



## PLANNING

# Imposed housing targets 'excessive' and 'unrealistic'

Environmental sustainability is being sacrificed in the pursuit of excessive and unrealistic housebuilding targets - according to a leading Horsham campaigner.

Roger Smith, of the Campaign to Protect Rural England - Horsham district branch, argues that a new report shows that the Planning Inspectorate's decision-making is heavily weighted in favour of developers.

The CPRE has published a report 'Targeting the Countryside' showing that between March 2012 and May 2014 planning inspectors overturned the decisions of local councils on major housing developments on greenfield land in 72 percent of cases where there was no defined land supply.

John Rowley, planning officer at the Campaign to Protect Rural England who co-ordinated the report, said: "These figures show that current policy

is encouraging unnecessary house building in the countryside against the wishes of local people.

"We need to see a more transparent and less punitive system which does not allow unrealistic housing targets to over-ride local concerns."

The group argues that the National Planning Policy Framework, approved by the Government in March 2012, has left councils without an approved local plan powerless to decide where developments should go in their area.

It says that many local councils are without a local plan due to the 'onerous criteria in constructing viable plans'.

Dr Smith argued the report demonstrated that contrary to recent statements made by Government planning minister Brandon Lewis local people did not have a bigger say over where housing goes.

He said: "Environmental

sustainability has been sacrificed in the pursuit of excessive and unrealistic house-building targets.

"The report shows that planning's supposed 'golden thread' is in reality tarnished and base - because politicians have made it so. Of concern, too, is the reluctance of councils, including Horsham District Council, whose decisions have been overturned by the Planning Inspectorate, to challenge the Government and the minister who is after all the political master of the Planning Inspectorate - and the seeming acquiescence and indifference of MPs."

He also challenged Horsham MP Francis Maude, who is also minister for the cabinet office, over comments made in May 2013 about the 'transitional' nature of the planning system with applications being approved on appeal.

In a letter to the County



Campaigners at an appeal over 160 homes in Henfield in March this year

Times Mr Maude said: "I believe these problems are transitional ones which arise as we move from the old top-down system to one genuinely based on local decision-taking."

HDC has lost a number of appeals recently including several south of Billingshurst, while councillors approved 475 homes east of the village last year as they faced the prospect of losing an appeal for 550 homes on the same site.

Two schemes in Henfield, one for 102 homes east of Manor Close, and another for 160 homes off West End Lane, were both approved on appeal.

In June this year Nick Herbert, MP for Arundel and South Downs, vowed to 'abolish' the Planning Inspectorate claiming this would stop an unelected body doing more damage in the future.

Meanwhile the Horsham District Planning Framework,

which included 2,500 homes and a new business park north of the A264, was approved by the council in April. At the April meeting it was argued that if the plan was not approved HDC would continue to be vulnerable to speculative planning applications. The plan has now been sent to the planning inspector who will test its soundness in a series of examination hearings set to start on November 4.