

## **Environment and Planning A, forthcoming (paper accepted in final form)**

### **The exercise of power to limit the development of new housing in the English countryside**

Dr John Sturzaker  
School of Architecture, Planning & Landscape  
Newcastle University  
Claremont Tower  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE1 7RU  
Tel +44 (0) 191 222 5413  
Email john.sturzaker@ncl.ac.uk

#### **Abstract**

This paper argues that power is being exercised by rural elites to prevent much needed new housing being built in the English countryside. Evidence is presented from five case study local authorities in rural England, via analysis of interview data and policy documents produced at the regional and local plan-making level. The paper rejects technocratic explanations for the ongoing failure of the planning system to deliver more housing in line with the well established need/demand for such. Drawing on the three dimensions of power presented by Lukes (1974, 2005), the paper explores how the exercise of power effectively subverts planning processes and leads overwhelmingly to decisions being made which favour the exclusionary preferences of certain groups.

#### **Introduction**

It has been well established that there is a particular problem with housing affordability in rural areas (ARHC, 2006; Best and Shucksmith, 2006; CRC, 2006), though in the very recent past some have begun to question this (Bramley and Watkins, 2009; Coombes, 2009). Notwithstanding these recent critiques, it is generally agreed that since the introduction in 1991 of national planning advice designed to increase affordable housing provision, delivery in rural England has been consistently and significantly less than the established need. The Commission for Rural Communities has estimated a need for 30,800 additional affordable homes per annum in rural areas (CRC, 2006), compared to a build rate of less than 6,000 per annum (Best and Shucksmith, 2006).

Previous research exploring this shortfall has tended to focus on “blockages” in the system for delivery of affordable housing (Audit Commission and National Audit Office, 2005; Farthing and Ashley, 2002; Taylor, 2008; Whitehead et al., 2005). Some of these blockages, and suggestions for overcoming them, were noted 30 years ago (Shucksmith, 1981). However, the number of affordable (or market) houses being built has not substantially increased.

This paper argues that there are limits to the success of ‘rational’ policy – that attempting to improve the efficiency/efficacy of the delivery of affordable housing in rural areas through technical tinkering with the planning system may not be adequate. The lack of success of this kind of approach suggests that there is a more fundamental problem at the core of rural housing delivery. Based on empirical data from five case studies in different regions of England, this paper argues that the shortfall in (affordable) housing provision is due to the exercise of power in three “dimensions” (Lukes, 2005). It postulates that power is exercised by rural elites, interested in what is called in the title of Peter Hall et al’s seminal work “The Containment of Urban England” (Hall et al., 1973). The paper builds on much of the existing work on rural housing, some of which (Dear, 1992; Gallent and Tewdwr-Jones, 2007; Monk et al., 2005) considers the importance of opposition

to new development in the countryside. What is lacking, however, is a framing of this opposition to housing in relation to the exercise of power, and specifically an analysis of how and in what forms that power is exercised. This paper seeks to address that issue.

The research upon which this paper is based focussed on rural *affordable* housing. However, it is argued below that an emphasis on purely affordable housing, and/or housing for 'local' people, is an example of the manifestation of power used to exclude 'Otherness' from the countryside. This paper therefore considers rural housing in general.

## **Rural housing**

It is not the intention of this paper to revisit the range of publications which discuss the extent of, and various reasons for, need and demand for housing in rural England (see for example ARHC, 2006; Best and Shucksmith, 2006; CRC, 2008; Richards and Satsangi, 2004). In summary, the supply of rural housing (both market and affordable) is lower than it is in urban areas – the Affordable Rural Housing Commission identified a 6% fall in new housebuilding in rural areas between 1998 and 2005 (compared with a 29% rise in urban areas), and a rise of only 3% in affordable housebuilding between 2001 and 2005 (compared with a 22% rise in urban areas). At the same time demand for such housing is often very high, thanks in part to demand from commuters, retirees and second/holiday home owners.

This disparity between supply and demand has led to several policy initiatives to support affordable housing delivery in rural areas. The implementation of several of these policies will be referred to in the body of this article, so they merit some explanation here:

- *Section 106 (s106) schemes* have delivered most affordable housing seen in rural areas in recent years. In s106 schemes, a proportion of market housing is required, via legal agreements related to planning permissions, to be designated as affordable, with price and occupancy restricted.
- *Rural exception sites* are specific to communities of 3,000 population and below. In, or adjacent to, such communities, affordable houses can be built on land which would not otherwise receive planning permission for market housing.
- *Rural housing enablers (RHEs)* are often employed by rural community councils. RHEs usually act as independent drivers of rural housing, working with local stakeholders to deliver rural schemes.
- *Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3)*, published in 2006, emphasised the Government's commitment to "improving the affordability and supply of housing in all communities" (DCLG, 2006). It was made clear that the planning system should deliver "A sufficient quantity of housing taking into account need and demand and seeking to improve choice" (ibid.). This is the first time that national planning advice has stressed the importance of increasing supply in *all* communities, urban and rural, and has advocated meeting *demand* as well as *need* for new housing.

## **Research methods**

The study from which this paper is drawn was based on two key sources of data.

Firstly, interviews were carried out between October 2006 and November 2007 with 34 key actors in affordable housing delivery across five case study local authorities in different regions of England: Alnwick District in the North East region, Harrogate Borough in the Yorkshire and Humber region, South Hams District in the South West region, Stratford-on-Avon District in the West Midlands region, and Wealden District in the South East region. These case studies were

chosen because, in addition to being in different geographical areas of England: they have different approaches to generating affordable housing through the planning system, several having been identified as examples of ‘best practice’ in this regard; and are in different housing markets, for example exhibiting different levels of demand from in-migration or different forms of demand affecting house prices.

Those interviewed included seven housing officers and four planning officers from the local authorities, four representatives of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) operating in those areas, four RHEs, and ten representatives of parish councils (the lowest tier of local government in England, operating at village and town level). These interviewees were identified as being the key actors involved in affordable housing provision in rural areas, based on a literature review and the author’s experience as a planning practitioner. The interviews were semi-structured, with certain core questions running across the areas, supplemented with location-specific questions where necessary. They were transcribed in full.

Secondly, policy documents at the national, regional and local level were studied, including England-wide Planning Policy Statements and Guidance notes, Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs) from the five regions being studied, and local plans/Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) for the case study local authorities.

The policy documents and interview data were analysed to draw out common themes relating to (*inter alia*) attitudes to housing development, both market and affordable.

All five of the local authorities demonstrated high demand for market housing and a correspondingly high level of need (established through housing needs surveys and housing market assessments) for affordable housing. However, the research found that housing supply was not increasing to meet that need and demand. LDFs, the new form of local development plans, were not delivering higher levels of housing, market or affordable, in the case study areas, often to the vocal frustration of the key actors interviewed.

The research identified various ‘technical’ problems with the implementation of Government policy regarding planning for housing in rural England, and suggested some solutions to those problems. That technical discussion will be presented in a future paper, and develops the work of others in this field. However, as noted in the introduction, technical solutions have been proposed for 30 years or more, to no noticeable improvement in (affordable) housing delivery in rural areas. It therefore seems reasonable to infer that more fundamental issues are at the heart of the problem. It is the central thesis of this paper that behind and beneath the visible apparatus of the planning system, the exercise of power is acting to prevent significant increases in housing supply in the English countryside. The work of Steven Lukes can cast light on this exercise of power.

### **Lukes’ three dimensions of power**

Steven Lukes’ *Power: A Radical View* was first published in 1974, and reissued in 2005 with additional notes from the author. Lukes argued that power was exercised in three dimensions:

*The one-dimensional view of power* focuses on decision making, and assumes that the locus of power can be seen by noting who prevails in decision making where there is an observable conflict. Those that prevail, it can be assumed, are the powerful. American authors writing from a pluralist perspective in the 1950s (e.g. Dahl, 1961) argued that critiques of democracy in the USA were misplaced, because “since different actors and different interest groups prevail in different issue-areas, there is no overall ‘ruling elite’ and power is distributed pluralistically” (Lukes, 2005, p5).

*The two-dimensional view of power* developed as a critique of the one-dimensional view, focuses on non-decision making, and argues that institutions act to ensure that the most powerful retain power. This is done by excluding the less powerful from important decision making processes, leaving only those decisions to be made that do not fundamentally alter the *status quo* – “some person or association could limit decision-making to relatively non-controversial matters, by influencing community values and political procedures and rituals” (Lukes, 2005, p6). The work of Bachrach and Baratz is key here, their paper “Two Faces of Power” (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962) arguing that setting the agenda for discussion was the second dimension of power.

*The three-dimensional view of power* was developed by Lukes via a criticism of this two-dimensional view of power which he came to see as too focussed on overt behaviour and observable conflict. He argued that “the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place” (ibid, p27). Lukes introduced the concept of the powerful exercising that power by shaping wants/desires – leaders shape preferences as well as respond to them. “Is it not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things?” (ibid, p28). Lukes argued that power was exercised at the structural level (Giddens, 1984) to shape opinion/discourse, and was hence hidden from view. So the three-dimensional view of power does not require observable conflict. Conflict can be potential, or even latent – “a contradiction between the interests of those exercising power and the *real interests* of those they exclude” (Lukes, 2005, p28). The excluded may not express their interests, or even be aware of them, therefore raise no objections to the blocking of those interests – “power is at its most effective when least observable” (ibid, p1). This difficulty in observing power in Lukes’ third dimension has obvious implications for attempts to study it. This paper follows the Foucauldian approach of treating language/discourse as the point where “relations of power are actually exercised and enacted” (Fairclough, 2001, p36). Others have used this approach, arguing that discourse is important because “the incumbents of political power can orchestrate political and social change through directing linguistic change” (Hastings, 1999, p11). The latter sections of this paper will argue that rather than directing and orchestrating change, language and discourse are used to *prevent* change and maintain the status quo in rural England.

It is important to clarify how this paper uses the concept of power and the powerful. A political economy approach might assume that Lukes’ third dimension of power operates at the structural level, within a framework which sees ‘capital’ pitted against ‘labour’ to control the means of production. This paper focuses on a more fine-grained level of analysis, putting aside the broad structural arguments to examine how the planning system is operating in practice, specifically examining the exercise of power by particular interest groups to prevent rural development.

### **Power as it might be applied to rural housing**

Any attempt to consider power relations must first seek to identify who gains and who loses from the development pattern observed in England. Several authors have addressed this issue.

Peter Hall et al, in the early 1970s, expressed the view that the English planning system was leading to urban containment (Hall et al., 1973), due to rural elites co-operating with urban local authorities to thwart the expansion of cities into the countryside. Hall et al criticised the English planning system introduced by the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, principally on the grounds that the system had achieved one of the aims set out in that act (urban containment), but had failed to match this with the extensive provision of new towns in the countryside around major cities envisaged by those drafting the legislation. Hall et al concluded that house prices had thus increased in most desirable areas (e.g. the countryside) due to a scarcity of supply, and urban built densities had gone up likewise.

Hall et al concluded, as did others (Shucksmith, 1990) that the less well off, principally those who aspired to live in the countryside but could not afford to, had paid the price of this urban containment. They found that existing rural inhabitants had been the overwhelming beneficiaries of the system – they continued to enjoy an undisturbed countryside and found the value of their land and property assets increasing at a rate significantly higher than if more development had been allowed. In addition, Hall et al argued, urban local authorities benefitted from a policy of urban containment, as they successfully retained their population, and hence maintained or increased their tax base.

Some authors have argued that a fear of “Otherness” is one of the reasons (or *the* real reason) for opposition to some forms of rural development. Hubbard (2005) looked specifically at the controversy surrounding the proposed development of asylum centres in rural parts of England. He argued that the English countryside “may be described as a repository of white [to which we could justifiably append ‘middle-class’] values, ideologies and lifestyles” (Hubbard, 2005, p12). Hubbard went on to postulate that the virulent opposition to asylum centres (and housing?) was in part the result of rural communities seeking to protect those values, ideologies and lifestyles, and hence exclude Otherness.

Hubbard’s findings are supported by the work of Milbourne (1997), who found that opposition to new rural housing cut across “property classes”, in that most groups living in the countryside, whether they owned their own home or not, were opposed to new residential development. He suggested that opposition was thus based not only on financial interests (a desire to see house prices increased), but could be related to the lifestyle choice to live in the countryside (Milbourne, 1997).

This paper looks at the regional, local and community levels of decision making. These are all important, but in part due to the richness of data available, there is a focus later in the paper on community actors – specifically, parish councils. Several authors have studied decision making in rural communities – Woods has written extensively on the complexity and politicisation of these arenas (see, for example, Woods, 2005), and Yarwood (2002) considered the role of parish councils in the development of rural housing. Yarwood concluded that “the involvement of parish councils is limited” (Yarwood, 2002, p289) which often led to frustration on the part of parish councils. This paper, however, argues that parish councils are of increasing importance in the provision of rural housing. The legal basis of the planning system in England restricts the role of parish councils to that of a consultee on planning policy and development proposals. Local authorities, however, are indirectly endowing them with a significantly greater role in the process by given them a higher status than other community groups because they are, in theory, “representative” of the whole community. This may be a questionable approach, as identified in the discussion of the second dimension of power below.

### **The first dimension of power**

Studying power in Lukes’ first dimension – *decision-making* – requires an analysis of the decisions made with relation to rural (affordable) housing. This section briefly summarises evidence that decision makers are not taking the opportunities presented to them to increase the supply of housing in the countryside. In discussing decision making in different contexts the paper does not (indeed could not, without going into lengthy detail) argue in each case that the ‘wrong’ decision has been made, rather that decisions may be being made in such a way as to benefit a particular group.

#### *Regional planning policy*

An example of this decision-making at regional/national level is the approach taken to allocating district-level housing numbers through RSSs, since 2004 the regional level part of the statutory development plan in England. Figure 1 shows the proportion of housing in each region allocated to the relevant case study local authority at each stage of the RSS production process. These stages are: the Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) and structure plan (the previous form of regional & sub-regional planning in England), the various draft RSSs and the final RSS, published by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

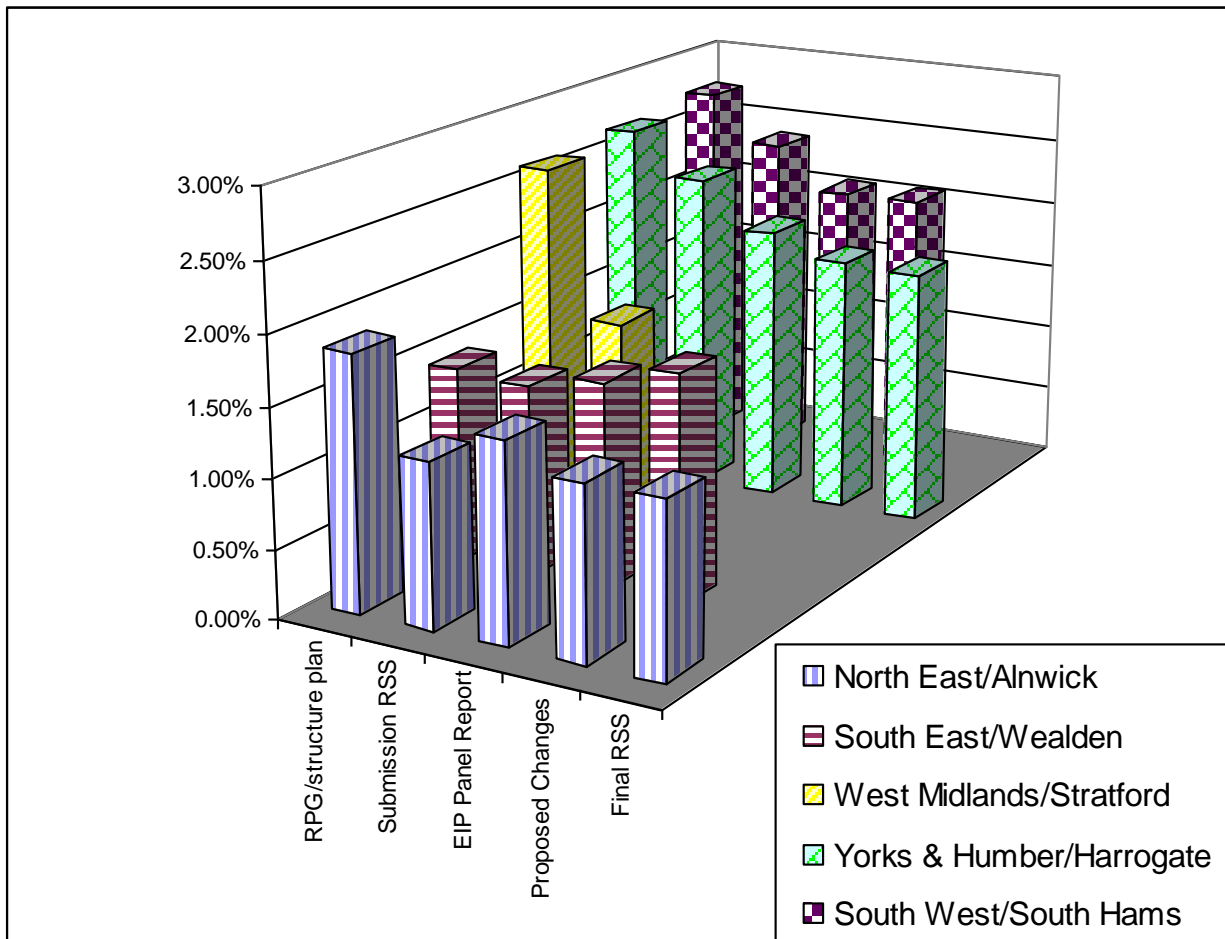


Figure 1 – The proportion of housing in each RSS allocated to the case study local authorities

There is a clear downward trend in four out of the five case study local authorities in each published iteration of the RSS. The exception to this is Wealden District in the South East, a region featuring ongoing disputes between central and regional government about the appropriate level of housing to be allocated there. Justification for these reductions is discussed below under the third dimension of power.

### *Local planning policy*

Local authorities must ensure that their LDFs, the central component of which is the core strategy, are in “general conformity” with the relevant regional spatial strategy. This has tended to be interpreted by planning inspectors as meaning that local authorities must not allow the building of more housing than they have been allocated in the RSS. Many local authorities have been instructed to reduce their ‘oversupply’ of housing to ensure they meet RSS figures in the medium to long term, having granted planning permission for ‘more’ housing than they should have done.

Three of the case study authorities – Alnwick District Council, Harrogate Borough Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council, have all introduced policies in their development plans which are effectively moratoria on most new housing development if there is an oversupply of 10% or more against RSS figures. These policies have been in place in various forms since 2004, and have been included in their new core strategies by Alnwick and Harrogate (adopted 2007 and 2009 respectively). Alnwick and Stratford-on-Avon are expecting to grant no planning permission for new market housing between 2007 and 2011.

#### *Parish council opposition to housing – market and/or affordable*

Here an interesting difference has emerged between the case study areas – in Alnwick District, South Hams District and Stratford-on-Avon District, interviewees demonstrated, or reported in others, a greater acceptance of affordable housing development than market housing development. Some of the parish council representatives interviewed considered there was no need for market housing in their village:

I don't [see any need for market housing]. I know they say you should expand or die, but we haven't got any room for any new houses! Unless you go into green fields, and we're a conservation area as well here. There are one or two bits that could be infill, but do you really want to get rid of the spaces in your village? (Representative of parish council A, Stratford-on-Avon)

There was an overwhelming response [to the parish plan questionnaire] that there is sufficient open market housing at present – we don't want any more, we don't need any more. (Representative of parish council B, Stratford-on-Avon)

In Harrogate Borough and Wealden District, however, several interviewees reported the opposite, that 100% affordable housing development might be less acceptable than market housing development with an element of affordable housing in it. That was ascribed by one local authority representative to distrust of the council on the part of local people, because they see council housing previously built and now sold, or occupied by 'undesirable' people. Others concluded that opposition to affordable housing was due to NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) attitudes, which is supported by some of the interviews with parish council representatives. One such individual, who admitted to having retired to the area for its physical environment, noted "The parishioners, en masse, like the environment they live in. They like all the open views that you've got away from the village, and they want to preserve those" (Representative of parish council B, Stratford-on-Avon). This seems like a prime example of the 'preserved countryside', where decision making processes are dominated by pastoral and preservationist attitudes (Murdoch et al., 2003), and hence the exercise of power by those keen to avoid change.

#### **The second dimension of power**

Lukes' second dimension of power is non-decision making. Are pro-rural development voices excluded from decision making, either by accident or design, allowing the powerful anti-development lobby to dominate?

#### *Regional policy making*

Regional spatial strategies are officially produced by regional planning bodies, but the large amount of work involved means much responsibility is taken by working groups of local authority officers. One local authority representative noted that in the West Midlands region, the process was dominated by urban authorities, which affected the end result:

If you look at the personnel involved, there is a strong urban bias and I think ultimately that's got to be reflected in the output (Local Authority representative, Stratford-on-Avon).

All of the case study local authorities were struggling to get their voices heard at the regional level. It seems likely that this domination of the process by urban voices could be partly responsible. Others have noted that the RSS preparation process relies on formal consultation procedures rather than actively engaging with the 'rural voice', as tends to happen with rural housing strategy preparation (Three Dragons, 2007). This means that those with a direct interest in rural development (e.g. rural community councils, local authorities, parish councils), can respond only to a fully formed draft document rather than participating in the development of that document. This appears to be an example of the exercise of power through non-decision making – if there is nobody putting forward a pro-rural development perspective, there is no need to make a decision on the validity of that perspective.

### *Local policy making and implementation*

Local authorities now have a statutory requirement to involve the community in the development of planning policies. This shift, introduced as part of the 2004 Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act, is part of the Government's attempts to embrace collaborative planning, to achieve a more "locally-contingent and inclusionary form of local environmental planning" (Healey, 2006, p314). There are, though, questions about the extent to which local authority practice reflects this new agenda, there being a tendency on the part of local authorities to simply use existing structures, usually parish councils, as vehicles for 'community involvement'.

One RSL representative described the situation they were working in as "what we have in three of the four districts in XX county is almost a parish council power of veto [on exception sites]" (quote anonymised to protect confidentiality). Another local authority does not enshrine a requirement to involve the parish council in policy, but informally it is strongly encouraged:

Any time I tend to speak to people about exception schemes, I encourage them to go into a tripartite agreement with the parish council and an RSL. I think it helps to give some legitimacy to a proposal (Local authority representative, Alnwick).

Stratford-on-Avon District Council's 'Local Choice' policy, which aims to provide housing to meet local needs if the "community" wants it, emphasises the importance of support in a parish plan for such housing:

The views of the local community as expressed preferably in a Parish Plan (or equivalent) or in its absence an alternative source of reliable evidence, will be fully taken into account in the planning process.

(Stratford-on-Avon District Council, 2006)

The policy does not make support in a parish plan an absolute requirement, but key actor interviews suggest the absence of such a plan means a Local Choice proposal is unlikely to succeed. How a community might generate an "alternative source of reliable evidence" as suggested in the policy is not made clear.

Good practice on parish plan production suggests "The whole community should be involved in producing the Parish Plan, with the parish council taking lead responsibility" (The Countryside



Agency, 2004). It therefore seems unlikely that a parish plan would be produced without the support of the relevant parish council, again equating the community with the parish council.

This reliance on the parish council as a *de facto* proxy for the community, long standing policy of many local authorities though it is, may have negative implications. Some RSLs identified parish councils as being a block on the delivery of affordable housing, with one parish council accused of preventing development because “They didn’t want any housing at all, they don’t want the village to expand” (RSL representative B, Stratford-on-Avon). Tewdwr-Jones has critiqued the role that parish councils play in the development process, accusing them of having “a lack of credibility and influence, a lack of qualified professional support staff, a parochial outlook, a lack of political direction, an absence of competition for council seats” (Tewdwr-Jones, 1998). One local authority representative shared these concerns, asking:

Who are the parish council serving? The parish councils in this area tend to be comprised of articulate professionals who are effectively looking after their own... it’s a common problem across the region, people are opposed to development – they moved here specifically because it was undeveloped, and don’t want it to change (Local authority representative, Wealden).

It is fair to say, then, that there are some concerns about how inclusive parish councils are, and that a reliance on parish councils as a proxy for the community may in some cases be frustrating the development of (affordable) housing. This is evidence of Lukes’ second dimension of power – the exclusion of the less powerful, in this case those not on parish councils. This might not be a problem were parish councils truly representative of their community, but as demonstrated here, they may not be. As one interviewee stated: “The Government is keen on local democracy, but haven’t answered the question about how that works if you have a local need for affordable housing but a parish council that is anti-development” (Local authority representative, Wealden).

Finding ways to involve the community in policy making which go beyond the parish council is not, of course, an easy task, but the Government’s advice on community involvement emphasises that local authorities should go “beyond those who are familiar with the system to difficult to reach groups” (ODPM, 2004), so perhaps efforts in this direction are overdue.

### **The third dimension of power**

Lukes’ argued that the powerful shape the wants and desires of the less powerful in the third dimension of power. For the reasons discussed above, the focus here will be on the use of language/discourse practices as examples of “instantiations of power” (Hastings, 1999). The discussion below identifies instantiations of power in two specific discourses. Firstly, a general anti-development discourse dominates rural policy and decision making, indeed arguably has done so since the inception of the British planning system in the aftermath of the Second World War (Cloke, 1979). This discourse now takes several forms, from straightforward opposition to any form of development in the countryside to arguments that rural areas are less ‘sustainable’ than urban. Secondly, there is an emphasis that any housing delivered in rural areas must be an exception to this general approach, and then be for local people only. These discourses combine to add support for the approaches taken in policy design and implementation at regional, local and community level.

#### *Anti-rural development discourse in regional policy*

The submission draft of the North East RSS relies heavily on particular sources of ‘evidence’ to support its strongly anti rural development stance:

House prices, housebuilding and migration show a trend away from the creation of sustainable communities to a more dispersed pattern of development.

(North East Assembly, 2005, para 3.56)

An urban containment discourse is matched with what we might almost call a positivist approach in other places in the document:

The RSS tackles both the cause and effect of affordability by better meeting people's aspirations and needs to help alleviate pressure on popular areas... Removing the factors that influence people to move away from the urban and former coalfield and heavy industrial areas, through improvement of housing and living environments, would help to alleviate some of the pressure on rural areas.

(North East Assembly, 2005, paras 3.78 & 73.80)

This quote illustrates the perception that a simplistic, one-way causality is in effect in the housing market of the North East. The document assumes that urban areas are unattractive locations for "people" to live in, so they seek to move to rural areas, hence increasing the demand for housing, hence making that housing less affordable. It makes the further assumption that improving the urban environment will reduce the demand for rural housing – an undeniably significant assumption, apparently supported by little evidence. Assumptions and predictions about the effect of 'urban renaissance' are presented as fact, and used to justify an urban containment approach in the RSS. Hall et al demonstrated in 1973 that this approach was not necessarily effective, but the North East RSS considers no alternative points of view.

The submission draft of the Yorkshire and Humber RSS shares the strong urban focus of the North East RSS, and uses some of the same arguments to justify this. Other RSSs, by contrast, are closer to the advice in PPS3. Early in the South West RSS, the document states that the first feature of "The regional future this strategy is working towards [is that] all communities enjoy the benefits of further development and where housing needs are satisfied" (South West Regional Assembly, 2006, para 1.3), as suggested by PPS3. The South East RSS occupies something of a middle ground, emphasising that the majority of development will be in urban areas, but that there may be a range of reasons for housing in the countryside: "In rural areas some housing development will be needed in order to meet identified social or economic needs..." (South East England Regional Assembly, 2006, policy H3). There is still a need, rather than demand, focus, however.

One explanation for these different approaches might be that the North East and Yorkshire and Humber regions are dominated by large urban local authorities, on Tyneside & Teesside and in West and South Yorkshire respectively. The South West and South East, in contrast, do not have a dominant urban core (London being excluded from the South East plan). This could be seen as evidence of Peter Hall's "unholy alliance" – the exercise of power by rural elites and urban authorities working together to constrain urban growth, to the benefit of both parties, but the disbenefit of many others.

#### *Anti-rural development discourse in local policy*

Similar language to these RSSs is to be found in local policy documents. Harrogate Borough Council's local plan in place at the time of the case study visits adopts wholesale an urban containment discourse. This is justified by frequent references to sustainable development and assumptions about the best way to achieve this, for example: "Housing development in the District will be restrained because of the quality of the environment and in order to limit in-migration from West Yorkshire" (Harrogate Borough Council, 2001). This same discourse is used to justify the

moratorium adopted by the Council (Harrogate Borough Council, 2004). Wealden District Council takes a similar approach in its local plan: “the emphasis is on creating balanced and sustainable communities... On this basis, this chapter contains policies for *controlling* [emphasis added] housing development in the District” (Wealden District Council, 2005).

*Anti-rural development discourse affecting public opinion*

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) is probably the most well known and effective lobby group which seeks to limit development in the countryside. Murdoch and Lowe (2003) have identified a trend in CPRE publications to move away from a purely preservationist rhetoric to a more sophisticated, ‘sustainability’ focus. In 1994 a CPRE Policy Committee paper had noted that the “CPRE’s historic approach, which has been to highlight environmental threats, has allowed policy makers to resist making changes because it presents only one side of the issue” (Murdoch and Lowe, 2003, p325).

It seems, however, that this more sophisticated approach is targeted at policy makers, rather than potential CPRE members/donors. An appeal for funding from prospective donors was sent out by the CPRE in June 2008, signed by Bill Bryson, the President of the organisation. It was contained in an eye-catching envelope with the phrase “How many new houses are planned for the green fields YOU love?” emblazoned across it. The appeal letter highlighted the “staggering 263,900 houses set to be built on some of the most beautiful, precious green fields across the country over the next five years” (CPRE, 2008). It also identified several cases where the CPRE had been successful in thwarting planning applications for housing developments. The letter was accompanied by a set of remarkable ‘choices’ for the recipient, reproduced in figure 2.

**What do you want?**

A hedgerow teeming with butterflies?	<b>OR</b>	An out-of-town supermarket teeming with cars and shoppers?
A quiet stand of oaks casting shade on the path?	<b>OR</b>	Roaring juggernauts belching exhaust on a motorway verge?
Children lying in the grass gazing at the starlight?	<b>OR</b>	Enough electric lights to make the night look like day?
A babbling stream winding among the bluebells in a wood?	<b>OR</b>	A stream of cars to new executive homes half a mile away?

**What are you going to do?**

YES, I’ll help CPRE act locally by sending a gift of £2 a month	<b>OR</b>	Do nothing. Our disappearing countryside can look after itself.
---	-----------	---

**My countryside, my voice. I’m making a stand**

Figure 2 – The ‘choices’ accompanying the letter from Bill Bryson (CPRE, 2008)

The kind of language used here appears to add little to a balanced debate on the need for development in the countryside. It presents the choice as being between no development at all and intensive, environmentally damaging development – no middle ground is acknowledged. It is easy to see how this sort of language can seep into discourses around rural housing.

*Local needs housing and social inclusion/exclusion*

It is common practice for rural exception schemes to be approved with planning conditions and/or planning obligations limiting the occupation of the housing provided to people with a ‘local connection’. All of the case study authorities make use of this approach with their rural exception

sites, and indicated in the interviews their support for it. This is encouraged by Government advice in PPS3.

Many interviewees stressed the importance of communicating to local communities that new affordable housing provided would specifically be intended for local people: “I think education that affordable housing can be for your sons and daughters, and your doctors, your teachers, and your hospital workers, is changing perceptions” (Local authority representative, South Hams).

It seems local authorities are attempting to ameliorate objection through hiding affordable housing programmes behind a focus on local people. It is important to question whether this approach is simply pragmatism: an appropriate way to avoid NIMBYism by addressing the importance of perceptions of development (Clifford and Warren, 2005); or whether it constitutes an abetting of rural elites in the use of power to exclude ‘Otherness’.

Some commentators have criticised the use of locals only policies as being “unjust and morally suspect” (Rogers, 1985), but such policies are undoubtedly popular with some rural people. Many of the parish councils interviewed, across the case studies, stressed the importance of providing housing for local people who could not afford to buy housing otherwise, as the following three interview extracts illustrate:

Local people have got the priority, which is what we want (Representative of parish council A, Harrogate).

We’re very much happy that the people living in the new affordable housing at the moment are local people (Representative of parish council B, Stratford-on-Avon).

There are so many people in this village – I have three children, my daughter married a local farmer, and they needed somewhere to live. They couldn’t buy anything here, no way. There are lots of people in that position, whose children wanted to stay locally but couldn’t. A lot of people felt this was a good idea, there wasn’t much opposition (Representative of parish council A, Stratford-on-Avon).

This support for affordable housing for *local* people was also identified by Yarwood (2002) as being one of the main themes where parish councils supported affordable housing schemes. Yarwood also found that parish councils felt a strong sense of “ownership” in these housing schemes. When they were closely involved in initiating or developing housing, they often referred to them as “our scheme” or “our houses” (Yarwood, 2002) – perhaps the exercise of power by claiming ownership of houses provided by a registered social landlord.

Several parish council representatives expressed a concern that their village may become a repository for social housing tenants from a nearby urban area. Again, this seems to be a reflection of a fear of Otherness. An RHE identified a contradiction in the attitudes of some communities:

It’s quite a bizarre situation, someone can go into an area and spend a million and a half on a house, which is feasible in [case study local authority], and they might come from [nearby city]. But if someone goes into affordable housing and they’re from [same nearby city] it’s a totally different ball game! What’s that about?! It’s most odd (quote anonymised for confidentiality).

As implied by the quote, the corollary of the local needs approach is that it can be exclusionary, and potentially discriminatory. For example if the demography of a village, as many tend to be, is dominated by white British people, then policies to provide housing for local people may exclude

those of a different ethnic and social background. The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) has identified this as a potential problem, noting that the more restrictive a local connection policy, the more likely it is to be discriminatory, and hence unlawful (Commission for Racial Equality, 2006).

Some of the interviews with parish council representatives reveal an element of exclusiveness, potentially even discrimination:

The fear of the objectors is, if there isn't enough local people, it's going to be thrown open to outsiders. And they don't want outsiders coming in, that's the top and bottom of it, even if they're needy cases. They have this impression that we're going to get asylum seekers (Representative of parish council A, Harrogate).

If, later on, when somebody moves, there isn't somebody local to take it on, it can go to adjoining parishes, *but we're hoping that that will never happen* [emphasis added]... so it's not as if we're bringing outsiders in (Representative of parish council A, Stratford-on-Avon).

This evidence suggests that for some rural dwellers Otherness can include not just those of a different ethnic or social background, but also those from urban (as opposed to rural) England, and even those from outside their own village.

## Conclusions

This paper has examined evidence from only five rural local authorities, covering only a small proportion of England. It is impossible, therefore, to categorically state that any conclusions drawn from this data can necessarily be applied more broadly. However, the case studies are in different regions of England, are under the democratic control of different political parties, have different approaches to the delivery of (affordable) housing, have different housing markets and feature different degrees of rurality. Despite these differences, similar patterns of policy implementation, and similar attitudes towards development, have been identified in the analysis of documents and interview data. It therefore seems reasonable to suggest that something unifies housing delivery (or the lack thereof) across the case studies, and perhaps across rural England as a whole.

The first section of empirical data discussed above identifies a number of decisions which could be explained/justified by those taken in a number of ways – the need to balance different priorities, for example. However, similar decisions being taken in several different regions of England suggest that such claims are overplayed. The number of rural authorities implementing moratoria, or policies seeking to severely restrict new housing development, suggests a common approach of urban containment across England. This is despite Government policy explicitly stating that housing should be provided in rural areas where there is need or demand for it. Those who disagree with that policy appear to be exercising power to block it.

Urban local authorities dominate the RSS preparation process, and despite the Government's commitment to community involvement, decision making processes at the local level remain far from inclusive. Those local authorities that do place an emphasis on community-driven affordable housing schemes equate 'the community' with the parish council, which can have the effect of excluding those who might have a different point of view. This fits well with Lukes' second dimension of power – the less powerful, whether smaller rural local authorities or those not on parish councils, are excluded from decision making processes, meaning the powerful can exercise their dominance more easily. Therefore difficult decisions regarding support for rural housing do not need to be taken.

Evidence suggesting the exercise of Lukes' third dimension of power has been presented in two strands which come together to maintain the status quo in rural settlements: an anti-rural development discourse; and a 'localness' discourse.

The anti-rural development discourse is used in RSSs to justify low levels of housing outside conurbations, which is followed up in local policy making – the discourse is focused on the 'fact' that rural development is automatically unsustainable in comparison with urban areas. Others have argued against this assumption (Shucksmith, 2007; Taylor, 2008), and a Government minister stated in a speech in early 2009 that "there is no such thing as an unsustainable place – only unsustainable ways of doing things" (Benn, 2009). However, this approach remains dominant in English planning policy and implementation.

At the same time, it appears that in some cases, the local connections policy is acting in an exclusionary, and hence indirectly discriminatory, way. Some powerful residents of villages are using power, through the parish council, to protect their rural enclave from outsiders. This approach is endorsed by local authorities and the Government, so the exclusionary preferences of the powerful are condoned, even encouraged, by those seeking to provide affordable housing in rural areas.

These two discourses act together to limit development of new housing in rural areas to small schemes of affordable housing, dubbed exceptions to an overall policy of restraint, and which can be occupied by a very narrow range of people with an existing connection to the area. So there is no way for the majority of the urban population to access housing in the countryside, priced out of the market as they are. This is to the benefit of the urban local authorities identified by Hall et al (1973) as being one half of an 'unholy alliance', as it reduces the mobility of their council tax base. It is also to the benefit of the other half of that alliance, rural elites who wish to exclude Otherness from the countryside, as evidenced by this quote in a recorded interview with one parish council representative, who also represents the CPRE in that area: "In order to keep riff-raff from [nearby city] out of the community you need this s106 agreement" (quote anonymised for confidentiality). For him, this opinion was clearly the common sense view – it was appropriate to prevent the urban poor from moving into his village.

Alternative discourses briefly discussed above, and elaborated elsewhere by a few other authors, receive little coverage in mainstream planning debate, which is testament to the strength of power being exercised. It is time that planning professionals and policy makers took a fresh look at this exercise of power that has allowed exclusionary discourses to become, and remain, so dominant and influential.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Rose Gilroy, Stuart Cameron and Mark Shucksmith, and three anonymous referees, for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper. The research this paper is based on was co-funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Commission for Rural Communities.

## References

- ARHC, 2006 *Final Report* (Affordable Rural Housing Commission & Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, London)
- Audit Commission, National Audit Office, 2005 *Building more affordable homes: Improving the delivery of affordable housing in areas of high demand* (The Stationery Office, London)
- Bachrach P, Baratz M S, 1962, "Two Faces of Power" *The American Political Science Review* **56** 947-952
- Benn H, 2009, ""Why the rural economy matters" - Speech at the Commission for Rural Communities summit on Releasing the innovative potential of rural economies", 5 February 2009
- Best R, Shucksmith M, 2006 *Homes for Rural Communities: Report of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Rural Housing Policy Forum* (JRF, York)
- Bramley G, Watkins D, 2009, "Affordability and Supply: The Rural Dimension" *Planning, Practice & Research* **24** 185-210
- Clifford B P, Warren C R, 2005, "Development and the environment: Perception and opinion in St Andrews, Scotland" *Scottish Geographical Journal* **121** 355-384
- Cloke P J, 1979 *Key settlements in rural areas* (Methuen, London, New York)
- Commission for Racial Equality, 2006 *Statutory Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing* (CRE, London)
- Coombes M, 2009, "English Rural Housing Market Policy: Some Inconvenient Truths?" *Planning, Practice & Research* **24** 211-231
- CPRE, 2008 *Urgent - reply by July 2008 (letter requesting funding)* (The Campaign to Protect Rural England)
- CRC, 2006 *Calculating housing needs in rural England* (Commission for Rural Communities, Cheltenham)
- CRC, 2008 *The state of the countryside 2008* (Commission for Rural Communities, Cheltenham)
- Dahl R, 1961 *Who governs? Democracy and power in an American city* (Yale University Press, New Haven)
- DCLG, 2006 *Planning policy statement 3: Housing* (Stationery Office, London)
- Dear M, 1992, "Understanding and Overcoming the Nimby Syndrome" *Journal of the American Planning Association* **58** 288-300
- Fairclough N, 2001 *Language and Power* (Longman, Harlow)
- Farthing S, Ashley K, 2002, "Negotiations and the Delivery of Affordable Housing through the English Planning System" *Planning, Practice and Research* **17** 45-58
- Gallent N, Tewdwr-Jones M, 2007 *Decent Homes for all - Planning's evolving role in housing provision* (Routledge, London & New York)
- Giddens A, 1984 *The Constitution of Society: outline of the theory of structuration* (Polity Press, Cambridge)
- Hall P, Gracey H, Drewitt R, Thomas R, 1973 *The Containment of Urban England* (Allen and Unwin, London)
- Harrogate Borough Council, 2001, "Harrogate District Local Plan", <http://www.harrogate.gov.uk/harrogate-2320>
- Harrogate Borough Council, 2004, "Selective Alteration to the Harrogate District Local Plan", [http://www.harrogate.gov.uk/pdf/DS-HDLP-Sel\\_Alteration\\_saved.pdf](http://www.harrogate.gov.uk/pdf/DS-HDLP-Sel_Alteration_saved.pdf)
- Hastings A, 1999, "Discourse and Urban Change: Introduction to the Special Issue" *Urban Studies* **36** 7-12
- Healey P, 2006 *Collaborative Planning* (Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire & New York)
- Hubbard P, 2005, "'Inappropriate and incongruous': opposition to asylum centres in the English countryside" *Journal of Rural Studies* **21** 3-17
- Lukes S, 2005 *Power: A Radical View, second edition* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke)
- Milbourne P, 1997, "Housing conflict and domestic property classes in rural Wales" *Environment and Planning A* **29** 43-62

Monk S, Crook T, Lister D, Rowley S, Short C, Whitehead C, 2005 *Land and finance for affordable housing. The complementary roles of SHG and the provision of affordable housing through the planning system* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York)

Murdoch J, Lowe P, 2003, "The preservationist paradox: modernism, environmentalism and the politics of spatial division" *Transactions Of The Institute Of British Geographers* **28** 318-332

Murdoch J, Lowe P, Ward N, Marsden T, 2003 *The differentiated countryside* (Routledge, New York, NY)

North East Assembly, 2005, "Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East Submission Draft", <http://www.northeastassembly.gov.uk/displaypagedoc.asp?id=614>

ODPM, 2004 *Statements of Community Involvement and Planning Applications* (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Wetherby)

Richards F, Satsangi M, 2004, "Importing a problem? Affordable housing in Britain's National Parks" *Planning, practise and research* **19** 251-266

Rogers A, 1985, "Local claims on rural housing - a review" *Town planning review* **56** 367-380

Shucksmith M, 1981 *No homes for locals?* (Gower, Farnborough)

Shucksmith M, 1990 *Housebuilding in Britain's countryside* (Routledge, London ; New York)

Shucksmith M, 2007, "Sustainable Development and Sustainable Rural Communities – Who Gains and Who Loses?" in *Housing Studies Association Annual Conference*, York, <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/chp/hsa/papers/spring07/Plenaryshucksmith.ppt>

South East England Regional Assembly, 2006, "Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East Submission Draft ", [http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/southeastplan/plan/view\\_plan.html](http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/southeastplan/plan/view_plan.html)

South West Regional Assembly, 2006, "Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West Submission Draft", <http://www.southwest-ra.gov.uk/media/SWRA/RSS%20Documents/Final%20Draft/draftRSSfull.pdf>

Stratford-on-Avon District Council, 2006, "Stratford-on-Avon District Local Plan Review 1996 - 2011", <http://www.stratford.gov.uk/planning/planning-609.cfm>

Taylor M, 2008, "Living Working Countryside: The Taylor Review of Rural Economy and Affordable Housing", (CLG, Wetherby)

Tewdwr-Jones M, 1998, "Rural government and community participation: The planning role of community councils" *Journal of Rural Studies* **14** 51-62

The Countryside Agency, 2004 *Parish Plans - Guidance for parish and town councils* (Countryside Agency Publications, Wetherby)

Three Dragons, 2007, "Assessing the Rural Content of Regional Spatial and Housing Strategies", (Commission for Rural Communities, Cheltenham)

Wealden District Council, 2005, "Non-statutory Wealden Local Plan Interim Guide for Development Control", [http://www.wealden.gov.uk/planning\\_and\\_building\\_control/Local\\_Plan/WLP\\_review\\_draft.aspx](http://www.wealden.gov.uk/planning_and_building_control/Local_Plan/WLP_review_draft.aspx)

Whitehead C, Monk S, Lister D, Short C, Crook T, Henneberry J, Rowley S, 2005 *The value for money of delivering affordable housing through section 106* (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London)

Woods M, 2005 *Contesting Rurality: Politics in the British Countryside* (Ashgate, Aldershot and Burlington)

Yarwood R, 2002, "Parish councils, partnership and governance: the development of "exceptions" housing in the Malvern Hills District, England" *Journal of Rural Studies* **18** 275-291