

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS

SOUTH EAST MP BRIEFING:

DELIVERING THE HOMES THE SOUTH EAST NEEDS



Dear SOUTH EAST MP

Councils in the South East are working hard to create the right environment for delivery of the new homes our local communities need – but their ambitions are at risk without your help. We want to ask for your assistance to influence the new Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government to ensure they support councils in achieving more.

The South East's housing track record is strong. We had the UK's highest completion rate over the past 3 years at more than 99,700 homes. However councils could do more if they had powers to unblock barriers to growth, so we would welcome your support to amend proposals in 3 key areas:

- 1. Letwin review: Secure powers for councils to get unused planning permissions moving**
 - Councils need new discretionary powers to charge council tax or fees on the South East's 66,751 unused housing permissions – that's equivalent to 2 years' supply of new homes.
 - These powers would allow councils to incentivise building of already-approved homes rather than having to release more and more greenfield land for housing. Without these powers councils won't have the tools to meet Government's proposed new housing delivery test.
 - South East councils welcome Sir Oliver Letwin's review into unused planning permissions, announced in the Budget. We urge you to work with your local authorities to help him understand the tangible powers councils need to get the South East backlog moving.
- 2. Treasury rules: Free up councils to invest in local infrastructure & direct housebuilding**
 - Infrastructure is essential to support housing and economic growth, especially in the congested and overcrowded South East, which faces a £15.4bn infrastructure gap by 2030.
 - Extra money in the Budget is really welcome but it is very unlikely the South East's share will meet all its needs. We want your help to persuade Treasury to give councils access to a share of national taxes paid in the South East – such as first sale stamp duty – so councils have the means to invest in local infrastructure investment themselves.
 - The Budget also allowed limited options for councils to bid to increase housing borrowing caps (HRA) to build their own affordable homes. Your support for expanding this South East-wide would help all SEEC councils deliver a step change in the number of affordable homes.
- 3. Housing allocations: Sense check 'right homes in the right places' housing targets**
 - Ministers' proposed housing targets need a sense check to correct South East anomalies. Current figures cut councils' housing numbers in pressurised towns such as Oxford or Reading and fail to take account of protected land such as AONB, National Parks and Green Belt in more rural parts of the South East.
 - South East councils would face changes in their housing numbers from a 56% increase to a 47% cut. We want your help to encourage Ministers to review allocation methods and ensure that councils can amend housing targets to reflect local circumstances and available land.
 - Proposals would cut housing targets in many northern towns – undermining Government's growth and investment plans for the north in favour of increasing pressure in the South East.

We hope we can call on your support in these issues affecting your constituents and would be pleased to provide further details to your office if that would be helpful.

Cllr Nicolas Heslop

SEEC Chairman and Leader of Tonbridge & Malling BC

Cllr Roy Perry

SEEC Deputy Chairman and Leader of Hampshire CC

