



# Broadcast

The offline periodical from Living Countryside  
Website [www.ukagriculture.com](http://www.ukagriculture.com)

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## Sustainable housing – its back to the land!

Amidst all the doom and gloom in the housing market and controversy about so called eco-towns, one idea just keeps on growing:

### *diffuse development*

Has Britain ever had enough homes? For as long as many people can remember changing demographics and household structure have conspired with inadequate supply, to limit their availability. And now, post credit-crunch, with the building industry in crisis and housing transactions tumbling, relocating is more difficult than ever.

Its time to get Britain moving!

And that's exactly where "diffuse development" comes in and with the Welsh Government now consulting on sustainable housing for rural areas; the concept couldn't be timelier.

Diffuse development is the provision of very small numbers of low impact homes in working farmyards throughout the country. The houses, built of local materials and traditionally styled, will be discretely placed and subject to the planning condition that they can only be used for letting and cannot be sold outside the farm business.

Speaking for Living Countryside, David Uren commented, "diffuse development provides important environmental benefits, particularly through the use of farm supplied renewable energy which can be used incredibly efficiently at the local level. It also avoids blighting our countryside with homes that are located in large blocks far from the workplace and there are few issues with flood management or sustainable water use".

He went on to add "after years of financial difficulty farm businesses have diversified and there is now a real demand for rental accommodation from those involved in the diversified activities. So contrary to expectations, these new homes will result in less traffic."

**Living Countryside**

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But there are other interesting aspects to the concept. By putting rental accommodation back into the heart of the countryside, diffuse development helps support the rural infrastructure so that schools and shops can remain viable.

Recognising that new buildings in the countryside were often charged as “damaging”, David said there was no one keener to see our green and pleasant land protected “but we need new homes and looking at the alternatives with either green field development or so-called eco-towns, diffuse development makes a lot of sense. If anything, a traditionally styled cottage set amongst modern farm buildings could be a big improvement.”

Diffuse development can be easily implemented by the adoption of more flexible approach by planners to the use of farmyards. And, as this land has minimal value high quality, environmentally friendly homes will be affordable. As a build-to-let scheme it’s genuinely sustainable as it encourages the use of locally sourced renewables whilst utilising the existing rural infrastructure.

There are around 300,000 active farms in the UK but many of the smallest farms would be unable to accommodate diffuse development without it having an adverse impact on the environment. Diffuse development becomes less attractive as the size of the agricultural holding decreases and the efficient use of natural resources and infrastructure are compromised. Even so diffuse development could be suitable in around 100,000 farmyards and that this could provide up to 250,000 new homes.

And with many builders struggling in the downturn and mortgage finance hard to come by, diffuse development could offer much needed help for Britain’s struggling housing market.

“For much of the last six thousand years, most of Britain’s population has lived sustainably in small rural communities centred around the farm; its time we learnt from the past and looked forward” said David. “Its time we got back to the land”.

Full analysis of the concept is available as a PDF file and can be found at

[www.ukagriculture.com/diffuse\\_development.cfm](http://www.ukagriculture.com/diffuse_development.cfm)

#### **Notes to Editors:**

This briefing is available at [www.ukagriculture.com/press](http://www.ukagriculture.com/press)

The full analysis is available at [www.ukagriculture.com/diffuse\\_development.cfm](http://www.ukagriculture.com/diffuse_development.cfm)

According to Defra there are more than 300,000 agricultural holdings in the UK. Some of these are very small but the statistics show that there are over 78,000 holdings greater than 50 hectares in size.

Living Countryside is a farm grown organisation that explains agriculture and works to protect and improve the countryside. In September 2006, Living Countryside was registered as a charity.

The website of Living Countryside is [www.ukagriculture.com](http://www.ukagriculture.com). Work on the website commenced in 1999, since when it has become one of the countryside’s most prominent rural resources.