

## **Town centre use policy blocks rural development**

When is a town centre use not a town centre use? Never, according to the draft PPS4, even if it forms part of a regeneration proposal in rural areas.

Town centre uses and the town centre first approach appear so rigidly cast that rural economic regeneration initiatives beyond the confines of the few defined in local development frameworks will be seriously constrained. It begs the question of whether this document has been through any sort of rural-proofing exercise.

Last year's draft PPS4 made constructive strides toward rectifying the confusing and damaging advice in PPS7, which had a serious impact on rural schemes. The new draft seems to ignore Matthew Taylor and the Commission for Rural Communities' reports and reverts to an even more complex arrangement.

While the PPS helpfully encourages the reuse of historic and other redundant buildings in the countryside, the primary alternative economic use for such property — B1 workspace uses — would be considered a town centre use and is effectively barred from consideration. Equally, what about conversion of redundant pubs into employment, retail and leisure uses, all town centre uses in a rural context?

This country has a legacy of fine buildings in rural areas that can be put to beneficial new uses, particularly offices, as a key means of ensuring their long-term sustainability. I hope that in reviewing representations, opportunities will not be lost for want of unambiguous guidance that properly considers development opportunities.

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