

A HOME AT ITS BEST *improving your chances*

A home should be what you need and where you need it: handy to necessary shops, schools and work. A doctor shouldn't be too far away and there should be a reasonable journey time to such facilities as hospitals, swimming pools and sports, entertainment, 'comparison' and fun shopping, galleries and culture etc. And, if these are too far to walk or cycle, public transport should be cheap, frequent and good all day, so that the kids can get there on their own without excessive cost and trouble. It doesn't seem too formidable a proposition and yet, when we build so much new housing, we just don't seem to get it!

That is because we are buying what is being built and 'sold' to us: and what is 'sold' to us is what is most profitable. You and I may think buying is a 'good thing', perhaps as a hedge against inflation and old age? – or paving the way for the next better house up the ladder? We all like to think of home as 'ours'.

If you look through the list of essential factors, above, on most large estates there will not be many boxes you can tick ... and there will be even fewer in future as the older locations that are closer in are used up and new ones have to be found.

Ironically, sites for houses in their thousand are identified each time there is a new plan, yet should you live in a small undesignated village and want to build an odd house or two: that has usually not been allowed. Sadly, most sites that are planned for in such policies are to accommodate targeted numbers, not specific people: they are there to match the targets and to provide a profit. The larger numbers, the incomers, all end up having no real choice over whether they *want* to be here or there: it is what can be afforded that is usually the decisive factor. A changed policy, not developer strategy, is needed to ensure the 'place' is where it can do a positive good.

If the government pursues its declared policy of 'localism', will this happen? What new deal might be better than the old ways? Some claim that decisions, if left simply to local wishes, will 'block all development' – will always be rejected, a recipe for stagnation.

When considering the small digestible numbers, wanted from time to time in established communities, perhaps people would be flexible. People can be trusted to be reasonably objective. When it comes to the large numbers however, the incomers and the estates – hundreds and thousands of people with twice as many cars – these will likely not get a popular very local mandate ... and why would you expect them to? In the opinions of 'locals' such developments will be seen to threaten their existing lives and environment, which they do! A real demand does exist for many more homes than are the natural extensions of existing communities and their infrastructures ... so it really is a good idea to provide a focussed node for such growth.

Acle, as our model, should never grow to make an estate but evolve into a proper place with mixing of uses. Perhaps one example, of sophisticating the normal infrastructure would be to install photo-voltaics for all, recouping the capital alongside the ground rent, in our 'landhold' package and providing very cheap electricity for all, thus adding another contribution towards affordability.

The idea of landhold is not a revolutionary new principle. Rather it tackles the notion of more virtuous routes for money created by the community, at present side-tracked against the public interest.

Michael Innes, December 2010