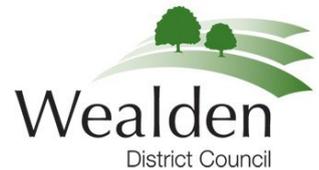


OUR REF:
DATE: 15 October 2024
YOUR
REF:



Angela Rayner
Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for
Housing, Communities and Local Government
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Cllr Rachel Millward
Leader of the Council

By email: angela.rayner.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Angela Rayner,
Cc Matthew Pennycook

As Leader and Deputy Leader of Wealden District Council, we are writing to ask your government to enable us to help with the housing emergency - more accurately a crisis of inequality.

Wealden is a rural district in East Sussex. We have just over 3000 council houses of our own. There is affluence, but also significant pockets of deprivation, and we, like everywhere, are experiencing a dramatic rise in the pressures on our housing services and the demand for temporary accommodation. Like you, we want nothing more than to help our residents find suitable housing and rewarding employment. But the multiple barriers we face will not be removed by your proposed reforms to the planning framework.

There is no way that it's possible to build at the rate your proposed targets require. Between 2012 and 2022, the average number of houses built here was 726 per year. At this moment, we have granted permissions to 8400 homes which remain unbuilt, in many cases not even begun. The situation is made even worse as Registered Providers are no longer able to deliver section 106 allocations for affordable housing on planned developments, due to soaring costs of building safety, Decent Homes, decarbonisation and increased regulation. **The system needs a complete overhaul, and Local Authorities need powers to ensure fast delivery of housing after permission is given.**

The specifics of Wealden's landscape simply do not allow us to reach the targets you wish to impose. 53% of Wealden is National Landscape; the Pevensey Levels Ramsar site and Ashdown Forest SPA/SAC have to be protected against further damage. Our SSSIs cover almost 10% of the district, and another 7% of our area is in the South Downs National Park. We also have 14 Biodiversity Opportunity Areas that cover 15% of Wealden. **These areas offer the best opportunities to enhance biodiversity in a country with one of the worst records of protecting biodiversity in the developed world. Areas of high biodiversity**



and carbon sinks need greater protection from further damage, not just for our residents, but for the nation.

The hope that increased housing numbers would result in falling prices has proved to be false. From the early 1990s to 2016 the number of new homes built exceeded population growth yet prices rose – in the South-East, the average price of a home rose from £63,000 in January 1992 to £309,000 in December 2016, and current prices are higher still (source: Gov UK). It follows that no amount of playing with the calculation of Standard Method will achieve the desired result, because the viability test (which protects developer's profits at 20%) and developers' practice of manipulating prices through land-banking and drip-feeding new homes to estate agents will continue to keep most of what is built unaffordable to all but a small minority of the population. **If we are to solve this housing emergency, the viability test must be scrapped, and community need prioritised over developer profit.**

History clearly shows us that the private sector cannot deliver ambitious housing programmes alone. Between 1946 to and 1980, 4.4m (126,000 pa) new social rented homes were delivered, mostly by local Councils. We are best placed to deliver for the local communities we understand, and have the in-house skills required. Yet our Housing Revenue Account is under pressure. As every local authority with retained council housing will share, we are struggling with increasing costs of debt servicing; unpredictable and frequently changing national rent policy; increasing labour, construction and inflation costs; and the need to balance the essential but unfunded costs of building and fire safety; Decent Homes; increased consumer regulation and decarbonisation, curtailing our ability to provide new homes. Moreover, each year we lose valuable stock through right to buy. Wealden is one of over 100 Councils signed up to the '[Securing the Future of Council Housing](#)' campaign, and we urge Ministers to seriously consider the recommendations made in the report ahead of the Autumn Budget. **Councils must be given the legal freedom and financial means to build social homes at scale and enabled to acquire the necessary land at current use value, and an urgent reform of Right to Buy is required, removing the discounts currently offered and committing to enable Councils to retain 100% of receipts in the longer term.**

Last, but by no means least, we very much hope that your government will join the dots between the undoubted requirement for more homes and the climate and biodiversity crises that are ever more manifestly upon us. We cannot afford the carbon cost of building luxury homes to protect developer's profits. **Previous governments have failed to consider planning, housing need and carbon budgets together, and we sincerely hope that your government will rectify this as a matter of urgency.**

We wish you the best of luck with your time in government, and implore you to carefully consider these issues and suggestions in order to enable us to deliver on your vision for housing.

Yours sincerely,



**Cllr Rachel Millward, Leader
Wealden District Council**



**Cllr James Partridge, Deputy Leader
Wealden District Council**

