

HOUSING NEEDS PROPOSAL

By
Richard Weavis

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Government's current ambition is for 300,000 houses to be built each year.

1.2 This requirement appears to be based on the Government's perceived notion that a shortfall of housing is creating high prices and making it difficult for first time buyers to purchase.

1.3 The Government's plan appears to be to flood the market with housing and in doing so reduce prices. This is a very simplistic approach and does not take account of available and suitable land supply in an area. Nor does it properly take account of damage to the environment and wildlife, or the adequacy of local infrastructure and services and their ability to scale up.

1.4 In short, the Government's approach is too remote, too simplistic, and lacks sufficient consideration of local issues including, for example, the perception of high average prices caused by proximity to a National Park or similar area.

2. Proposal

2.1 To offer an alternative method for the calculation and location of local housing need.

3.0 Aim

3.1 To give greater power and responsibility to Local Authorities, Parish Councils and residents through the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan systems.

3.2 To ensure only the number and mix of housing needed in an area is built.

3.3 To ensure adequate and suitable infrastructure and services are in place before housing developments are occupied.

3.4 To protect green open spaces, the environment, and wildlife, which collectively enhance the physical and mental wellbeing of residents.

3.5 To safeguard the charm, character and historic setting of an area, important to both residents and visitors.

4.0 Method

4.1 Following detailed consultation with all Local Authorities and other stakeholders, The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will issue a nationally agreed set of detailed housing need assessment criteria.

4.1.1 These criteria will include:

Anticipated population growth;

Demographic trends;

Local Authority and Housing Association waiting lists;

Homelessness;

Shortfalls in affordable and retirement homes;

Adequacy of existing infrastructure and services and the ability to provide, scale up, or improve as required;

The impact of climate change including flooding;

The impact on the environment and wildlife.

4.2 The agreed national criteria will then be included as principle policies in Local Plans.

4.3 All Parish Councils will undertake a housing needs questionnaire to determine the likely additional housing need and type required for their area.

4.4 The details of the Parish Council's questionnaires will be submitted to the Local Authority. The Local Authority will then collate the information provided from all Parish Councils and apply the results to the national criteria and arrive at a possible housing needs figure for the following five years.

4.5 The possible housing needs figure may be less than the initial required housing needs figure following an adjustment for available and suitable land supply and current infrastructure and services capacity etc.

4.6 The possible housing needs figure will then be discussed with all Parish Councils and housing need apportioned on a fair and equitable basis taking into account available and suitable land in each Parish and that no Parish should increase its existing housing number by more than 10% in a five year period. This will allow a more structured integration of development, infrastructure and services, and new residents.

4.7 When agreeing the final housing needs figure for each Parish the Local Authority will ensure that any additional infrastructure and services required will be completed before developments are occupied.

4.8 The Local Authority will complete its Local Plan based on the final housing needs number agreed.

4.9 Each Parish Council will complete its Neighbourhood Plan based on the final housing needs number agreed.

4.10 A review of housing needs, using the Parish questionnaire method, will be undertaken every five years and a new target set for the following period as necessary.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 This proposed method will possibly take between twelve – eighteen months to set up because of the discussions needed to approve the national criteria.

5.2 The national criteria can be periodically reviewed to make sure any new events and impacts are addressed.

5.3 Radical changes to existing documents should not be required. The Local and Neighbourhood plan systems are in place, as are Parish Council questionnaires. The NPPF should require only minimum amendment with the removal of 'The presumption in favour of sustainable development' and any reference to the current 'standard method'.

5.4 Local Authorities, Parish Councils and Residents will all feel much more involved and their opinions and legitimate concerns listened to, and much more likely addressed, thereby creating less feeling of resentment.

5.5 Once in place this method of only building what is currently possible and necessary will be much more flexible in responding to local change and much more likely to preserve the character, environment, wildlife, and residents wellbeing of an area.

**RW for SOSCA
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Richard Weavis has been a Fellow member of the Incorporated Association of Building Engineers and has been involved in the construction industry for many years. Before retirement specialised in sustainable design and construction and renewable energy systems. This enabled a better understanding of the damaging impact any building has on the environment.

‘Many residents understand the need for affordable and retirement homes but struggle to understand the need for a substantial growth in ‘Market Sale’ houses. This is especially so when suitable land is not always readily available and local infrastructure and services are struggling to cope.’