



HUW MERRIMAN MP  
(Bexhill and Battle)



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA



The Rt Hon Chris Pincher MP  
Minister for Housing  
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government  
Fry Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Our Ref: HM17962

9 September 2020

Dear Chris,

We write with respect to the Government's consultation for house building, planning and development process and for new housing targets.

We are both very supportive of Government measures to get more people on the housing ladder. We wish to work with you to ensure that more homes are delivered in the right areas. It is with this aim in mind that we seek to meet with you to assist with this outcome. The following issues are of concern:

### **Delivering Housing Numbers**

Rother District Council's Local Plan requires it to deliver 335 new homes each year. The average delivery over the last 3 years has been 241. With 75% of land being designated as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the District Council, along with East Sussex County Council, built a new road, Combe Valley Way, a link road from Bexhill to Hastings to accommodate thousands of new homes and businesses. Since it's opening five years ago, developers have not built on this allocated land in the scale hoped for. Instead, developers are building in other parts of the district where the infrastructure is already choked. Despite evidence showing Rother District Council to be proactively creating development opportunities, the recently incorporated Standard Method increased Rother District Council's housing delivery target to 736 homes. The proposed new Standard Method would lift this figure to 1,173.

### **Land Designation**

We welcome your moves to speed up development on land designated as growth areas. This could help bring the land forward which the District Council planned for when delivering the Bexhill to Hastings link road. However, we believe that two further requirements would be needed:



1. Land designated as 'protected' needs to be further protected to ensure developers are incentivised to build on 'growth' land. Were there to be a combination of the proposed simplification of planning for growth land allayed to making it harder to build on protected land, we believe more housing would be delivered overall. Without the limitations on protected land, we believe the reform of planning for developed land will not be enough to incentivise developers to deliver the homes our district needs on the growth land which, in our instance, has been provided for at scale since the link road opened.
2. The design approval process needs to be reformed. The issue delaying building the limited number of new homes which are being built on the Link Road was not one of planning; outline permission was given some years back. Bovis, as lead developer, tell us that it took almost 3 years for the council and developer to agree the final design stage. A similar application, with Northampton Borough Council, took the developer and council only 18 months. Again, if we cannot simplify the design process for larger scale developments, developers will continue to build a patchwork of 50 homes on greenfield sites which do not deliver at the rate required or in the right place.

At the immediate stage, we would be keen to meet with you and your officials to better understand how the model has drawn up a requirement for Rother District Council to provide over 1,100 homes per year. We would wish to discuss the algorithm with you, and your officials, to determine how this can be delivered in a district which is 75% AONB and how the demand has been forecasted to deliver such numbers. This is particularly relevant given we have been informed that land which has already been made available for housing development by Rother District Council was not sold at auction due to a low risk appetite by our major house builders in our area.

We look forward to hearing from you, and meeting with you and your team.

With best wishes,

Huw Merriman  
Member of Parliament  
for Bexhill and Battle

Sally-Ann Hart  
Member of Parliament  
for Hastings and Rye



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Our Ref: 8584661

10 August 2020

Dear Huw,

Thank you for your email dated 24 July, on behalf of your constituent Mr Mike Gadd of Helouan, Mutton Hall Lane, Heathfield, East Sussex, TN21 8NX about the approach to new housing in Wealden.

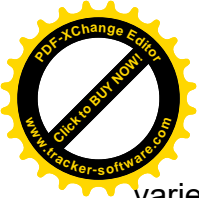
The Government is clear that in order to help make home ownership affordable for more people, and to help more people be able to rent their own home, we need to deliver more homes. More homes are needed in the least affordable areas to inhibit soaring house prices. As a general rule, we would expect an increase in housing provision to improve the overall affordability of homes. Making sure local authorities plan for the right number of homes is a crucial first step.

The National Planning Policy Framework, revised in 2018, implemented a standard method for calculating local housing need to enable all communities to have a clear, transparent understanding of the minimum number of homes they need. In February 2019, short-term changes were made to the standard method, with planning practice guidance being changed to specify that the 2014-based household projections were to be used within the standard method. This short-term change was proposed to offer stability at the same time as ensuring the standard method remained consistent with our supply aspirations. When the short-term change was implemented we committed to undertake a review and bring forward longer term options.

I am pleased to confirm that review has been undertaken and we are currently consulting on a new proposed standard method in our consultation *Changes to the current planning system*. We would welcome Mr Gadd's views as part of this consultation which is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-current-planning-system>.

We are also consulting on wider reforms to the planning system which will streamline and modernise the planning process, bring a new focus to design and sustainability, improve the system of developer contributions to infrastructure, and ensure more land is available for development where it is needed in the planning White Paper *Planning for the Future* which is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future>. Again, we would welcome Mr Gadd's views as part of this consultation.

Mr Gadd raises specific concerns about the build-out of planning permissions. Through *Planning for the Future*, we want to explore how the revised planning system can best support the build-out of development, which will include ensuring that growth areas comprise



variety of building types which can be taken forward by different builders. We will also consult on options for improving the data held on contractual arrangements for land to help improve competition.

Mr Gadd mentions concerns about empty homes. The number of long term empty homes remains substantially lower than when records began in 2004. Local authorities have powers and strong incentives to tackle empty homes. Through the New Homes Bonus they receive the same amount for bringing an empty home back into use as building a new one. Billing authorities in England also have the power to charge extra council tax – on top of the standard bill – on properties that have been empty for at least two years. Furthermore, in certain circumstances, local authorities can exercise powers, through an Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) to take over the management of long-term empty homes in order to bring them back into use in the private rented sector.

Once again, I appreciate how important these matters are to Mr Gadd and I am grateful to you for writing in on his behalf.

**LUKE HALL**