
Maintaining the vitality and viability of market towns

Market towns (small rural settlements of between 2000 and 20000 people) are centres for services, housing and employment; research shows that although they could continue to fulfil an important role in the countryside they face challenges.

What are the research findings?

- Market towns need to develop solutions that match local needs.
- They are still valued by rural and urban dwellers for their cultural and historical heritage.
- Rural residents may bypass their towns and centres in order to work, shop and enjoy leisure elsewhere.
- However, through careful planning, market towns can still appeal to these residents as centres for trade and other activity.
- With appropriate marketing, market towns can also appeal as destinations for day trips.
- Housing growth may help, but experience suggests this has not always been well planned.
- Good planning requires collaboration within/between towns and a good relationship with their local authority but in practice this is very difficult to achieve.

What are the implications for UK planning authorities?

Planners and local authorities could help market towns to fulfil their potential by:

- Carefully managing change.
- Planning for change around a vision/strategy at town level.
- Thinking carefully about potential linkages between different activities in the towns.
- Avoiding undesirable/unconnected urban extensions.
- Prioritising town centres in their approach to development.
- Identifying the highly motivated individuals who are committed to finding a future for their towns and working with them.
- Encouraging collaboration.

Further information:

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