

September 2020 Report from KCC Cllr Geoff Lymer
Letter to MP's regarding the Governments draft Planning for the Future

Dear Ms Elphicke and Mr Mckinley.

I would like you to tell me what you have done or are proposing to do about the Government's draft Planning for the Future. The proposal in this bill is, in short, entirely to remove any democratic part in planning for the areas where we live. I am dismayed that a Conservative government should engage in this Prescottism. It has its elements of consultation suggested but they are a mere pretence of including the local people.

It's also based on the false claim, repeated I am sorry to say by successive Conservative ministers, that it is the planning system with its pesky democratic bits (such as they are) which is holding up the wholesale concreting of large parts of Kent in particular and the South East in general.

It cannot be argued that delays in delivery are caused by planning bureaucracy when ***more than a million homes with planning permission have not been built***. Since 2009, 2564600 homes have been approved for construction but only 1530680 completed (source LGA used government sourced figures for analysis).

Since 2012/13 the number of planning permissions granted has almost doubled with councils approving 9 in 10 applications. I call on the government to give councils power to take action on land that has planning permission for homes to make it easier to compulsory purchase land where homes remain unbuilt. The planning system is not a barrier to house building, "no one can live in a planning permission or a half-built house where work has begun on a site but not been completed."

It is vital that the planning process is protected in order that councils and their communities can ensure we realise the government's ambition of building beautiful homes which includes the necessary infrastructure and affordable housing

These figures give lies to the government's claims that council planning departments are the problem in getting more new homes built. The Tory government should give councils tough "use it or lose it" controls over land with planning permission and stronger powers to require mixed development to meet local housing needs.

The algorithm or formula is already producing absurdly anomalous, so-called 'housing needs' numbers. "Need" is a phony word. It's never been true that the increase from 6,000 to 13,800 pushed onto Tunbridge Wells Borough Council in West Kent in 2016 was to provide homes for people currently living in the borough. It's even less true that the 'need' only five years later is set to go up to about 18,000 before we've even made a plan for the last travesty. We are seeing the same picture in East Kent in the Dover area. These are self-fulfilling prophecies, because when you build the houses people move in from outside to fill them, thus apparently proving the numbers right.

The Covid crisis with its working from home has shown that it is no longer critical where you actually are to take part in the economy. It is no longer essential to cram everything in the South East and London.

Strategically it should go to our new friends in the North and the north Midlands where land prices are much cheaper and there is more room plus they want the economic boost of building.

On another track, that homeworking argues ever louder for a shift of the £100bn from HS2 to the provision of a world standard digital communication system for broadband and mobile phones. That's the shape of the future economy.

Why cannot the South East MP's unite with the 1922 Committee and defeat the Government's proposed legislation with the Conservative 80 seat majority? I and the parishes I serve look forward to your responses.

Yours sincerely

Geoffrey Lymer
Kent County Councillor
for the Dover West Ward