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Study reveals the true cost of living close to high voltage power lines

A new research study reveals the cost to property owners living close to high voltage power lines in the UK and considers what action could be taken to by planners and property developers to prevent this negative effect.

In a bid to meet rising demand for new housing stock, local planning authorities in the UK have continued to authorise the development of brownfield land, crossed by electricity distribution cables, for residential development. This has taken place despite media reports, since the mid 1980s, claiming that proximity to overhead high voltage power lines may have an adverse effect on health.

A new study, in **Urban Studies**, a leading urban studies journal published by Routledge, reports that this approach to new housing development may now be changing. Despite no legislation in the UK to prevent new housing from being built close to or underneath overhead high voltage power lines, the study reveals that developers are now placing low-cost or social housing closest to these power lines and using so-called power line 'corridors' of open space, directly beneath the lines, to help screen them from view.

Sally Sims, co-author of the study and lecturer in real estate and construction at Oxford Brookes University, comments:

"This shift in approach to planning new housing developments is a sign that local authorities and developers are beginning to take this issue seriously. By positioning low cost housing closest to these lines and creating corridors or a 'right of way' directly underneath the power lines, developers are following US

practice, which has shown to limit any negative effect on house prices. In fact, in the US, the increased land around homes backing onto these ‘rights of way’ has been shown to enhance property values despite a view of the line itself.”

However, this shift in planning practice is taking place too late for many homeowners, who live close to overhead high voltage power lines and pylons.

The study reveals that living close to a pylon has the most significant effect on property value – reducing the value by 21% compared with a similar property just 250 metres away. Having a view of the pylon from the front of the house has a more negative effect than a rear view and homes with a picturesque view, are more negatively affected than other homes.

When it comes to how close homes are from overhead high voltage power lines, the study shows that detached homes are worse affected than semi-detached homes. Semi-detached properties with an overhead power line 300 metres from their property had property values 1% above the price of a comparable property in the same locality. Detached homes at the same distance from overhead high voltage property lines were valued at around 30% below the price of a comparable property. At a distance of just 100 metres from high voltage overhead power lines, detached properties were valued at 38% lower than a comparable property.

The study also found that valuers and agents tend to underestimate the effect overhead high voltage power lines have on property values – quantifying the negative effect on property values at just 5 - 10 %.

Sally Sims comments:

“Clearly homeowners with detached properties, living close to overhead high voltage power lines are significantly affected and their homes could be valued as much as 38% lower than comparable properties in the area.

"By proving that this difference in property values exists, the study's authors hope to persuade local planning authorities and developers to consider this issue in future residential development."

About the study: The study has been carried out by Sally Sims and Peter Dent at the School of the Built Environment, Oxford Brookes University. The research involved using a sample of professional valuers and estate agents to participate in a valuation study to demonstrate the actual effect on value of high voltage power lines at various distances and locations, according to different house types. The study also drew on available data about property transactions in Scotland (similar transactional data is not currently available in other parts of the UK). A separate perceptual study was also carried out.
To view a complete copy of the study visit:
http://journalsonline.tandf.co.uk/openurl.asp?genre=article&issn=0042-0980&volume=42&issue=4&spage=665

Notes to editor:

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