

# FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

## PRESS RELEASE

**STRICTLY UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 15:00 on Tuesday, 6<sup>TH</sup> October 2020**

## **Council joins forces with MP over objections to planning system changes**

Fenland District Council has lobbied local MP and Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Steve Barclay, to fight a proposed reform of the national planning system.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Chris Boden, told the MP that the Government's proposals would set Fenland up to fail to meet planning targets for new homes, as they would effectively ask the Council to "achieve the impossible".

The Government is currently consulting on its Planning for the Future white paper, which proposes a number of radical changes to planning policy and regulations.

Fenland District Council has serious concerns regarding some of the proposals, particularly the proposed method for assessing local housing need, which determines the number of new homes that must be built in Fenland every year.

The proposed changes to the methodology would see a huge increase in housing targets for Fenland. The district would see the biggest hike in Cambridgeshire, rising from 538 new homes per annum to 844 per annum – an increase of 57%.

The proposed method also fails to consider local circumstances and constraints that could impact delivery of new homes, such as flood risk or infrastructure requirements, and does not take into account local economic and housing market conditions, such as market demand or development viability.

The Council is also concerned that plans to replace the existing system of developer contributions (Section 106 agreements) with a new nationally-set, flat rate 'Community Investment Levy' will make developments in the district even more unaffordable.

In a letter to MP Steve Barclay, Cllr Boden said: "Over the 20-year target period, we would be expected to deliver 16,880 new homes, which is equal to three and a half times the current number of homes in Chatteris. We just cannot squeeze in a further three and a half towns the size of Chatteris into Fenland without building in areas of high flood risk and without massive government funded infrastructure to support those new homes.

"The proposed algorithm makes no allowance for the fact that 83% of the land area of Fenland is in flood zones 2 and 3 – the areas most susceptible to flooding – and that much of our land area in the less flood-susceptible flood zone 1 is already quite heavily developed.

"The combination of a significant increase in our housing delivery target with the potential imposition of a national uniform Community Investment Levy will, quite simply, set up Fenland District Council to fail to meet its planning targets for new homes, as we will be being asked to achieve the impossible."

Cllr Dee Laws, the Council's Portfolio Holder for Planning, added: "The Council supports economic and housing growth and this ambition forms part of the Council's wider business plan. However, the Council objects to the proposed housing needs increase of 57%, as this significant increase and need for almost 6,000 extra dwellings is considered unrealistic and undeliverable given viability and infrastructure constraints.

"For the Council to even attempt to meet the proposed target there would need to be significant public sector investment in local and strategic infrastructure to support such a high level of growth and this has not been identified."

**ENDS**

**For more information contact Fenland District Council press office on 01354 622226**