

Dear Huw

Thank you for your email.

Mike Gadd response also see notes in red below.

As I have said below while completing the 2 planning consultations, I have concluded that WDC are passing permissions and fulfilling their part of the planning process.

However, it has become abundantly clear LPA's are being let down by the building industry by leaving permissions unbuilt.

Nowhere in the White Paper have I seen any sanctions for the Building Industry for not playing their part, indeed the White Paper suggests putting more money their way.

I would suggest it is now the time bring in stronger methods to sanction the building industry instead of taking away some of the democratic processes it suggests.

One such as this,

The White paper stated on page 32 Para. 2.39 last section this can be found [here](#).

"the delegation of detailed planning decisions to planning officers where the principle of development has been established, as detailed matters for consideration should be principally a matter for professional planning judgment."

Statements like this cannot give confidence to residents or elected officials that have clearly demonstrated delivery of permissions.

I would also like to add that from the start of the WDC New Local Plan preparation the officers have been communicating extremely well with HeathfieldGreen.Space and have welcomed our questions and have provided all information requested in a timely and professional manner.

Sarah Bushnell response.

I would like to raise the matter of use of brownfield sites it is becoming noticeably clear that there are huge repercussions from COVID ... in the short-term business are shedding workers and although this may be somewhat to a lesser extent in Wealden due to the proliferation of small businesses ... there are large towns where which will be suffering large scale redundancies.

There is nothing in 'Planning for the Future' or indeed being proposed by WDC that really gets to grips with the exceptionally large amounts of office and retail space which is being vacated and mostly for good.

In the medium to long term COVID has changed people's buying and living habits the move to on-line shopping has been accelerated and it is clear that people prefer to work from home at least for some of the week if not all.

There needs to be a stop put on all applications to develop greenfield sites and a 'demand' put onto developers / builders until the brownfield sites and possibilities for conversion of existing redundant office and retail spaces are exhausted.

In line with the above ... the facts are that there are approvals for over 1Million homes which are not being built and a further 650,000 empty homes which could be brought into use. Further 'demand' should be put on builders / developers that they build out all of the approvals they currently hold, and no new applications should be accepted until all those 1 Million homes have been built.

These things must be properly taken account in Local Plans ... it is a continuing disaster that developers are continuing to apply to build on greenfield sites whether outside or inside the AONB which covers over half of Wealden ... and that WDC is approving those applications.

Keep Safe

Regards
Mike Gadd

From: MERRIMAN, Huw <huw.merriman.mp@parliament.uk>

Sent: 12 October 2020 15:27

To: michaeljohngadd@btinternet.com

Subject: Re: Letter to Huw Merriman MP - From Sarah Bushnell / Michael J Gadd - Re: Planning for the Future

Dear Mr Gadd

Thank you for contacting me about the government's recent White Paper on the reform of the current planning system; 'Planning for the Future'. I received your joint email, and thought it prudent to respond to both you and Ms Bushnell on the issue. With 80% of the constituency being designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and with proposed targets increasing the numbers for Rother, this is a matter which has exercised me and I wanted you to be aware of what I have been doing.

Along with Sally-Ann Hart, who shares Rother District with me, I wrote to the Housing Minister to outline our local challenges and concerns with the changes to the way planning decisions could be made, and the ability, locally, to meet new targets. You can read it [here](#).

I hope this will give you an idea of the concerns I hold and the challenges we face. The letter expressed a desire to better understand how the model and algorithm could increase the numbers for Rother to 1100 homes per annum.

As I have found whilst working on the school funding formula, the best starting point is to sit down and understand the model before challenging it. We therefore asked for a meeting with the officials in order to take the case forward.

As a precursor to the meeting, Sally-Ann and I sat down with Robert Jenrick; the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, to discuss the concerns raised in the letter. I am shortening his title to SoS in order to condense this communication.

SoS conceded that Rother's numbers are high compared to other districts and boroughs across the region, and maintains that at 300 per year, Rother have not been delivering enough homes. He also accepted that there was a challenge for Rother, given so much of the geography is AONB.

SoS explained that the 1100 figure is largely derived from the high price of property vs the low average wage. The aim is to build more homes to reduce the price in order to give local people the opportunity to own their own affordable home. We do know that homes are too expensive for many in Rother because the constituency is in the Top 10 (of 650) with the highest proportion of people on the living wage. As many choose to retire to the area or move here to commute to London, the house prices are out of reach and not reflective of those who work locally.

Comment

With WDC building over 50% of all dwellings in East Sussex the theory that building more houses will lower house prices is a pipe dream as currently prices are still rising, this can be demonstrated by the fact that WDC have 6325 unbuilt permission up until May 2019 (which is keeping prices high and not contributing to the national house shortage) and has currently over 3000 submitted for approval in the last 26

weeks. So rather than the LPA having a plan led system it appears we have a developer led system with dwellings being drip fed into the system.

From a Wealden perspective, I explained that the District Council has had its plan rejected, causing more pressure to permit housing developments which appeared completely out of kilter with planned housing. I also explained that the view of the Ashdown Forest, with regard to nitrogen deposits and the Habitats Directive, was pushing development further south. This is leading to saturation around Stone Cross and huge concern for villages such as Herstmonceux and Ninfield. I did recognise that Wealden's targets, unlike Rother's, will reduce if these new numbers are imposed.

Comment

Again, the WDC figure of 1199 is only arrived at because it has been inflated by the 40% affordability factor which is not working due to the resistance by Developers/Builders to build what they have permission for. I also find it strange that there is an acceptance that 40% of all permissions will never be built (Shelter report and various other sources [example](#)) is this a coincidence that it is the same figure as the affordability factor?

The White Paper does not address this unbuilt issue.

With regard to the changes in the planning process, as opposed to the numbers, SoS explained that the proposals would make it faster to deliver consent and build out on land such as the Link Road, which has been allocated as land for 'growth'. To the concern that the 'design' element would still need to be approved, and on hearing our example that it took three years for Bovis to receive post-outline approval, SoS was confident that there would be no such hold ups post-local plan because the design-stage should largely be built into the local plan.

Comment

In your newsletter you said Bovis had tried to sell part of its development in Bexhill to no avail I am sure that if demand was there they would build out. But again are they demonstrating that money overrides the need for housing?

I feel that this needs to be tightened up so there is not such a lengthy delay to give final planning consent. These delays ultimately allow developers to argue that we are not building enough (hence more homes in Little Common and other areas under pressure).

Comment

There seems to be a lot of defence for the developers and little appetite to use a stick rather than a carrot, while completing the White Paper consultation it became abundantly clear that the reason for a housing shortage falls squarely on the Developers/Builder by not fulfilling their obligations once they have achieved planning permission.

As to the length of time it takes to get permission again this can be once again directed at the developers, all too often they put in sloppy applications with no prior exploratory work carried out, if the correct homework is done then the LPA would find it easier to process the application. In addition, if the homework had been done properly then perhaps the 40% that do not get built would be a thing of the past.

We additionally raised the concern that, without further protections for land designated as 'protected', developers will continue to target our protected land and not deliver on the 'growth' land. In response, SoS explained that speculative applications would no longer be permitted and this would be the catalyst for change

in 'protected' land which, along with the drive to deliver faster on 'growth' land, would cause house-building to be delivered on the land designated by the plan as 'land for development'.

I am looking forward to testing this with many local residents who have proved such a help at delving into the planning detail.

Comment

It is not hard to find areas for growth, indeed government have identified a growth area called the [Oxford - Cambridge Arc](#) where there is little protected areas compared to the South East and it has much better transport links already in place, but still in its calculations it the government wants to put 42% of all new homes in London and the South of London.

As a conclusion to this meeting, there seemed to be an understanding that the numbers for Rother needed further consideration. It was agreed that we would attempt to set up a local meeting on the Link Road with ourselves as MPs, Trinity College as land owner, Bovis as lead developer, as well as our local stakeholders, to attempt to drive delivery and also understand why the build-out has not occurred at the pace we had expected back in 2015. If it had, I do not believe we would have fallen behind and had these pressures to catch up with more building.

SoS will arrange for Sally-Ann and I to discuss the algorithm with relevant officials. I also hope that he will join for our local meeting but I am realistic about diary pressures for Ministers at this current time of COVID-challenge.

Comment

If a meeting can be arranged as indicated, Sarah and I would deem it an honour if we could attend.

I am aware how much concern this has caused because I have received a considerable amount of correspondence on the issue. I am pleased to have been copied into a number of responses to the government's planning consultation from local parish councils, groups and organisations. Their well-considered and knowledgeable responses helped me form the view which allowed for the conversation with the Secretary of State.

Many asked me to appear at the debate on Thursday 8 October in the House of Commons chamber. I did so, and Sally-Ann was selected to speak. However demand exceeded supply of time, so we did not get to hear her. However her speech is attached to the bottom of the '[Planning for the Future](#)' page on my website which I have linked. Rest assured, there are always opportunities to repeat.

Most importantly, there is a large number of Conservative MPs who echo our feelings, and the conversations behind the scenes will help to shape this policy. I will update constituents on this matter and, if you have not done so already, my regular newsletter (which you can sign up to receive at this [link](#)) will also help.

Once again, many thanks for getting in touch.

Kind regards,

Huw

Huw Merriman

Member of Parliament for Bexhill and Battle

29-31 Sea Road, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, TN40 1EE

Tel: 01424 734910

Website: www.huwmerriman.org.uk

Twitter: @huwmerriman

Facebook: huwmerriman/bexhillbattle

In line with data protection regulations, this office processes constituents' data for casework and policy query purposes under the lawful basis of public task. In instances where this lawful basis is not sufficient and explicit consent is required, a member of the office will get in touch with you to establish your consent. Data will be processed only to the extent to which it is necessary to achieve the stated purposes of assisting with casework and policy queries

UK Parliament Disclaimer: this e-mail is confidential to the intended recipient. If you have received it in error, please notify the sender and delete it from your system.

Any unauthorised use, disclosure, or copying is not permitted. This e-mail has been checked for viruses, but no liability is accepted for any damage caused by any virus transmitted by this e-mail. This e-mail address is not secure, is not encrypted and should not be used for sensitive data.

From: maximillion998@aol.com <maximillion998@aol.com>

Sent: Sunday, October 11, 2020 7:33 PM

To: MERRIMAN, Huw <huw.merriman.mp@parliament.uk>

Cc: michaeljohngadd@btinternet.com <michaeljohngadd@btinternet.com>

Subject: Letter to Huw Merriman MP - From Sarah Bushnell / Michael J Gadd - Re: Planning for the Future

Subject: Letter to Huw Merriman MP - From Sarah Bushnell / Michael J Gadd - Re: Planning for the Future

This email is from:

Sarah Bushnell, Little Marklye, Marklye Lane, Heathfield. East Sussex TN21 8QB

Tel: 01435862412

Michael John Gadd, Helouan, Mutton Hall Lane, Heathfield. East Sussex TN21 8NX

Tel: 01435862275

Ref: Letter Attached regarding 'Planning for the Future'

Dear Huw,

We are writing to you because we are strongly opposed to the new planning system proposed in the white paper / 'Planning for the Future' which is currently in consultation. The national press is starting to feature articles about the new proposals and it is good to see that there is a growing understanding of the major issues in the proposals. The article on your website is encouraging and we appreciate that you are taking an enquiring approach with the Secretary of State.

We therefore wish to bring to your attention the strong feelings of opposition to 'Planning for the Future' being voiced in Heathfield... because the issues which already prevail in Wealden are likely to become much worse should the new system become law. As you will know, Wealden has over 50% of its land area designated protected landscapes of the High Weald AONB and the Pevensy Levels, a large area is within the protection zone for the Ashdown Forest and in Heathfield, which is surrounded by the AONB, we have the listed Heathfield Park with listed gardens and an SSSI zone. So non-protected greenfield land suitable for development is scarce as are brownfield sites.

Our views are very much in line with MPs opposing the white paper ... that if made law Planning for the Future would 'erode local democracy, reduce affordable housing and encroach on countryside' ... and we think it is right to question the housing algorithm which has inexplicably and bizarrely reduced the number of new homes for the North and Midlands but increased it for the already over-developed South East. Indeed ... we agree that the new proposals will not 'level up' the North ... but they will 'concrete out' the South East.

In closing ... we feel that that we should emphasise that the impacts of Planning for the Future will be so severe and so unpopular in the South East that these proposals have the potential to be a huge vote loser for the Conservatives and on a scale not seen before.

We are therefore asking you to support Heathfield and all of Wealden... and to give us a strong voice in Parliament. Please oppose 'Planning for the Future'.

Yours sincerely,
Sarah Bushnell and Michael John Gadd

UK Parliament Disclaimer: this e-mail is confidential to the intended recipient. If you have received it in error, please notify the sender and delete it from your system. Any unauthorised use, disclosure, or copying is not permitted. This e-mail has been checked for viruses, but no liability is accepted for any damage caused by any virus transmitted by this e-mail. This e-mail address is not secure, is not encrypted and should not be used for sensitive data.

Attachment to original letter is [here](#)