

# More, Better, Faster: what does this mean for the future of planning in Hampshire?

A summary of the CPRE Hampshire Seminar with Housing Minister, Kit Malthouse MP.

In partnership with:



## Introduction

On Friday 8<sup>th</sup> February 2019, we were delighted to welcome MP for North West Hampshire and Minister of State for Housing and Planning, Kit Malthouse to a morning discussion on some of the main housing and planning issues facing our Hampshire countryside and communities.

The morning sought to address some of the most important issues facing housing and planning within Hampshire including housing numbers, affordable homes, impact to the countryside and environment and the current Planning System. This included a focus on the new government housing proposal of 'More, Better, Faster' and what implications this may have for our Hampshire countryside and county as a whole.

Over 100 local people and CPRE Hampshire members attended, eager to join in the discussion.

CPRE Hampshire Chair Dee Haas was delighted with the response *'This was a really fantastic opportunity for local people to have their say and debate some of the issues around housing and planning in Hampshire with a government minister and local representative. I'm always amazed by the breadth of knowledge held by our members and the level of interest and passion local communities have about these issues. It was a wonderful opportunity for the Minister to run through current government policy and to debate some of these ideas and influencing factors with the Hampshire community, as well as our expert speakers.'*

Topics raised on the morning event included sustainability, housing numbers, affordability and neighbourhood plans, as well as the impact to our wildlife and net environmental gain through planning from Debbie Tann, Chief Executive of the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust.

Mr Malthouse Chaired the debate and responded to audience questions and comments. *'Well over a hundred people came along, and seeing my own constituents engage so passionately with More, Better, Faster was a joy for me as Housing Minister. Hearing the thoughts of passionate citizens certainly gave me ideas that I will strongly consider in future policy.'*

**For further details on our speakers and a script of our speaker's presentations, please continue reading.**

## Speaker Biographies and Presentations

### Matt Thomson on national planning policy

It's great to be here in Hampshire, and in the same room as a current housing and planning minister.

The last time that happened was when Gavin Barwell delivered CPRE's annual lecture two years ago. Then, that minister challenged CPRE to support the government with "practical, positive action" so that "together we can both preserve our precious countryside and build the homes we so desperately need".

I'm going to talk a little about the national perspective on planning, in particular the national planning policy framework, the plan-led system and something on design quality.

So, the National Planning Policy Framework - the NPPF - was updated in July last year, and is still being tweaked a little.

Despite what you may have heard, it's not all about building more houses, better and faster.

It also includes lots of other good things like promoting thriving rural economies and protecting and enhancing nature, landscapes and heritage, and listening to the aspirations of local people.

But a lot of the good things are overshadowed by the emphasis It's great to be here in Hampshire, and in the same room as a current housing and planning minister.

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#### Matt Thomson, Head of Planning, CPRE

@MattThomson42 @CPRE

Matt has been Head of Planning at CPRE since 2014. He leads CPRE's work on general town and country planning matters covering strategic planning, devolution, brownfield development, Green belt, land market reform and the protection of built, natural and landscape heritage.

He is a chartered town planner with 15 years' experience shaping planning policies for mainly rural local authorities and was Head of Policy and Practice at the Royal Town Planning Institute.



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But a lot of the good things are overshadowed by the emphasis placed on building houses.

Building new homes is not a bad thing, in itself. I'd go so far as to say that it is necessary, and both Caroline and Lois will be going into those issues in more detail shortly.

The problem is that the combination of the presumption in favour of sustainable development and the housing delivery test, along with a standard method for calculating local housing need that focuses on a headline number of homes based on out of date demographics and crude market signals, results in a system that fetishizes the construction of a number of houses, over building homes that actual people can afford to live in, meaning that the housing crisis will never be solved.

What is clear, and we completely agree with the government on this, is that we need robust local plans in all areas to ensure that people and communities are at the heart of planning because development both meets their needs and impacts their environment.

In some places the lack of local plans is down to poor local leadership or sheer incompetence, but elsewhere it's the fault of the system, with government frequently moving the goal-posts and perfectly respectable policies being declared out-of-date for arbitrary reasons - not least because the house-building industry - not the community - has failed to build the homes for which it has consent.

Increasing scope for permitted development rights massively undermines both localism and the plan-led system, and results in poor quality developments that do little to address housing affordability, as highlighted in research by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.

I would take this opportunity to urge the minister to seriously reconsider current proposals to further expand permitted development rights, and reverse some of those that currently exist, in order to put communities back in control.

This has a particular relevance to the quality of design, and the launch of the Scruton Review, which CPRE strongly welcomes. You can't raise the quality of the design of new developments if communities are prevented from rejecting poor quality proposals. But this is what happens with both permitted development rights and threats to remove local control when inflated housebuilding targets are not met.

Some of the thinking behind the new focus on design is informed by the observation that people are less inclined to object to development proposals when they are well designed. This is undoubtedly true, but good design isn't just about aesthetics.

To overcome the reasonable concerns of people whose community's development affects, the buildings and spaces don't need to just be pretty, but the development needs tangibly to address the needs of the community concerned and to avoid causing harm to things that people value.

Resolving those issues is of course what planning is all about, which brings us back to a plan-led system with community aspirations at its heart.

I'm sure the minister would agree with us on that point, so now I'm going to turn the tables a bit, and respond to the challenge of the minister's predecessor with what I hope Mr Malthouse will agree is practical and positive, but which may be challenging for CPRE.

Recently the minister emphasised the need to look at the full length of the planning pipeline - not just the immediate 5-year horizon, and suggested that there needs to be 4-5 million homes "in planning". That sounds terrifying, but, if we need to deliver 300,000 homes a year (and I must emphasise that we do not believe that is an achievable delivery rate) and local plans look ahead over a 15-20-year period, then it is just simple arithmetic. This pipeline must explicitly recognise not just land with planning permission, but also sites allocated in local and neighbourhood plans, 'broad locations for growth' in later years in the plan period, suitable sites on brownfield registers, and estimates of delivery through permitted development and other windfall sites. What is challenging for CPRE is that this means that we must help councils positively to identify areas and even specific sites through local plan processes that can meet this aspiration, and not ourselves be timid about looking further ahead than the minimum 5-year supply. This doesn't mean we should stop defending those parts of the countryside that most need protection, but we have to recognise that without robust forward-looking plans in place that meet identified needs for development (taking into account the actual willingness and capacity of the house-building industry to deliver), we are at risk of speculative development that will cause far more harm.

The corollary of this of course is that it would be great if government could come down like a ton of bricks on local authorities that fail to uphold NPPF policies on preventing sprawl or protecting landscapes in the same way that they do on those that fail to plan for housing need -



especially when the housing that gets built in Green Belts and in the countryside so patently fails to address the root causes of housing crisis.

Ultimately, whether we get more development or faster development is often down to issues outside of the planning system, including the economy and the ways in which land is traded. The planning system rightly focuses on getting better development, and one thing that is clear right now is that what we're actually getting is no different from what we would have got if there wasn't a planning system in place at all, and this is not good.

We must do better.

*Further comments from Matt, following the Minister's words during the debate:*

Two points raised in the Minister's speech that I wasn't able to respond to were:

1. The Minister said that the dominance of the big house-builders was the result of regulation. This is barely even partly true. Their dominance wasn't the result of regulation *per se* but of the specific type of regulation that applied; it's worth noting that the regulation that resulted in their dominance had been sought by the big house-builders themselves. A good example here is the tendency, since the early 1990s, for councils increasingly to rely on a smaller number of larger development sites for housing development: something the big house-builders specifically lobbied for, with claims of economies of scale and the ability to deliver on big infrastructure. Originally it was intended that the smaller house-builders would supplement these big developments on smaller developments coming through on so-called "windfall sites". The big developers subsequently lobbied for very strict tests to be applied to housing numbers calculations with regard to "allowances" intended to account for future windfall sites, with the effect that such allowances were required to be minimised in favour of still more, larger allocated sites in local plans. To be fair, recent policy has been slightly more lenient towards windfall sites, but in fact the correct solution is to encourage councils to identify and allocate smaller development sites in local and neighbourhood plans.
2. The Minister stated that he wanted to ensure that planning was done with people and not to them (overlooking the fact that permitted development rights and centrally imposed housing targets are the opposite of this). We should call for planning to be done by people, rather than with them.

## Caroline Dibden - meeting community need

There is no argument that we all share a moral obligation to house those who are in need, decently and affordably. And the government certainly believe they have a political imperative to be seen to be fixing the “housing crisis” with Kit’s #MoreBetterFaster programme.

But what exactly is the housing crisis? There are a number of different housing pressures - the need for social housing (which although it has actually fallen from a peak in 2012, is still acute, particularly in rural areas), the need for youngsters to get onto the housing ladder, and the need to cater for an aging population. There is also the need to build (I hope) in sustainable locations to minimise car travel and the CO2 burden, which is generally NOT where house builders wish to build and costs them more.

So, the current thinking from government appears to be that the way to solve these requirements is to build a lot of houses across England - not calculated to fit any of the categories above, but just a big number overall of 300,000 pa. We know that the latest household projections (from the Office of National Statistics in September) are much lower than previous estimates had predicted, with annual household formation of about 159,000 dpa. So, the plan is to build many more than are notionally required, nearly 90% more.....firstly to deal with any backlog, and some to keep house prices down. In Hampshire, the ONS tell us that there will be just over 4,900 new households forming every year, but the plan is to build over 8,000 new dwellings, around 60% above what might be required. The opposite is true in many parts of the north of England where their latest housing targets have fallen below their previous plans.

What I find fascinating is that there is actually a surplus of existing houses over households in England, by about 1.25 million. Using the ONS’s latest household estimates, there appear to be 5.2% more places to live than there are households that want to live in them. In fact, growth in the stock of dwellings appears to have outstripped that of households over the past 50 years or so.

### Caroline Dibden, Vice-Chair, CPRE Hampshire

@Caroline Dibden @CPRE Hampshire

Caroline began her career as a Geologist in the oil industry, spending 15 years working globally, firstly for Shell and later as a Consultant.

For the last 20 years, she has been active in CPRE Hampshire and in Local Government. She has been a Parish Councillor and sat on the board of HALC. She has served as a District Councillor and was a Natural England nominee on the South Downs Joint Committee, and in both cases was on the Planning & Housing Committees.

For CPRE she concentrates on monitoring the area at a strategic planning level. She currently chairs CPREs national task & finish group on the methodology of calculating housing numbers.



There is also a significant discrepancy in the way numbers on housing waiting lists are measured, as applicants can be on more than one council waiting list and so might be double-counted in the statistics. One government source says there are 1.2 million households on waiting lists and another says there are 600,000. Although having said that, there is no real measure of how many households have NOT formed over the years, due to the price of housing, the constrained or concealed households, the sofa surfers.

But what is most frustrating is that I believe their method won't even work. The housing market is a lot more complex than simply supply and demand. Just building more houses will only suit developers, who will build more executive expensive homes (and do it very slowly) and cherry pick the best sites. And why on earth would developers build so many houses that their product price crashed? UK house prices are based on complex economics, such as interest rates, competing investment portfolios, rental yields, the impact of Air BNB, and as a safe haven for international funds. Most Local Authorities in the south-east will continue to fail to meet these over inflated targets, permitting or losing sites on appeal due to lack of 5YHLS, so the least sustainable sites tend to get permission, and Local Plans will be essentially useless. And then the Local Authorities will still get punished by having another 20% penalty shoved on top through the housing delivery test, and the cycle will be repeated.

As far as we are experiencing in Hampshire, the panic to meet extreme housing targets is forcing Local Authorities to make the most reckless decisions - large housing estates are being permitted without any recourse to the normal principles of whether they might be located in the right place, with any public transport improvements or infrastructure, and the issue of design is completely off the agenda. Local councils are in panic mode to meet targets before they are punished for a lack of 5YHLS or non-delivery, the latter being mostly an issue completely beyond their control - as it is down to developers to develop - not councils.

And actually, I believe the government can't afford for house prices to come down too much anyway, or significant numbers of existing owners would all be in negative equity and we'd be back to the economic sub-prime crash of 2008 again.

So, in my world - the MORE would be more social housing (in perpetuity) for local people who really need it, MORE dwellings which fit the local demographic requirements, and MORE which are designed beautifully with effective infrastructure. But not just MORE executive homes on greenfield sites and not just MORE profits for developers or foreign funds.

## Debbie Tann - net environmental gain



People are slowly waking up to the damage we are doing to our planet. Wildlife is in freefall with more than half of all species in steep decline<sup>1</sup>, seas full of plastic, rivers drying out, soils lifeless, air polluted, and the threat of runaway climate change. People are becoming less and less connected to the natural environment. The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, and the pressure we are putting on our environment has a massive long term economic and social cost.

We at the Wildlife Trust are campaigning for a ‘Wilder Future’<sup>2</sup> - there is no time to waste, we need to act now to restore nature and our connections to it, before we reach crisis point.

**Why is this relevant to today’s agenda?** Well, we believe that to put nature into recovery, action is needed across all policy areas - from farming, to water policy to environmental legislation and of course, planning. Planning is a vital area to get right because in the past housing development has been a significant cause of wildlife decline.

**We want to see all housing developments give back more than they take from nature** - by delivering meaningful biodiversity net gain, not only helping nature recover but also creating better places to live with far reaching social and economic benefits<sup>3</sup>. This all the more pressing with an estimated 140,000 homes planned in Hampshire in the next twenty years!

### Biodiversity Net Gain

Biodiversity net gain in development is defined as “*development that leaves biodiversity in a better state than before*”<sup>4</sup>. This mirrors the Government’s commitment in the 25

### Debbie Tann, CEO, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

@Debbie\_Tann @HantsIWWildlife

Debbie joined Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust in 1998 as a conservation officer having worked previously at Surrey Wildlife Trust and Woking Borough Council as a biodiversity officer focusing on wetland habitats.

She obtained a First Class BSc in Environmental Science and Ecology in 1995 and then an MSc in Conservation at University College London where she graduated with Distinction having specialised in the policy and politics of UK and European nature conservation.

Debbie has also served on the South East Committee for the Heritage Lottery Fund, as a Trustee of the Chalk Streams and Rivers Trust, and two years as the LNP representative for the Defra Local Delivery Group. Debbie was seconded into Defra for 11 months to help write the Natural Environment White Paper.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/more-one-ten-uk-species-threatened-extinction-new-study-finds>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hiwwt.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/wilder-future>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hiwwt.org.uk/blog/lianne-de-mello/what-does-net-gain-mean-our-wildlife>

<sup>4</sup> Biodiversity Net Gain: Good practice principles for development (2016) CIEEM, CIRIA, IEMA

<https://www.cieem.net/biodiversity-net-gain-principles-and-guidance-for-uk-construction-and-developments>

Year Environment Plan to “*improving the environment within a generation and leaving it in a better state than we found it*”<sup>5</sup>.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) already states that planning policy should identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable gains for biodiversity. This is a strong recommendation, but ‘*should do*’ is guidance only - and in practice it’s hardly been delivered. The government is now consulting<sup>6</sup> on whether biodiversity net gain should be *mandatory* for all developments when granting planning permission.

A mandatory requirement for biodiversity net gain would support delivery of existing planning policy, create a **level playing field for developers** and make it easier to implement a **consistent national approach to net gain**.

We support a mandatory approach to biodiversity net gain but there are a number of important principles that must be applied:

- It must not replace the existing Mitigation Hierarchy<sup>7</sup>, but deliver additionally. This means that where developments may impact on existing protected areas, they will need to follow the steps of ‘avoid’, ‘mitigate’ or ‘compensate’, before additionally looking to deliver net gain.
- It must be underpinned by an evidence-based spatial plan which identifies the best places to deliver - a Nature Recovery Network map<sup>8</sup>.
- Biodiversity net gain is not the same as environmental net gain, which is a broader concept. Biodiversity net gain should take precedence and not be traded or offset against wider environmental net gains such as increased green spaces for recreation.
- A standard metric for measuring and assessing biodiversity net gain should be used (based on the current Defra metric).
- Robust monitoring must be put in place and net gain should be delivered in perpetuity, making a permanent contribution to nature’s recovery.

Just protecting nature is simply not enough anymore. We need a land supply for nature, not just for housing.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>

<sup>6</sup> <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/land-use/net-gain/>

<sup>7</sup> NPPF Para 175 a) If significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.hiwwt.org.uk/nature-recovery-network>

## Steve Lees - Local planning system

My planning experience goes back to the early 1980s and comes as no surprise when I say that we have been here. The need for speed appears to be in the DNA of successive governments who have introduced many changes.

Song by Pink where she sings... is just like a pill which is making me ill....

In my view the changes have not necessarily had the desired effect and have in number of respects have hindered rather than helped.

Structure plans were replaced by regional plans which in turn were abolished left LPAs to determine the scale of development they should plan for and under the Duty to Cooperate to volunteer to take the shortfall from neighbours.

Late 1990s early 2000s Government keen on target setting decisions to be made within set timescale 8/13 weeks were National Indicators and league tables were published. At my previous authority it was summoned up to Whitehall to explain poor performance yet its record of delivering homes was good.

### Context of Current Framework

The development of a piece of land or change of use of a building is an important event;

- for the owners it represents a significant increase in value,
- for the developer a significant investment decision,
- for the neighbours/surrounding area it could be a significant change in many ways
- and for the environment a potentially permanent change whose impact needs to be carefully considered.

At same time context of decision-making has changed:

- the legislative requirements to be satisfied when considering applications increased significantly
- The public are more active and in larger numbers. Social media can be a very effective tool in mobilising people and the information regarding planning is far more accessible via Council web sites
- Legal challenges seem to be more frequent

### Steve Lees, Planning Consultant

Steve is an independent planning consultant with wide ranging experience. He worked for Test Valley Borough Council from in a number of roles, the last being Head of Planning Policy and Transport. At a strategic level Steve has experience of working on county structure plans, the South East Plan and with the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH).

He has been appointed as an external examiner to the planning school at UWE (Bristol), is a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute's south east advisory committee and provides advice to the Test Valley and Hampshire branches of the CPRE



That is not to say planners should not make decisions as expeditiously as possible or for applicants not to properly prepare proposals

In that context it should come as no surprise that contentious development at whatever scale has the potential to become long drawn out affairs as those involved use the process to support their particular position

### **Development Plan Documents**

The Planning & Compensation Act 2004 section 38(6) still in place long may it be the case ... make decisions in accordance with the development plan much to commend current system make a plan and then determine applications in accordance with that plan, what could possibly go wrong

The current system has an inbuilt timetable required by legislation which effectively creates a minimum period for plan preparation and adoption;

- includes two rounds of public consultation
- and an examination into the soundness of a Plan,
- examiners report and adoption

New Plans should be capable of preparation in around three years. The examination process can take a year start to finish so let's say 4 years total. So if start now and by end of 2022 early 2023 feasible to have a new plan in place...

On a positive note ref Gov't changes the introduction of more streamlined examination process not to everyone's liking but I think it is an improvement.... Less formal less intimidating for public. less profitable for the lawyers.

2016 TVBC local Plan examination lasted 2 months Dec14- Jan15 but report took 11 months. The TVBLP 2006 had a seven-month public inquiry with a personal daily battering from QCs lasting from Nov- March 2005 Report in September 2005 not the most pleasant or productive approach...

LPAs not helped selves in terms of performance in preparing LPs recent research by consultants Lichfield's 20% of local authorities do not have an adopted LP which post-dates 2012

How critical is the timing / time taken to prepare a plan in the delivery of development?

Let's assume a local plan takes 4 yrs. to put in place. Where does that sit with development of sites particularly large sites. Involved in a number of large sites in Test Valley egg at Andover, Romsey and edge of Chandlers Ford when look at the lifecycle of the sites from submission of applications to completion Three big sites 800, 1200, 2,500 from when permission granted to completion looking at 11- 12 yrs.

Shaving a few months off the LP timetable not achieve much at all in terms of rate at which houses are delivered.

## **Now let's have a look at Development Management**

Central to the decision making process is the opportunity for the public to be involved; to comment on applications, to speak at meetings for the decision to be made by elected members ... so built into the system is the scope for delay disagreement and disappointment.

The changes made by Government in my view left authorities reluctant to refuse applications which probably should have been.

In rugby union if the referee isn't sure if a try has been scored he asks the TMO 'is there any reason why I can't award the try?'.... dealing with planning applications has become a bit like that with the case officer asking 'is this scheme bad enough to refuse'.

## **Extract from RTPI research project 2018 Investing in Delivery**

Junior planners said there was a managerial focus on meeting target timescales rather than negotiating with applicants and shaping applications into acceptable proposals,

Planning managers said that they aspired to quality decision- making, but fundamentally were under pressure to deliver on statutory targets in order to fulfil their KPIs at a corporate level within their authority...

But are now seeing signs of a change for the better post NPPF 2018. Number of recent examples of appeals being dismissed due to poor layouts, poor design leading to poor living conditions even where is shortfall in land supply and the Courts have helpfully reminded everyone that the starting point is the Development Plan

## **Role of Developers**

Should not be all about the LPA. Applicants/developers have their role to play in engaging early on in the process with local community to not only explain scheme but flexibility to take on board comments made.

Helpful if did homework and submitted it properly having plans which were consistent with each other be a start Recent example where same application 2 different sets of landscape proposals for same layout both of which were worse than the first plan submitted with original application which had got pp = why wouldn't you refuse it.

example where plans incorrectly drawn couldn't physically get the proposed development on the site.... Had to make the road narrower to fit the houses in.

Robert Adam essay in recent Policy Exchange publication makes for interesting if depressing reading in giving a very lop sided view of how the system

## **Summary**



Optimistic about the potential of the planning system to deliver good development in the right place and in timely fashion

Looking back there certainly was and still is a case for improving the performance of local planning authorities and there should always be scope to improve in terms of the efficiency of the process and in the quality of the decision made.

LPA's who are not doing it as well should learn from others that are and not feel uneasy about doing so. Need to promote a sharing of best practice culture

Role for RTPI to put more resources to promote good planning and good planning practice.

Suggest what isn't needed is tinkering with the system.

## Lois Lane - affordable housing

We all have the right to a home we can afford to live in, no matter where we are. When communities have good homes that people can afford, we witness a whole host of wider benefits: improvements in health and wellbeing, better educational outcomes as children take fewer sick days, less time spent commuting because people can live near where they work, less traffic on the roads and better air quality. We know that housing policy choices can affect all of these areas.

At the moment, though, families on low and even average incomes are struggling to afford a place to live. The problem, in an expensive county like Hampshire, is that affordable housing often isn't affordable, under the current definition. At present, the definition of affordable housing encompasses a wide variety of tenures, some of which are much more expensive than others. In recent years, planning policy and grant funding have mostly concentrated on homes for 'affordable rent', at up to 80% of market value.

But in places where housing costs are high and wages are low, this can still be far more than people can afford to pay. The gap between rents and incomes is a particular problem in many rural areas with low wage economies.

From the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's analysis of income and rental data from 2016/17, we can see that the average wage in Basingstoke and Deane district was £33,626. But the average lower quartile income was just £23,996. Meanwhile a 2-bedroom property for 'affordable rent' would set you back £634 per month in this local authority area. So a household on a low income could expect to spend 32% of their income on rent here, even if they managed to secure an affordable rent property. We know that things can be even tougher for those renting in the private sector, where a property could cost upwards of £800 per month.

A comparable home for social rent, however, would cost only £487 per month, a much more manageable 20% of earnings for a low income family. Imagine what else that family might be able to do with the £147 they would save every month on their housing costs. Family days out, Sunday lunch at the local pub, after school activities for the kids, or even saving towards a deposit.

This is why social housing is so crucial, and why we are pleased to see the Government taking steps towards funding homes for social rent again. Hopefully we will see lots more government led investment in social rented homes, including in rural areas.

CPRE Hampshire is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registration number: 1164410.

**Lois Lane, Policy & Advocacy  
Advisor, CPRE**

**@LoisLane1066 @CPRE**

Lois Lane is a Research and Policy Advisor in the planning team at CPRE. She leads our national policy work on rural affordable housing and land reform. Before joining CPRE, Lois completed a PhD in Medieval History at Kings College London.



Social homes help build communities, housing the nurses, teaching assistants, bus drivers and shop workers that the countryside needs to thrive.

Right now there are 19,988 households on local authority waiting lists for social housing in Hampshire. Last year 226 new homes for social rent were built in the county. While the trajectory is positive, that still means that it would take 88 years to provide everyone on the waiting list with a home they can afford. And that's without taking into account the 77 homes that were sold last year in Hampshire under Right to Buy.

Building enough social rented homes in our villages and market towns is going to require grant funding through Homes England. The lifting of the HRA borrowing cap last October was a really positive move, but only 31 out of 91 rural authorities have a housing revenue account. The others are going to need more support for local authorities to start building again, or for housing associations to significantly increase their capacity.

Some possible policy solutions, some of which are likely to be more controversial than others:

- A new definition of affordability in national planning policy, which is tied to incomes rather than the market.
- Increase in proportion of Government housing spend which funds social rent, with properly proportioned funding for rural social housing schemes.
- Reform of Right to Buy, so that local authorities have the power to set their own discounts and keep 100% of receipts after debt repayment to fund replacement homes.

Building more of the kind of homes we need is not just possible but necessary if we want everyone to have a fair chance in life, no matter where they live. If we want children from low-income rural households to have a stable place to grow up, we should invest in social housing. If we want the countryside to be home to a mix of people from all walks of life, we should invest in social housing. If we want to boost the rural economy, and curb the rising housing benefit bill, we should invest in social housing. Yes, it will be a challenge, but it will offer an opportunity too. With the right investment, we can build the homes we need without concreting over the countryside.



