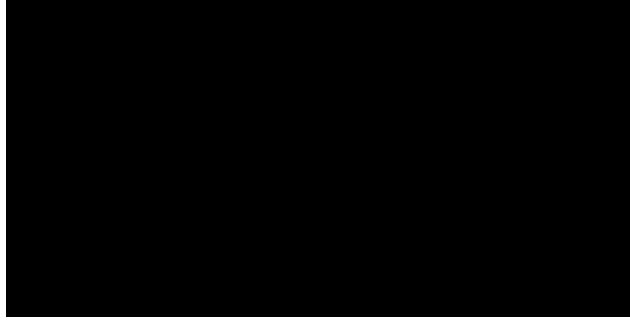

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For how much longer are we expected to believe that the only way in which communities can get the houses for which there is a demonstrable need is to allow developers to cover our green fields with "luxury", "executive" homes in order to secure a token gesture toward those homes that are actually needed? Once granted the developers then do everything possible to reduce or evade this requirement or to water down the community contributions attached to the planning approval. Worse still the developers know that local councils will, all too frequently, accept, reduced value, cash alternatives to top up their coffers.

Developers will always choose to build larger "executive" homes in preference to the smaller homes actually needed. First time buyer homes are far more tiresome to sell; you need two or three buyers instead of the one buyer for a larger home. You need to sell the home first to the intended owners and then to the parents who are likely stumping up the deposit. Mortgage affordability for first time buyers is fraught with trip points and the cancellation rate is much higher. No wonder developers don't want to build these.

The oft peddled argument that first time buyer homes are less commercially viable assumes that the land value is virtually fixed. This is entirely false and a dereliction of council responsibility toward all of their constituents equally. Where land is now being targeted outside of supposed local development plans then this land should be considered ONLY if it will deliver the homes for which there is a survey confirmed local need instead of a quota contribution toward the media headlined "340,000 new homes needed every year"

I have yet to see any evidence that the much quoted shortage of housing relates to anything more than a government and establishment drive to stimulate the economy and the recovery through a "build, build, build" invitation to developers and their shareholders. Council Planners can condition approvals to applications which only provide those house types needed. The developers will only buy the land if it meets their margin requirements and the only variable remaining is the land value. This is usually land which had agricultural value but which now may, with development potential, be worth millions instead of thousands. Why should a land owner, by virtue of a fortunate inheritance, be allowed to manipulate communities and environments for their own benefit? Strict design conditions may halve the value of potential development land but the only "loser" is the land owner having to settle for five million pounds instead of the ten million hoped for. The current planning process seems just more evidence of a "chumocracy" establishment serving its elites interests.

The need for first time occupier homes (for ownership and rent) is evident and plain to see. The need for the homes preferred by developers is probably not a "need" at all but an aspirational want. We measure societal success by the size of home we own and the assets we gather around us. We want a four bed detached home with room on the drive for a new car and possibly a boat to gain the right post code despite the fact that three of the bedrooms are usually never used and there is no room in the garage for even one car.

I am as guilty as the next man but the next man and me cant find the home we actually need and want. The middle market homes could probably easily be provided for by vacating older owners seeking a smaller more manageable home (possibly bungalows) but still with sensibly sized gardens with privacy and space to entertain friends and family. Retirement villages might be appropriate. These are the homes that developers should be building and which councils should be prioritising in their hundreds and not the thousands supposedly necessary to gain a token gesture toward those homes actually needed.

"We need to build more new homes" is a simplistic fallacy. We do need to build more of the **right** homes and Council planning policy should require surveyed evidence that developer applications respond to a real need and a real shortage. Stroud District Council considers itself a responsible and environmentally committed council, it's time it demonstrated this and stood up for the communities it claims to represent. All too frequently it appears that councils are jack booted enforcers for an elite serving establishment. This public consultation will, in all likelihood, be a box

ticking exercise toward an already inevitable conclusion. We do not need to identify where the government stipulated quota of new homes will be built, we need to be questioning how that requirement has been determined and if it is even evidence justified.

