

OPINION



Promise of more housing will not bring down prices



James Radley
Deputy leader of Hart District Council and leader of the Community Campaign (Hart) group

IT is a fact that housing in the South East of England is unaffordable, especially for young people.

My eldest son still lives at home with us because he cannot afford to buy or rent locally. This is a fairly common, if unwelcome, facet of modern living in the UK.

Central government's repeated message is that to make housing more affordable, we need to build more.

While we certainly need more homes, it is a fallacy to present housing as a commodity product, the price of which can be materially affected by supply and demand. While absolutely essential, houses are also seen as aspirational, and by many as a solid investment so the law of commodity pricing will never apply.

The price of a house is almost irrelevant in terms of its affordability. It is based on the ability to raise a hefty deposit and to sustain the cost of the mortgage or simply being able to pay the rent.

So let's not imagine for one moment that building more market housing will make them cost less. A large hike in interest rates may well reduce prices but will not make them any more affordable.

I acknowledge that we do need to build more homes; families need places to live and the ability to provide affordable housing schemes within new developments does provide a supply of much needed homes that people can afford to occupy.

Therefore, the government's drive for local authorities to identify sites for substantial new developments in their Local Plans is sound - even if they do seem to be going about it in the wrong way.

For years Hart District Council has failed to deliver a new Local Plan and this has left our communities open to unwelcome planning decisions through the appeal process.

The decision to allow Grove Farm (alongside Crookham Village) is simply the most recent example and makes a complete travesty of any notion that planning is a democratic process.

The majority of people who responded to consultations in Hart don't want further expansion of the existing towns but instead see the logic of focussing development on a new settlement site. In this way, critical infrastructure can be designed in from the outset.

Unfortunately, it appears that the inspector in the Grove Farm case can seemingly set aside this democratic expression of will and allow yet more development with little opportunity of providing infrastructure. In doing so, some people believe that the opportunity of building a new settlement in Hart may be slipping away.

I fear there are some who may have deliberately attempted to derail the Local Plan process in order to achieve planning by appeal and so impose all the housing growth on those areas which already have over stretched schools and congested roads.

The Community Campaign (Hart) felt compelled to join forces with other groups to take over the administration of Hart Council in May because we saw that the Conservatives neither could nor would be able to form the required consensus to drive through our Local Plan. Their internal infighting has for years sown confusion into the plan making process.

Hart District Council must stay focussed on an infrastructure led Local Plan - despite the interference of short sighted appeal decisions.



It is a fallacy to present housing as a commodity product, the price of which can be materially affected by supply and demand