

Cllr Rachel Millward (Leader)(Green Party)
Cllr Ian Tysh (Portfolio Holder for Planning)(Green Party)
Wealden District Council
Council Offices
Vicarage Lane
Hailsham, East Sussex
BN27 2AX

Sent by email

23 October 2024

Dear Cllr Millward and Cllr Tysh,

Re: Wealden Local Plan and projected planned housing numbers

I am writing this open letter to express my serious concerns regarding your leadership and the current status of the Wealden Local Plan, especially in light of the recent communication from Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner regarding housing targets for local authorities.

As you are aware, the Wealden Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation outlined a housing provision strategy aimed at meeting the district's needs up to 2040. This consultation proposed the development of approximately 19,950 homes. However, recent government announcements have introduced mandatory housing targets that significantly increase expectations for local authorities. The new national target now stands at 370,000 homes per year, a substantial rise from the previous advisory target of 305,000 homes per annum.

Specifically, under the Green Party and Liberal Democrat coalition's Regulation 18 proposals, 955 homes per year were projected. However, additional rounds of site allocations were called for, and since then, the Labour government has re-imposed the 5% buffer requirement, reinstating the original target of 1,186 homes under the former National Planning Policy Framework. Furthermore, this figure has now been increased to a base requirement of 1,397 homes per year as you rightly note in your press release yesterday. However, you failed to note the 5% buffer and the 20% penalty for not meeting housing needs (delivered sites are currently less than 85% of the base target), Wealden is now required to deliver 1,759 homes per annum—a staggering 84% increase over the Regulation 18 number.

Looking at historical performance, Wealden District has consistently failed to deliver sufficient homes, even in the absence of a local plan. During the 2023 District Elections, the Green Party pledged to halt overdevelopment and protect Wealden's landscape. It is now clear that, under the Green Party-led alliance, the housing target has surged by 105% compared to actual delivery levels, driven by the Labour government's policies and your leadership. It leads to my conclusion is that housing numbers will double under your leadership and you have claimed this is a win-win outcome for Wealden. This is a tragedy for Wealden, you have sought to urbanise and build concrete over our rural landscape.

It is also highly disappointing that the Green and Liberal Democrat coalition continues to rely on the support of two Labour councillors, Cllr Manvell and Cllr Cox, given that the destructive housing targets come from their own national government. These targets threaten to overdevelop our district, eroding the very character and landscape that the residents of Wealden cherish. By depending on Labour's support, the coalition is effectively endorsing policies that will irreversibly harm our local communities and environment whilst doing little to address the affordability issues of which we are all so familiar.

What is particularly concerning is the lack of communication from the Wealden Cabinet since the Secretary of State's announcement. Despite the significant implications for our district, there has been silence from both the portfolio holder, Cllr Ian Tysh, and yourself as Leader. Numerous councillors have sought clarity on how these new targets will impact the local plan, yet no updates have been provided to Wealden Members. This failure to communicate is deeply troubling given the gravity of the situation and the widespread concerns among residents and councillors alike.

Cllr Millward, before the general election, you described the election of local Green MPs and a Labour Government as a "win-win" for voters. Labour was very publicly committed to mandatory increased housing targets. You knew this.

We note that your Green Party administration in Wealden is only viable because you have cultivated the support of Labour councillors.

I urge you to address this issue urgently and provide an update on the status of the Wealden Local Plan in light of these new housing targets. The council must respond transparently and engage the community to ensure that the local plan aligns with updated requirements while considering our district's unique characteristics and residents' concerns.

I look forward to your prompt response and clarification on how the council intends to proceed.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Lunn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

**Councillor Michael Lunn (Conservative)
Representing Rotherfield and Hadlow Down Ward
Wealden District Council**