

# Rural housing is a worry

**MANY people think of our diocese as being 'urban', but there are significant parts that are rural in character.**

Much of the Isle of Wight and many parishes in the deaneries of Bishops Waltham and Petersfield fall into that category.

Rural communities are under pressure, and often feel overlooked or misunderstood by the urban majority, some of who can have a strange view of what the countryside should be like, and do not appreciate rural concerns.

This can apply in the Church as well as in the wider community. The large suburban parish with its single parish church is rather different to the rural multi-parish benefice with its several distinct and scattered communities and parish churches.

One problem that has perhaps been obscured by recent interest in other issues is that of rural housing. I live in a 'commuter' village that has now virtually no 'native' inhabitants, there being little social housing, and house prices at a level that local people cannot hope to afford.

Whatever the housing market

## the big issue



**Rural affairs adviser David Heatley looks at the problems of finding somewhere affordable to live in the countryside as part of our series on moral, spiritual and social issues**

may be doing at the moment, house prices have risen and rural house prices have risen faster than urban house prices.

The provision of affordable housing for both rent and purchase is essential to sustain the local workforce and maintain a balance in the population.

However, those with modest incomes, including young families, pensioners and first-time buyers, find themselves being priced out of many rural areas. This upsets the social balance of the community, families may be separated, and the local economy may be forced into decline.

Many of the rural population have to spend more than 50 per cent of their income on mortgage payments. In 2003 almost 37 per

cent of rural residents spent over half their income on mortgage payments, and almost 60 per cent spent between a third and a half. To add to this, rural households also have to spend more on transport, fuel and power than those living in urban areas.

Along with a lack of available land, there are a number of reasons for the shortage of affordable homes: new social housing has not kept pace with homes sold through the 'right to buy' scheme; agricultural employment has declined; and the rise of the part-time service sector has left many rural residents with low incomes.

Villages now have affluent incomers who wish to commute from, work in, or retire to the country, and the demand for sec-

ond and holiday homes is pricing the locals out of the market.

There may be ways the Church can help here, and affordable housing schemes involving glebe land do exist in some dioceses. In areas of real need, the Christian with a second home might consider letting it to a local family rather than affluent friends or holidaymakers.

The concerns of the countryside and rural church were highlighted in the Report of the Archbishops' Commission on Rural Areas (ACORA) in 1990.

One of the results of this is that each diocese now has a rural officer, and we have two! The Rev Graham Morris is rural affairs adviser on the Isle of Wight, and I fill a similar position for the mainland part of the diocese.

If you wish to know more of rural concerns, both of us are anxious to increase awareness of the rural church and community and welcome opportunities to talk to PCCs, clergy chapters and deanery synods.

Contact me on 01730-827459 or [dhheatley@aol.com](mailto:dhheatley@aol.com). Contact Graham on 01983-292050 or [graham.morris@btinternet.com](mailto:graham.morris@btinternet.com)

## Foundation teaches children music skills

IT'S a way of giving children from urban Portsmouth a chance to learn about music that they might not otherwise have had.

The St Mary's Music Foundation was founded to offer local children free instrumental tuition in return for singing in the choir at St Mary's Church, Fratton. This provides them with further singing training and the chance to be part of a team.

The foundation also works with diocesan music adviser Rosemary Field on the *From Classrooms to Choirstalls* project, which involves work on choral singing in schools, climaxing with a short choral service.

The foundation is looking to expand its work, especially its collaboration with local schools. It is planning a visit to sing Evensong at Magdalen College, Oxford, and to participate in concerts during 2005, culminating in a trip to France next summer.

For more details, contact the director of music at St Mary's Church, Michael Stoddart, on 023-9229 8708 or [michael@michaelstoddart.org](mailto:michael@michaelstoddart.org)



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Cornerstone Vision, 28 Old Park Road, Peverell, Plymouth PL3 4PY Tel: 01752 225623 [www.cornerstonevision.com](http://www.cornerstonevision.com)