

## **COMMON THREADS, COMMON CONCERNS**

**The following is a digest of concerns expressed by town councils, parish councils and parish meetings, for which we thank them**

1. Parish and town councils are under tremendous pressure to do something urgently to address overdevelopment of Wealden and adjacent districts, but feel that, while they have the power to express opinions, they are powerless to act to halt it. The issue is consuming their time and attention unduly, in some cases almost to the exclusion of their other work.
2. There is general consternation in many towns and villages that the quality of life and the environment in Wealden and adjacent districts have deteriorated, are deteriorating and will continue to deteriorate under the onslaught of overdevelopment.
3. There is a broad consensus that the key driver of overdevelopment and its consequences is the existing unsustainable and unfair targets for housebuilding set for the South East as a region, and Wealden and adjacent districts specifically.
4. There is a strong belief that the 'standard method' to set housebuilding numbers employed by central government is demanding that too much housing be built in Wealden, principally targeted because it is rural and has green open space that can be built upon easily.
5. The one-size fits all 'standard method' is based on outdated, inaccurate data which renders its algorithmic output not fit for purpose and skews building targets upwards and on to green field land in the South East; it needs reforming.
6. The deployment of the flawed 'standard method' and the rejection of Wealden's 2019 local plan is incentivizing the building of the wrong numbers, of the wrong type of houses, in the wrong places, at the wrong price point for affordability: on green fields currently used for farming; in or near small villages; on flood plains; in natural habitats; near protected areas and areas of natural beauty, with hundreds of houses also proposed for the High Weald AONB.
7. Existing permissions for thousands of houses which are delivered only slowly or not yet at all are not being counted towards critical metrics, such as the Five-Year Land Supply and the Housing Delivery Test, which many councillors see as unjust and unwarranted.
8. Housebuilding is not evenly distributed: for instance, there is a strong perception in some councils that the brunt of proposed housing projects is being borne mainly by four towns.
9. There is a strong perception of a lack of coherence and 'joined-up' thinking in the planning system, with multiple authorities' and decision-makers' agendas, sometimes contradictory, in play – central government; MPs; Wealden District Council; the East Sussex County Council; the Planning Inspectorate are widely seen by councillors and many of their electors as parts of the problem, not the authors of solutions to overdevelopment.
10. Councillors report that decision-makers and authorities are seen to be deaf to the concerns raised by electors and their town and parish councils or absolve themselves of responsibility for the current situation.
11. Opportunistic large- and medium-scale developers are gaming the system and policy-making incoherence, and moving into the gaps to build and propose projects that are overdeveloping the entire district and overwhelming for specific localities.
12. Opportunistic individuals are exploiting the current system to seek permission for extensions or conversions that contribute to overdevelopment or can later be more easily turned into more housing.
13. The sheer (sometimes multi-thousands) scale of some residential estates currently being built and others proposed that are effectively small 'new towns', and the aggregate of all

large and small developments, is historically unprecedented and deforming or destroying the human, animal and plant habitats of Wealden and adjacent districts. The term 'concretization' is often used by councillors.

14. The A27, A2270 and A22 are too narrow and/or convoluted to be or to become arterial roads supporting the many thousands of houses already built, being built, proposed to be built and demanded by central government. The existing towns are already congested with heavy traffic and on-road parking, as is the case with numerous small villages. But there is a strong feeling that a new offline A27 destroying our diminishing countryside is not the answer.
  15. Country lanes and minor roads are congested and battered by excessive local private and commercial vehicular traffic and traffic displaced by congestion from the A-roads and are seriously inadequate to absorb proposed growth. Speeding has become a dangerous threat to many households and small villages, including routes for schoolchildren.
  16. Longer distance commuting inwards and outwards from large new estates to surrounding towns and beyond is already overwhelming the roads and lanes and increasing pollution, thereby nullifying calls for more environmentally sustainable lifestyles; and proposed new 'dormitory towns' of 1,500-3,000 houses will exacerbate this trend.
  17. Air quality is too frequently 'poor' or 'fair', especially near congested roads where vehicular traffic is slow or stationary or in congested town and village centres. Health impacts of such pollution are worryingly high, notably ground level ozone that affects respiratory illnesses.
  18. Large solar farms are spreading and in some locations are adding to the visual blight of green landscapes.
  19. Public transport is either non-existent or inadequate in many district locations and therefore cannot mitigate congestion and pollution.
  20. There is general acceptance amongst parish councils that there is a need for affordable housing but a number point to the perverse outcome of Wealden's building more houses than some adjacent districts but few of them are genuinely affordable for the younger age and lower income demographics of the district, the supposed intended beneficiaries of the government's 'standard method'.
  21. Infrastructure provision for water supply and sewage disposal, and even cemetery space, is already under pressure or inadequate and will be inadequate for the scale and density of proposed housing numbers. Water run-offs have been severely affected by 'concretization'.
  22. Quality, timely and accessible healthcare, notably GP practice provision, is already under great pressure, and overdevelopment is likely to exacerbate that in the absence of a comprehensive plan.
  23. Quality education provision and school places are already under pressure and large-scale developments will add to the pressure.
  24. There is widespread certainty that responses to date from decision-makers and authorities to appeals for action have not slowed, diverted or halted an overdevelopment 'juggernaut' which is perceived to be accelerating.
  25. There is a widespread belief that, given the nature and mobility of our local society and economy, no town or parish is an island; there is an inescapable impact of developments within any one jurisdiction, notably with respect to traffic density, speeding, parking, noise, light and air pollution, on adjacent town and parish council and parish meeting jurisdictions. Consequently, concerted action is necessary and desired.
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