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## Affordable housing and inequality in rural Britain

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A shortage of housing in rural areas has increased prices and excluded middle income groups and younger people from rural Britain. House prices in rural England are 25% higher than in urban areas. There is also much less social and affordable housing in rural areas for those unable to buy.

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### What problems result?

A lack of affordable housing results in:

- Overcrowding and homelessness
- Longer commuting distances and 'reverse commuting'
- Damage to family life and networks
- Barriers to economic growth
- Restricted life chances
- Growing inequality
- The risk of rural areas becoming ghettos for the affluent

### What are the research findings?

Research carried out in CRE shows that:

- The problem is perpetuated by housing and social policies.
- The notion of "sustainable and unsustainable communities" has been a major contributing factor.
- Planning policies which confine development to urban areas ensure rural house prices are higher.
- Planning practice in rural areas has prioritised environmental interests over social inclusion.

### What changes would help?

- **Planning policies** that encourage rather than prevent affordable rural housing. Sustainable communities require affordable housing.
- Reinstating a national target for affordable rural housing.
- More **finance** from a combination of public investment and cross-subsidy. Fewer market houses mean less scope for cross-subsidy and greater demands on the public purse.
- Cross-subsidy on exception sites in smaller settlements. Quotas of affordable housing remain vital in larger schemes.
- **Leadership** to challenge the "concreting over the countryside" myth and highlight the consequences of a lack of affordable housing.
- Unlocking of surplus public sector land by ensuring "greatest public benefit" rather than "best value".
- Support for community land trusts and other innovative, local approaches.
- Exempting villages from bedroom tax.

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