now. The actual net gain has exceeded 100,000 persons per year since 1994.

Using the updated population projection, Holmans has produced new estimates of “newly arising demand and need in 1996–2016”. He is careful to separate the new housing requirement that will be met in the private market (demand) and the requirement for housing that will require some kind of subsidy (need). Table 3 shows his conclusions. Including provision to offset demolitions and other losses, Holmans estimates that some 4.5 million additional houses are required over the 20 year period from 1996. This figure assumes that market demand will be met and that the newly arising need for affordable housing will also be met. This does not take into account any requirement to provide for the backlog of unmet need for housing. Over many years, the actual provision of affordable housing has fallen below that needed in principle. Thus, a substantial backlog has built up; perhaps to 650,000 dwellings according to Holmans. Some commentators suggest that this must be addressed. In practice, it is likely that this backlog will be ignored and that the backlog will rise as provision continues to fall below newly arising need. If any serious attempt were to be made to reduce the backlog, then the housing provision target would have to exceed the 3.8 million or the 4.5 million estimates made by DETR (1999) and Holmans (2001) respectively.

**Table 3: Newly Arising Demand and Need in 1996–2016<sup>5</sup>**

	Owner-occupied and market rented	Affordable housing	All tenures
Net increase in households	2,904	643	3,547
Increase in secondary residences	100	0	100
Net increase in vacant dwellings	124	41	165
Adjustment for sales to sitting tenants	-785	+785	0
Net increase in housing stock	2,343	1,469	3,812
New provision to offset demolitions and other losses	540	200	740
New provision demanded and needed	2,883	1,669	4,552

<sup>5</sup> Holmans, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

In considering the social problems that may arise from insufficient housing, it is important to distinguish between market housing and affordable housing. There is evidence that the total quantity of new market housing is falling below the requirement identified by Holmans. Indeed, new housing starts are at their lowest level for many years. The reasons for this are not clear, but certainly house-builders will claim that part of the reason is that the planning system is restricting the release of new land for housing. They will also claim that rising house prices in pressured areas are also in part a response to restrictive local planning regimes. There has been a debate for some years about the effect of the planning system on land, and hence house, prices. The drift of this debate is to identify an effect on prices resulting from restrictive planning, but to suggest that the effect is marginal. A common response from those who want to dismiss the argument is that to have any significant effect on house prices vast amounts of land would have to be released for development.

Even if it is true that the effects are marginal, simple economics suggests that reduced supply of housing will tend to push up prices. For some people on modest incomes such rises might just push them out of reach of the market sector. Such people are then forced to seek subsidised housing from a local authority, from a housing association or from the private rented sector using housing benefit.

Despite some concerns over the market sector, perhaps our sympathies should rest largely with those who have to seek subsidised housing. Holmans estimates that there is a newly arising need for affordable housing of about 80,000–85,000 units per year. Through the 1990s the actual annual provision of social housing (from the Housing Corporation, local authority social housing grants, and other minor sources) has varied from 78,000 units at best to 39,000 units. The last year for which figures are available, 1998–1999, saw 47,000 units built. Thus, each year there is a substantial shortfall on what is required. It is this shortfall that is adding to the backlog problem.

### **The Location of Housing Requirement**

Just as the question of the scale of housing provision has been controversial, so has been the question of *location*. This is the issue that causes grief at the local level. Until recently, there was a clear procedure for allocating regional scales of housing provision down to local authorities through regional guidance, structure plans and local plans. The national household projection was divided between regions according to the demographic projections for those regions. Thus, the regional household growth figure became the regional control total for housing provision. The task then was to divide this regional total between counties. This was done through regional planning guidance. Using a mixture of technical studies, based on the trend-based household projection for each county, plus policy discussions between local authorities and the regional planning agency, the allocation of the regional control total to counties was achieved. This approach mixed imposition—of the regional control total—with a bottom-up input from local authorities. The bottom-up approach was constrained, however, by the need for the sum of local authority allocations to equal the regional control total. Through the 1990s, despite some local authorities attempting to minimise their contribution to the regional total, this arrangement worked reasonably well. Only in the South East was it necessary for the Secretary of State to intervene to persuade local authorities to accept their contributions in full.

In the late 1990s this process of imposition of regional housing provision totals came under increasing pressure, particularly in the South East. Local authorities claimed that the assumption that they would continue to accommodate large increments of new housing development was unreasonable. They argued that the logic of the household projections, based on past evidence of migration within the U.K., condemns them to continuing housing pressures. The consequence was an ever more hostile reception for a regional guidance system dominated by the household projections. Indeed, the household projections and the implied housing requirements at the county level, became the only

significant feature of regional guidance in the South East. This hostile reception, allied to the general concern expressed about the household projections by environmental groups, led Government to abandon the traditional “predict and provide” approach to housing. It was replaced by an approach called “plan, monitor and manage”. This vague concept has been welcomed by those who consider the household projections to be iniquitous, because it implies that provision at something less than that suggested by the projections is possible. Indeed, this view has been confirmed since 1998, when Government suggested that regional guidance might involve a “bottom-up” approach to housing numbers. This allows counties to argue for a provision that they think they can accommodate rather than they should provide. Opponents of “plan, monitor and manage” fear that the approach will both under-supply housing and will undermine genuine strategic planning by creating a return to incremental planning.

Holmans makes clear his view that under-supplying housing is not to manage housing:

“Suffice it to say that ‘predict and provide’ as a term of opprobrium has come from roadbuilding and that the analogy between additional road capacity being soon absorbed by generated traffic and house building is unsound. To limit the increase in the supply of housing to something significantly below the amount that would balance the increase in households is not to ‘manage’ demand in any meaningful sense, but to merely reject part of it.”<sup>6</sup>

The consequences—good or bad—of this new approach have been most obviously played out in the South East as a new version of regional guidance has been developed. SERPLAN, acting on behalf of the local authorities in the region, produced a draft version of regional guidance in late 1998 (SERPLAN, 1998).<sup>7</sup> The significant feature of this was a cautious approach to housing provision. The “plan, monitor and manage” approach was used as a justification for suggesting an overall housing provision some way below that implied by the 1996-based regional household projection. No doubt this arose because of representations from local authorities about their inability or unwillingness to provide housing at a higher level.

The draft regional strategy was then subjected in 2000 to the new public examination of draft regional guidance.<sup>8</sup> Not surprisingly, the main topic of debate at the inquiry was the housing numbers. SERPLAN and supporters defended the low level of provision in the draft, while house-builders and others protested that the household projections provided the most realistic guide to the housing requirement. The report of the public examination, from Professor Stephen Crow, basically supported the latter argument. Crow argued that decent housing is a fundamental human right, and that under-provision would create misery for some. He concluded that the household projections did, indeed, give the most useful guide to what is required. He proposed a housing provision level for regional guidance that reflected this. The final version of the new RPG 9, issued by Government, attempted a compromise line, alighting on a figure somewhere between the original SERPLAN proposal and Professor Crow’s amendment. The figure is also given, not as a total for the 20 year strategy, but as an annual building rate for the immediate future—confirming the fears of those who suspect a return to incrementalism. Here, then, is the proof that the Government is willing to undersupply housing.

The location issue is at its most intense in southern England. This is where the growth pressures are greatest; this is where local authorities claim they have “done enough” in accommodating that growth;

<sup>6</sup> Holmans, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> SERPLAN, *A Sustainable Development Strategy for the South East*, (SERPLAN, London, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Panel Report on Public Examination of Draft Regional Planning Guidance for the South East*, (Government Office for the South East (the Crow Report), Guildford 2000).

and it is where the restrictive NIMBY response is most virulent. The same issues arise in some other parts of England—in Cheshire and North Yorkshire, for example. In other, less pressured parts of the Midlands and the North these questions of housing growth are not a priority. In some areas the demand for social housing is low, and there are even areas of abandoned social housing. In other areas the housing issue is not one of growth but of quality. But even if the issue of under-supply of housing is of importance only in half the country, it still remains a major problem.

The politics behind these issues is interesting. In the 1950s and 1960s politicians saw votes in the promotion of housing. Housing was a “good thing”. Now, housing is seen by many members of the public, and hence politicians, virtually as a disease. It is to be avoided at all costs. It is a situation that has intensified through the 1990s. During much of that decade a concern for the environment developed in society generally. For many people that new concern for sustainable development expressed itself in the protection of Britain’s green fields from development. Politicians have not been slow to see where the public’s priorities lie. In the General Election of 2001 no politician was heard to promote housing; many were heard to promote the protection of our green and pleasant land. At the time of writing, the two contenders for the leadership of the Conservative Party are vying to be seen as the most vigorous defender of the countryside.

The irony is that many of the NIMBY opponents of new housing, and the politicians who represent them, will be the first to complain about high local house prices, about the inability of locals to buy houses in places where they were born, and about the shortages of key workers locally. They do not, or choose not, to make the connection between these problems and their own reluctance to allow new housing to be built. Their instinct is to blame housing pressures on unreasonable outsiders who want to move to their local area. While it is true that some housing pressures arise from in-migrants, generally most pressure arises locally. It is very much the sons and daughters of the NIMBY protesters, and other locals, who create the problem.

### **A Decent Home for All?**

In 2000 the Government produced a green paper on housing issues, “Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All”.<sup>9</sup> Later that year, following consultation on the green paper, Government announced the initiatives it would undertake as a result of the review. Not surprisingly, given the title of the green paper, the focus of these initiatives is on quality and choice: “Quality through better homes and better services. Choice through people being given greater involvement in, and control over, their housing” (p. 3).

The key proposals were as follows:

- A stronger, more strategic role for local authorities, across all housing in their area;
- Additional measures to support sustainable home ownership, including a Starter Home Initiative for key workers;
- Measures to raise the standards of private rented housing, including encouraging new investment;
- Measures to bring all social housing up to a decent standard by 2010;
- Measures to deliver new affordable housing in line with local needs;
- Reforms to lettings policies for social housing;
- A review of tenure arrangements for social housing;

<sup>9</sup> Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All—Summary*, DETR, London, 2000).

- Reforms to establish a fairer system of rents for tenants of local authorities and registered social landlords;
- Simplification of the administration of Housing Benefit.

The emphasis here is clearly on quality and choice. The aim is to improve the quality of stock held in the local authority, social housing and private rented sectors. Management procedures are to be improved in all cases, including greater tenant involvement. There is no direct focus on increasing the quantity of housing, and no attempt to link the green paper concerns with the ongoing debate about household and housing numbers. Consequently, the social housing issue is not linked to events in the private housing market, including prices.

Although there is no direct concern in the Government's initiatives with the overall scale of housing required, certain initiatives might help to increase the quantity of housing. Increased investment is promised for the Housing Corporation, as are increased resources for local authorities. Whether these resources will increase the quantity of housing or will be absorbed in efforts to increase quality remains to be seen.

The planning system, through section 106 agreements, is still expected to squeeze affordable housing from house-builders. That the planning system should be used in this way is now part of the conventional wisdom. No-one will ask why a large share of publicly subsidised housing is now provided in this way, rather than being provided directly by the public sector. If the question was asked, presumably the pragmatic answer would be that the opportunity to use the planning system in this way exists and that the arrangement seems to work. Questions of principle, and of the effect of the arrangement on house prices and hence on demand for social housing, do not enter the equation.

### **PPG 3 and All That**

The line taken here so far is that much of the housing problem arises because Government has accepted the popular line that to undersupply housing is acceptable. This is largely manifest in planned housing provision somewhat lower than household projections suggest is necessary in some places. This tendency to undersupply may have been exacerbated recently by other planning policy, most obviously PPG 3<sup>10</sup> (DETR, 2000). This guidance provides further detail to the policy thrusts of the Urban Task Force report<sup>11</sup> and the Urban White Paper (U.K. Government, 2000). The intention of all three documents is to deliver an urban renaissance by: focusing as much new housing as possible on re-used sites in urban areas; building those houses at higher densities; promoting a sequential test for housing; urging housing capacity studies; designing parking out of housing sites; mixed use development; and more.

These new initiatives have begun to bite at the local level. This new agenda is reflected in all levels of planning policy, from the regional to the local. As the agenda has been introduced gradually in recent years, it is probably fair to say that the house-building industry has been sceptical. It has been required to switch its attention from an almost exclusive focus on large, greenfield sites to consideration of the prospects of urban sites that are often small, contaminated and of little interest to house-buyers. Although many house-building companies have responded by developing expertise in urban sites, their instinct has been to argue against further restrictions on greenfield development. They protest that the Government's target—reiterated in PPG 3—that 60 per cent of all new housing and conversions should be on re-used land, is unreasonable.

<sup>10</sup> Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Revised PPG 3: Housing*, (DETR, London, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Towards an Urban Renaissance, Final Report of the Urban Task Force*, (E.& F.N. Spon, London, 1999).

The house-builders—and perhaps some professional planners—argue now that the initiatives confirmed in PPG 3 make their business more difficult than ever. Whether there is a connection or not, annual rates of house-building are lower now than for many years.

It is difficult to tell whether the short term reduction in house-building is (i) an indication of problems that will persist under the new PPG 3 regime, resulting in ongoing shortages, or (ii) simply a short term blip as a result of the industry's rather awkward adjustment to the new regime.

House-builders argue that a series of new hurdles is reducing levels of provision. They argue that the sequential test to be used in determining the quantity of housing required outside urban areas is slowing down the local planning process, and hence the amount of house-building, as local authorities produce urban capacity studies. The house-builders will, in turn, want to question some of the assumptions made in such studies, fearing as they do that excessively optimistic figures will tend to arise. This optimism will produce low greenfield allocations in local plans, resulting in lower provision than is necessary if urban areas fail to produce expected capacity.

Another key feature of the new urban renaissance agenda is the promotion of higher residential densities in housing developments generally, and in urban areas in particular. Again, house-builders have responded to this new approach, albeit reluctantly in some cases. Their fears concern the long term popularity of high density developments, in a market where consumers tend to demand more space as real incomes rise. To date, these fears seem to be unfounded. Where high density developments have taken place in the more desirable parts of cities, they seem to have been popular. Some concerns have been expressed about the types of people served by new high density developments. Many are occupied by young professional people, who may not be committed to an area, and who may move on as soon as children are born. Small, one or two bedroom apartments may not be attractive to the very families that might help to revive inner city areas. Likewise, social housing built to the new high density specification may not be suitable for many of the families who make up a high proportion of those households seeking social housing.

One feature of planning that has irritated house-builders, landowners and local authorities alike is the retrospective application of PPG 3. This arises when a decision is made, say by an Inspector, based on the notion that had the current PPG 3 existed, when a local plan was produced, policies in the plan would have been different. He then proceeds to make a recommendation on the basis of what that plan might have said. An example is the case of large scale housing south of the M4 at Reading. The Berkshire structure plan made provision for this housing because the Secretary of State insisted that the county plan for the full quota of housing in RPG 9. The location of the housing site was debated at the Wokingham local plan inquiry, with three sets of promoters spending millions on pressing the merits of their sites. The Inspector, and subsequently the Secretary of State, shocked all concerned by arguing that if the current planning regime, and particularly PPG 3, had been in place when the structure plan was formulated, the policy would have been to find the required housing within existing urban areas. Hence none of the promoted sites were required.

### **The Way Forward**

The simple logic here has been to argue that politics in England has contrived to undersupply housing. This undersupply has created, and will continue to create, misery for some. At the margin increased prices push some households out of the private market sector. They have to seek comfort in the social sector, which is itself inadequate. The council sector will at best maintain the existing stock. The housing association sector does not provide enough new units each year, never mind dealing with the backlog of under-provision. The private rented sector remains largely squalid. Some hope arises from

recent Government pronouncements on increased funding for the Housing Corporation and a promise to improve quality across all sectors. Whether funding or better management will increase the overall stock beyond current levels is not clear.

If the quantity of housing is to be increased, then Government will have to confront all those groups and individuals who see further housing as a disease. This seems unlikely at the moment given the political unpopularity of this view. One hope is that with a general election now a long way off, some politicians might be so bold as to address the problem without immediate fear of electoral disaster. One way for them to do this might be to focus not on the environmental consequences of new housing in their constituencies, but on the plight of those affected by low supply—sons and daughters, the low paid, key workers, *etc.*

Such a bold political move might be eased by a national campaign for housing, orchestrated by responsible groups, that might gradually point out the folly of neglecting housing. Such a campaign might be able to demonstrate forcefully the consequences of such neglect by highlighting the effects on specific groups of the population—those for whom this neglect creates misery. The campaign might also try to demonstrate that building new houses—some on greenfield sites—need not spell disaster for the English countryside. Most of England is green and will remain so.