

Affordable Housing

A letter to the Post, Oct 2007

Sir,

West Meon's vote in support of a 'rural exception site' of affordable homes, reserved for locals, highlights an initiative that could be adopted in more places ('Homes for Locals OK', Post, 24 Oct).

A recent Halifax survey showed that average rural house prices are over seven times average rural incomes. And East Hampshire is now the 7th most expensive rural area in Britain, with the average home costing £326,000 – up 60% in just five years.

Several factors have driven house prices nationwide, including more singles, higher life expectancy and high levels of immigration. We learned this week that the government expects a population of 71m by 2031.

The government proposes to build at least 640,000 more homes in the south-east by 2026 – though relatively few of these are earmarked for East Hampshire (260 extra each year, plus the development of Bordon, ring-fenced in a separate plan). Many people do worry, though, that if Petersfield, Liss and the A3 Corridor are excluded from the South Downs National Park, East Hants could get a higher target in future.

The scale of government plans for the south-east should not go unchallenged: the need for more housing must be balanced against protecting the environment and keeping green spaces for all. Inappropriate developments and the 'back garden grab' are to be resisted.

But we must also ensure that there are enough lower-cost and affordable homes being provided, in our villages as well as the towns. If we do not take action, we could have increasingly ageing populations, lacking the balance that thriving communities need, and with a shortage of people to fill essential jobs.

Villages can help sustain their own vibrancy by finding more 'exception sites' for affordable homes on the edge of development areas, as part of Parish Plans.

Sincerely,

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