

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Minister of Housing, Communities & Local Government
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

29 September 2020

By email to Robert.jenrick.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Sir,

This is a collective response by the seventeen Parish and Town Councils within Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) to the Government's white paper "Planning for the Future" published in August 2020. This sets out potential new planning rules which have mixed benefits although the emphasis on the quality of the design of new houses and the adaptation of designs that blend with local tradition is to be welcomed. Accompanying the main white paper and issued at the same time is the document "Changes to the Current Planning System". This covers many issues of the planning process but the issue that most concerns our parishioners relates to the number of dwellings that Wokingham would be mandated to accommodate in the future.

In past years Wokingham Borough has fully accepted that considerable numbers of additional dwellings will be required, and has risen to the challenge and provided a steady stream of new homes commensurate with the Five Year Land Supply requirement. This has been in spite of developers, in some instances, dragging their feet in commencing house building after planning permission has been granted. The ongoing construction at the current Strategic Development Locations in Wokingham will ensure that this building will continue for the foreseeable future. However, this volume of building has already greatly reduced the availability of green spaces and put severe stress on local infrastructure, particularly roads.

This continued development has been seen by local residents as excessive and WBC has in the past approached the Ministry for Housing Communities & Local Government to request that the required housing numbers be reduced. In 2019 WBC consulted its residents in a house to house poll and 47,000 said that the then proposed 800 homes per annum were too many. Consider their anger therefore when they learn that the number of dwellings to be built in Wokingham per annum, as required by the new proposed formula, is 1600. This is wholly unacceptable as it would mean that two towns the size of Wokingham town would have to be built every 15 years.

We, the towns and parishes of Wokingham, strongly request that the Secretary of State for Housing Communities & Local Government reconsiders the methodology for calculating the Local Housing Need so that a realistic and manageable plan can be put in place, which is both achievable and which does not create more problems than it solves.

Yours faithfully,

Councillor Simon Weeks
Chair, Finchampstead Parish Council

On behalf of the Parish and Town Councils of: Arborfield & Newland; Barkham; Charvil; Earley; Finchampstead; Remenham; Ruscombe; St. Nicholas Hurst; Shinfield; Sonning; Swallowfield; Twyford; Wargrave; Wokingham; Winnersh; Wokingham Without; Woodley.

cc. Rt Hon Theresa May MP; Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP; Matt Rodda MP; James Sunderland MP.
Cllr John Halsall, Leader of Wokingham Borough Council; Susan Parsonage, Chief Executive, WBC.