

02nd March 2020

Isle of Wight CPRE Response to the Council's Draft Housing Strategy

Background

At the end of December 2018 the Isle of Wight Council published its updated draft Island Plan for public consultation. The housing strategy incorporated within the Plan advocated the building of 641 houses a year in line with central government's Standard Methodology as set out in the NPPF. The number has since increased to 675. Over the course of 2019, thousands of islanders took part in the public consultation and wrote to the Island council to object to the housing strategy outlined within the draft Island Plan. Thousands more signed up to MP Bob Seely's petition seeking to reduce the housing numbers contained within the Plan.

Since then the Council has issued press announcements (19th Sep 2019) outlining their commitment to listen to the feedback. It was announced that the Council would conduct a feasibility study on seeking Exceptional Circumstances (presumably under Section 60 of the NPPF) to commit to a lower housing target and to focus on delivering on housing "needs" for those most vulnerable island residents.

On 7th January 2020 the Council also launched an island housing needs survey which seems to form part of an attempt at (rightly) disputing the unprecedented annual house building target generated by the Government's Standard Methodology.

Despite the Council apparently being in the midst of conducting its own housing needs-based survey, a "draft housing strategy" was then published on the 20th January 2020. The IOW CPRE considers the draft housing strategy to be limited in value given it does not outline a more appropriate annual housing target but simply states that the 675 target is "under review". In contrast the housing strategy document which has stemmed from the

regeneration plan, is focussed on “increasing housing” and indeed the “promotion of the development of new homes.”

The Isle of Wight CPRE has set out an 8 point formal response to the draft strategy as follows:

1) The value of the housing strategy report is limited without an annual housing target

There is one mention of the current 675 house annual target being ‘reviewed’ and 73 pages explaining how special our island is and how adding nearly 20% to our existing housing stock is not going to impact it negatively.

We understand a housing needs survey has been published in January 2020 to help build a case for fewer houses to be built in line with actual island housing needs. We would like to understand more about this process.

2) The Draft Strategy should differentiate between local housing “need” and housing “demand” from second home owners or mainland retirees:

Beyond the 2,200 house shortfall in social housing, most houses built will be for people who do not live here currently. (That is an annual target of anything greater than 150 houses a year for 15 years)

The Island has a declining natural population which means that nearly all house building planned is for those who don’t currently live and work here. CPRE recognises that the Council is obliged under the current NPPF (unless an exception from it is sought) to enable house building for both residents and internal immigrants (people moving to the island from the mainland). However thereafter the draft document features multiple references to homes for Islanders when in reality the vast majority of all building is for those who currently don’t live here.

CPRE believes the net effect of this is to mislead readers into thinking that the majority of house building is for island residents when this is clearly not the case. The draft document does make a single reference to external demand in point 3 of the executive summary:

"[The Islands'] current population of around 140,000 and those that are projected to come over the next 5 years"

However it goes on to claim that the strategy aims:

"To enable everyone living on the Island to have a place they call home"

and;

"we mainly need to build ordinary homes for the younger generations of Islanders who wish to remain or return to the Island to make a living and raise a family"

and be;

"developing the homes Island families need"

Language referring to "Island families" having a "place they call home" is therefore misleading.

3) The Draft Strategy should highlight the real reason for young people leaving the Island: a paucity of well-paying jobs

The Draft Strategy claims it:

"will also keep young people from needing to leave the Island to gain affordable housing"

However, independent research commissioned by the CPRE shows affordability as justification for increasing house supply is misplaced: 11 out of the top 15 local authorities to which people are migrating are **less** affordable than the Isle of Wight.¹

4) **The Draft Strategy understates the true impact of the current house building program:**

The draft strategy states in point 7 of the executive summary, that if the housing target of 675 houses per year were to continue for twenty years:

“it would add just under 1% to the current built environment on the Island.”

This is factually incorrect and serves to underestimate the unprecedented scale of house building currently planned for the island. The island features around 70,000 households on the island and the addition of 675 houses a year for 20 years would increase the number of houses by over 19%.

5) **The Draft Strategy fails to recognise the inherent conflict between mass house building and protecting the environment and our landscape:**

The strategy fails to recognise the conflict between developing thousands of homes on greenfield sites and protecting the environment, our landscape and the Island’s rural character so valued by its residents.

“We recognise that new housing development can be perceived as a threat to the environment. But this need not be the case”

We disagree, and believe such sentiment fails to recognise the value of the Island’s overall rural landscape which is now Britain’s most recently recognised UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, half of which is made up of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

¹ “Review of demographic change in the context of Housing Need for the Isle of Wight” available at www.isleofwight.cprelocalgroups.org.uk.

6) **The Draft Strategy fails to deliver on the majority Island view on housing**

CPRE Isle of Wight believes the Council's housing strategy should reflect the views of residents who want to protect their historic landscape. Instead the Council seems to have understood the viewpoint of their electorate but taken the view that the voters need to be educated about the benefits of mass house building on greenfield sites.

The draft strategy starts by recognising that the urbanisation of the Island is hugely unpopular

"Development in general is still unpopular on the Isle of Wight"

"There is still huge resistance to new housing on the Island"

Yet there is no attempt to reflect the broad demand by Island residents to protect the natural environment around them. Instead, the Council sees its role to reeducate them as to the benefits of large scale house building.

"Development in general is still unpopular on the Isle of Wight. This needs to change... Engaging local people will be key to bringing forward development and creating a welcoming environment for future developers to invest".

"Sustain[ing] a positive housing campaign to break down resistance to new housing development"

The draft strategy document then goes on to propose a series of pro-development policies directly counter to the views of Islanders. These include:

"Promote the construction of new homes by raising the profile of the Island as a place to invest with business, developers, and builders"

"In order to drive up the delivery of new housing on the Isle of Wight, the council will work alongside the local development community in achieving delivery rates"

"Ensure the planning process is using all available tools, levers and powers to encourage development to be brought forward"

The Council claims to have an:

“overwhelming need and clear strategic mandate to: Significantly increase the rate of housing delivery to ensure delivery”

Given the Council itself recognises that increasing housing development is directly opposed by the electorate, it is unclear where this “clear strategic mandate” is derived from.

7) The Council should commit to restricting planning consent to housing which seeks to complement the local vernacular architecture and which is screened properly with trees and hedges:

The Council has in recent years provided planning consent for large-scale, characterless, ‘cookie cutter’ developments such as can be found around the edges of almost every home county market town. These sorts of housing developments are deeply unpopular with residents as noted by the strategy document.

In CPRE Isle of Wight’s view support can be won from around the island for a limited number of houses solely for social housing needs with the following:

Tree planting and hedgerows adopted to screen housing wherever possible
Local vernacular should be adopted with attention to glazing and housing materials in particular.

8) Brownfield development should be prioritised over and above greenfield site development.

CPRE Isle of Wight would like to see more done to encourage the development of empty and derelict sites within towns around the Island. How many registered brownfield sites have been developed over the past year?