

WHAT WE NEED TO DO TO DEFEND OUR COUNTRYSIDE...

The setting of unattainable housing targets is a dangerous flaw in the current planning system which must be changed. It is opening the door to wave after wave of speculative planning applications for housing on greenfield sites across England.

CPRE is campaigning for a more common sense approach to building the houses we need which stops giving developers free rein to build in the countryside and encourages – above all – the reuse of previously developed land first. This means securing crucial changes to national planning policy.

Importantly, we must also influence housing policy and tackle the question of who is going to actually build the houses we need. Unless this question is answered, we will continue to fall short however many impossible housebuilding targets are set.

What CPRE is doing

1. We will shortly release a hard-hitting research paper, exposing the flaws and inconsistencies in the present method of calculating housing need, using evidence gathered from our network of county branches. We will be campaigning for a clearer and more realistic methodology to be introduced. We will publicise the issue in the media and put our arguments to Ministers, government departments, local authorities, MPs and planning practitioners.
2. We will continue to promote innovative policy solutions to critical housing issues through evidenced-based research papers. Our *Housing Foresight* series aims to provoke wide-ranging discussion over the future shape of housing policy. The papers have featured in national media and been welcomed by Ministers and Shadow Ministers.
3. We will continue campaigning for the Government to adopt a more robust 'brownfield first' policy to ensure that previously developed sites are used before greenfield sites. We have already made important headway on this crucial issue in the past year, including the current Government announcing a £1 billion brownfield fund to encourage councils to unlock brownfield sites for housing. But there is still much more that needs to be done.
4. We will continue to support our local branches in every county across England, who are grappling with the problems caused by the current planning system. As the case studies in this leaflet illustrate, our highly-skilled, tireless volunteers are engaged in some enormous battles to challenge unattainable housing targets. They are working hard to influence local plans and stop inappropriate housing developments damaging the character of their towns and villages. Their experiences on the ground also play a vital role in giving our national campaigners the evidence they need to make our case for the countryside at Westminster.



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CPRE will continue to push for a strong 'brownfield first' policy

What you can do

CPRE simply could not do everything we do to protect and enhance the countryside without the generosity of members and supporters like you. By making a donation today, you can help ensure that the countryside is given a voice and that it continues to be heard.

Your gift could help fund vital research into the devastating consequences of the present planning system and the unnecessary loss of countryside that entails.

It could help us prepare briefings for Ministers, MPs and the media to highlight the urgent need to reform the way housing need is calculated. Or it could help fund a local campaign to defend green fields against inappropriate development.

The campaign we are fighting is being fought at Westminster and in every part of England. The better resourced we are, the better our chances of stopping the needless loss of countryside and getting the houses we need built, but in the right places.



Campaign to Protect Rural England
Standing up for your countryside



The current planning system is unintentionally threatening communities and countryside across England

We must build many more houses in England than we currently are. But as the diagram above shows, the system we have is deeply flawed. Excessive and unattainable housing targets are being set in local plans. This is resulting in constant speculative applications for planning permission from developers in completely unreasonable places, while more suitable sites (i.e. brownfield land) are disregarded.

So today, there are sites all over the countryside that are either allocated in local plans for development or proposed for planning permission. But no one knows which, if any, are actually going to get developed. So communities have

the threat of inappropriate housing development constantly looming over them.

It's chaos. And the result is a developer-led planning system and the worst of both worlds: too few houses being built, and those which are being built, are in the wrong places. That's why CPRE is campaigning to end this merry-go-round and calling for a number of common sense measures with realism at the fore – so that we have a planning system which responds to genuine local housing need and gets houses built in the best locations.

Matt Thomson, Head of Planning, CPRE

ACROSS ENGLAND, UNREALISTIC HOUSING TARGETS ARE LEADING TO DISASTER...

All over England, communities are faced with excessive and unattainable housing targets, as a result of the flawed way in which housing need is assessed. Here are just two examples – taken from CPRE branches in Oxfordshire and Cornwall – of the damage this threatens to do to the rural beauty of England and how CPRE is leading the charge against this senselessness.

The threat to Cornwall's countryside from excessive housing targets

Cornwall's draft local plan proposes that approximately 50,000 houses should be built in the county. Most of the houses are likely to be inappropriately located on green fields on the outskirts of existing major towns.

If the inflated housing targets are accepted, Cornwall will have to find space for over five 'Truros'. This will have a terrible impact on the county's countryside and fundamentally change its character. Acting as the county's voice for the countryside, CPRE's Cornwall branch is fiercely campaigning to challenge the targets and influence the county's local plan. They do not accept that such a large number of new houses in Cornwall – much of it high-end housing for non-residents – is necessary.

To support their challenge, CPRE Cornwall commissioned a report by an independent planning consultant. This found that 32,000 additional houses are needed in Cornwall – significantly less than the figures in the draft local plan.

Crucially, the branch's case also highlighted that the local authority had failed to adopt a proactive 'brownfield first' policy to encourage better use of existing buildings and previously developed land. They are now developing a 'toolkit' to equip concerned local people with the resources they need to respond robustly to speculative planning applications.



CPRE Cornwall is concerned that excessive housing targets will lead to permanent and needless erosion of the county's beautiful countryside.



Oxfordshire's Green Belt and AONBs are likely to suffer if the proposed housing targets are approved.

'Staggering' housing targets endanger Oxfordshire's countryside

CPRE Oxfordshire has launched a campaign to challenge what they call the 'unwanted, unsound and unachievable' housing targets proposed for the county. The targets suggest that 100,000 houses need to be built in Oxfordshire, virtually doubling an earlier estimate of 54,700. This will put enormous pressure on local communities and the countryside, including Oxfordshire's Green Belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).

The branch believes the 'staggering' figures are not about meeting the needs of existing residents, but catering predominantly for the county's over-ambitious economic development plans. As part of their campaign to challenge the county's housing targets, CPRE Oxfordshire commissioned an independent report which concluded that the proposed housing target for Oxfordshire is "so overstated, so fatally flawed, and unfit for purpose".

CPRE argues there is no evidence to suggest that such a target can be achieved in a sustainable way. Building on this scale will damage the environment and overwhelm the local infrastructure.

There is also no evidence that developers are actually willing to deliver this level of housing, making the proposed target unachievable. Unscrupulous developers will be happy to pocket permissions for greenfield sites to add to existing land banks, but they are certainly not equipped or incentivised to build on this scale.

Like many other parts of England, Oxfordshire is being set up to fail. Doubling housebuilding targets will make no difference to actual housebuilding output and, once the targets are missed, normal planning rules will cease to apply and developers will have freer rein to build where they choose.

The branch is urging local policy makers not to accept the proposed targets. They are also appealing to local authorities to direct housing allocations away from the county's Green Belt and AONBs and to prevent further development in inappropriate greenfield locations.

IT'S TIME TO GET REALISM BACK INTO OUR PLANNING SYSTEM...

The practice of setting steep and unattainable housing targets in local plans is one of CPRE's most pressing concerns with the current planning system, alongside the lack of a robust 'brownfield first' approach to development.

Today, many local authorities find themselves under huge pressure to identify and release lots of land to accommodate implausibly high housing targets, in some cases higher than have ever been achieved, even in boom years. And yet we're still not getting the houses we need built.

The crux of the issue lies in who is actually going to build the houses. The big developers, who dominate the market, have no interest in helping local authorities meet building targets and why should they? They are acting rationally and in the interests of their shareholders and will simply continue to build the number of homes they want to build and which they think the market will support. And if they are allowed to build them on cheap green fields they will do so, rather than regenerating derelict eyesores in our towns and cities.

The need for developers to maximise profits on each housing unit has seen them adopt business strategies which focus on

land trading as much as on actually building houses. Once they have secured land, they build at a rate that will keep prices high. This puts extra pressure on the countryside as land still to be developed on a site with planning permission is removed from the local authority's land supply, meaning that it has to allocate land or approve new developments elsewhere.

Unfortunately, politicians fail to grasp that releasing more land for housing is not the same thing as actually getting houses built.

Successive Governments have simplistically argued, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that if high housing targets are set in local plans, it will lead to a big increase in housing supply and prices will become more affordable. This approach is fatal: it has not delivered anywhere near the number of houses we need, let alone in the right places. We must get realism back into our planning system.

WHY CURRENT HOUSING FIGURES ARE PIE IN THE SKY



1. They do not take account of current housebuilding rates

National planning policy stipulates several factors which should be taken into account by local authorities when calculating their housing targets. However, government guidance says that low rates of housebuilding can't be used to lower future housing targets. This is illogical and completely ignores the realities of the housebuilding industry, which will want to maintain profit margins by continuing to drip feed new houses onto the market.

2. They are calculated using an inconsistent, flawed methodology

For such a crucial part of the planning process, the guidance on how housing targets should be determined is both brief



and vague. This has led to many different methodologies, assumptions and data being applied. Local authorities, housebuilders and environmental campaigners regularly turn up at local plan meetings with vastly differing estimates of housing targets, despite all following the same government guidance.

3. They take little account of infrastructure pressures and sustainability issues

In only a small handful of local plans adopted in recent years have local authorities been allowed to set housing targets that are constrained due to infrastructure or environmental impacts. So, despite Ministers saying that such constraints can be taken into account when determining housing targets, experience clearly shows that it is not happening.