

Planning issues

I have been working closely with Wokingham Borough and some of the Parishes on the issue of development. Wokingham has an agreed local plan with ample provision for new housing, and does not wish to see additional planning permissions granted on appeal outside the approved areas of the plan.

The Council had granted 9500 permissions for new homes to be built by March 2017. The agreed requirement is for 850-900 new homes a year, so this represented more than a ten year supply. Under government rules a Council has to make available a five year supply of permissions to give developers and builders some flexibility. On this basis Wokingham should not lose on appeal unless the application was for homes within the agreed plan.

Some Inspectors in the past have ignored or looked through the high level of outstanding planning permissions, and have concentrated on the actual build rate. If this has been below the agreed rate they have sometimes granted extra permissions. This is damaging to the Plan led process, and makes it far more difficult to plan for schools, roads and other infrastructure, introducing more uncertainty into where extra homes might be built.

Together the Borough and I have urged the government to tighten the rules over what Inspectors can do when a Council has made available many more permissions than the number required. the Secretary of State has agreed to work with the Borough on trying to secure a better build rate on the many sites where permissions are already outstanding.

Wokingham is working hard to put in the extra schools, roadspace and other public facilities so much development needs. A better enforced local plan would help with this work, which requires Inspectors to support the Council.