

Changes to Local Housing Need formula and Local Plan Review examination mean many more homes will need to be built

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West Berkshire



Local Plan

Many more homes than originally planned will need to be delivered in West Berkshire over the coming years as a result of instructions from the Planning Inspector.

Yesterday the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), and deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner issued a statement opening a [consultation on proposed changes to the to the National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF). This introduces new, mandatory housing targets for all local authorities in England. Ms Rayner has clearly stated that she will not hesitate to use her powers of intervention should it be necessary, including taking over an authority's plan making directly.

The proposed changes also dictate the use of a different method to calculate Local Housing Need which results in West Berkshire having the [highest percentage of increase](#) in Berkshire - more than doubling the current local housing need figure.

Responding to the proposed new framework [Councillor Denise Gaines, West Berkshire's Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Planning and Housing](#), commented:

"In terms of housing figures, the increase is rather a bombshell for West Berkshire.

"It does feel like a real blow to local democracy that means the course for future development and the number of homes built in West Berkshire will be determined by Westminster and not by us.

"We feel very strongly that local decisions should be made by local people and want our communities to have a strong voice on what happens in their district. To this end, we will continue to work to ensure that each and every development offers the most benefits to our residents in terms of the environment, positive infrastructure such as roads, schools and GP surgeries and the highest level of affordable housing."

West Berkshire Council will be responding to the consultation in due course.

Local Plan Review

The announcement from central Government coincides with the publication of the Inspectors interim findings of the Public Examination of West Berkshire's Local Plan Review - an overarching set of policies which outlines how the district develops in the coming years.

Following a round of public hearing sessions, the Planning Inspectorate has today (Wednesday 31st July) [published its interim findings](#). These call for immediate modifications to the Plan from which the Council allocates housing development across the district.

The Inspector's interim report has come after eleven days of hearing sessions which took place in May and June where the Inspector considered evidence presented by the Council and representations from developers and community groups.

Based on this evidence, whilst the Inspector has not yet reached a conclusion on what the overall housing land supply should be, he noted that overall, there would be a significant shortfall in the supply of homes compared to the minimum requirement of 9,270 new homes for the period 2023 to 2041.

The Council must therefore move to increase the number of homes proposed at North East Thatcham and put forward additional sites to boost the housing land supply for the district.

The Inspector's instruction [follows the direction made by central Government](#) which prevented the Council from withdrawing the current Local Plan to replace it with one which meets the aspirations of the Liberal Democrat administration.

The administration wished to develop a new plan to meet residents' wishes and put the environment front and centre, while prioritising new homes and employment spaces within existing town and village boundaries. It also included reducing the focus on development within Northeast Thatcham and Theale

Speaking about the Planning Inspector's instructions, Councillor Gaines added:

"The Council took the difficult decision in January to progress with the submitted local plan to avoid intervention from Government which may have led to them taking over the development of the plan and further eroding local democracy.

"Whilst the Council is disappointed at once again at being directed by the Inspector to take a course of action that we know is not supported by the community, we must accept the interim findings of the report and consider our appropriate next steps or risk Government intervention."