

HUW MERRIMAN MP
(Bexhill and Battle)



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Chris Pincher MP
Minister for Housing
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Our Ref: HM17962

9 September 2020

Dear Chris,

We write with respect to the Government's consultation for house building, planning and development process and for new housing targets.

We are both very supportive of Government measures to get more people on the housing ladder. We wish to work with you to ensure that more homes are delivered in the right areas. It is with this aim in mind that we seek to meet with you to assist with this outcome. The following issues are of concern:

Delivering Housing Numbers

Rother District Council's Local Plan requires it to deliver 335 new homes each year. The average delivery over the last 3 years has been 241. With 75% of land being designated as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the District Council, along with East Sussex County Council, built a new road, Combe Valley Way, a link road from Bexhill to Hastings to accommodate thousands of new homes and businesses. Since it's opening five years ago, developers have not built on this allocated land in the scale hoped for. Instead, developers are building in other parts of the district where the infrastructure is already choked. Despite evidence showing Rother District Council to be proactively creating development opportunities, the recently incorporated Standard Method increased Rother District Council's housing delivery target to 736 homes. The proposed new Standard Method would lift this figure to 1,173.

Land Designation

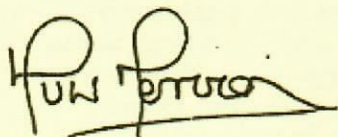
We welcome your moves to speed up development on land designated as growth areas. This could help bring the land forward which the District Council planned for when delivering the Bexhill to Hastings link road. However, we believe that two further requirements would be needed:

1. Land designated as 'protected' needs to be further protected to ensure developers are incentivised to build on 'growth' land. Were there to be a combination of the proposed simplification of planning for growth land allayed to making it harder to build on protected land, we believe more housing would be delivered overall. Without the limitations on protected land, we believe the reform of planning for developed land will not be enough to incentivise developers to deliver the homes our district needs on the growth land which, in our instance, has been provided for at scale since the link road opened.
2. The design approval process needs to be reformed. The issue delaying building the limited number of new homes which are being built on the Link Road was not one of planning; outline permission was given some years back. Bovis, as lead developer, tell us that it took almost 3 years for the council and developer to agree the final design stage. A similar application, with Northampton Borough Council, took the developer and council only 18 months. Again, if we cannot simplify the design process for larger scale developments, developers will continue to build a patchwork of 50 homes on greenfield sites which do not deliver at the rate required or in the right place.

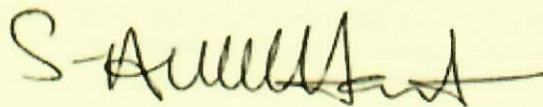
At the immediate stage, we would be keen to meet with you and your officials to better understand how the model has drawn up a requirement for Rother District Council to provide over 1,100 homes per year. We would wish to discuss the algorithm with you, and your officials, to determine how this can be delivered in a district which is 75% AONB and how the demand has been forecasted to deliver such numbers. This is particularly relevant given we have been informed that land which has already been made available for housing development by Rother District Council was not sold at auction due to a low risk appetite by our major house builders in our area.

We look forward to hearing from you, and meeting with you and your team.

With best wishes,



Huw Merriman
Member of Parliament
for Bexhill and Battle



Sally-Ann Hart
Member of Parliament
for Hastings and Rye