

The Government's proposals to reform the planning system as set out in the White Paper *Planning for the Future* and the *Consultation on Changes to the Current Planning System* are likely to have adverse effects on our district. Brightling Parish Council would like to make the following points:

The Government's intention to divide the country into the three development zones of Growth, Renewal and Protection will result in a transfer of planning decisions away from the community and into the hands of developers. Although the commitment for all areas to maintain local plans is welcome, the criteria for drawing up zones is opaque, takes no account of local needs and has no scope for appeal. Development in zones designated as Growth or Renewal will be automatically adopted without scrutiny, whereas development in Protected areas will be restricted.

This poses particular problems for Rother where 82% of our area is designated AONB. Rother needs more homes, it needs affordable houses for the young and it needs a proportion of social housing in both towns and in rural areas. But such homes need to be sensitively placed in the right locations and available to local people. Rother needs to maintain control.

It is estimated that under the proposed housing formula the number of houses Rother must build will rise from 736 units to 1,173. This ignores the fact that, nationwide, 241,000 homes were built last year under the current system, a rate which, extended over the parliamentary term, would exceed the Government's million-home aim by 205,000. This demonstrates that the current system *can* work without wholesale overhaul *if* the houses are targeted in the right areas. It is not always easy to find appropriate land, as evidenced in our neighbouring village, Burwash, which is struggling to meet its current Neighbourhood Plan target, but it is clear that the best way to manage land provision is through local engagement and accountability and not through remote imposition by government.

Furthermore, the proposals take no account of the 'land bank' – the million unbuilt housing units already with planning permission, mostly held by their owners as investments. It would be far more helpful to introduce time-limited 'use it or lose it' legislation and

continue with the present system under which building land is identified, with owners and developers then building under rigorous democratic scrutiny in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework. This framework includes restrictions on building within AONBs.

Overall, the proposals are likely to mean fewer affordable houses in any new rural development. The Government is proposing to quadruple the size of residential sites that currently trigger the contract between developers and local authorities to provide affordable houses. At present, 40% of units in any new development in Rother of six or more houses must be 'affordable' (in other areas the figure is ten). Rural villages with small developments need to have the proportion of affordable houses protected.

In accordance with Rother District Council's Draft Environmental Strategy and The High Weald AONB Management Plan the proposals offer disappointingly little detail on building design, environmental impact and sustainability. It is important that Rother retains the right to enforce its own carefully adopted standards.

Although increased digitisation and administrative streamlining of the planning process is to be welcomed, it is important that those without digital access, or those who, for whatever reason, lack the ability to partake, are not excluded. This is particularly relevant in very rural areas where broadband coverage is still often poor. The visual impact of planning notices remains the most effective way to raise awareness.

