

**Clir Rebecca Burnett, Harrogate Borough Council Cabinet Member for Planning has written the following:**

### **The Local Plan— the solution to our district's problems**

The Local Plan contains many parts, but if we just focus on housing, we are talking about an additional 16,500 homes in our district before 2035.

The Local Plan, alongside the council's Economic Growth Strategy, have the potential to resolve a multitude of serious problems facing our district.

#### **Six very serious problems, in no particular order:**

##### **1. Our young people cannot afford to buy a house here**

Our average (mean) house prices are £342,590— 31.5 per cent higher than the North Yorkshire average, and 35.6 per cent higher than the national average. It is beyond most of the people who grow up in our district to be able to afford to buy a house here. The price of the average property in Harrogate is 13.4 times the average salary.

We lose many young people to university towns and cities because we have great schools. But they cannot afford to return. And those who complete their education locally find themselves living with parents often into their mid-thirties.

An increase in the supply of good quality smaller market housing across the district will help address this imbalance.

##### **2. Commuters are a major cause of congestion on our roads**

Whilst we also have a high proportion of local traffic in the towns of Harrogate and Knaresborough (that is people travelling less than 5 miles in their cars) which needs addressing, commuters are a major issue. To generalise— people who can afford to live in our district commute daily to higher paid jobs in cities like Leeds and York, and the less wealthy people working in our large tourism sector commute daily from cheaper housing areas in cities like Leeds and York. The A61 and the A59 in the morning and afternoon peak prove this point.

The council's Economic Growth Strategy aims to bring higher value jobs to our local economy, allow growing local businesses to expand and stay here, and raise our average workplace earnings from their current below average (median) level of £25,486.

The part the Local Plan has to play is, again, in increasing the supply of good quality smaller market housing across the district. This will help those who work here afford to live here too.

##### **3. We suffer from poor air quality due to stationary traffic**

We have air quality issues in Knaresborough, Harrogate and Ripon. The majority of this is caused by private vehicle exhausts. Congestion caused by both local and commuter traffic causes stationary queues at busy junctions.

Whilst the Local Plan is not the only solution to be sought here addressing the commuting issue by enabling people who work in our district to live here too will go a long way.

#### **4. Our villages are struggling**

Without people to use them rural pubs, post offices, community centres and village shops are closing. Rural bus services are in decline because there aren't enough people using them.

While fewer and fewer young people and families can afford to live in our villages' local services will decline and close.

Proportionate developments in many villages will help revitalise and support rural centres. Part of the Local Plan is a 'housing mix' policy which presses developers to build a mix of houses suited to the needs of the local area not just to what they can sell for the most profit on the open market.

Development also brings investment into these facilities, alongside more people to use them.

#### **5. There are thousands of people on the housing waiting list**

Thousands of people in our district are in temporary or unsuitable accommodation. This is a figure we all, as a community, should want to reduce.

The Local Plan presses developers to aim for 40 per cent affordable housing on each site defined as housing for those who cannot afford to buy or rent at the market value. It can be delivered through a registered provider, like a housing association, or through the council directly. We have a good record of achieving close to this figure.

Working on percentages, it stands to reason that whilst our overall supply of housing is low, our supply of affordable housing is also low. Whilst this is the case, we stand no chance of offering those thousands who are in temporary or unsuitable accommodation another option than living in cramped accommodation, bed and breakfasts or homelessness.

#### **6. Local businesses struggle to recruit staff**

Since potential employees cannot afford to live here and, in many cases, cannot afford to travel here there is a recruitment crisis in our district.

Businesses will not stay locally and will not relocate here when there are other areas where the supply of staff is plentiful. We have seen home-grown businesses leave our district, and leave large gaps in the quality of our economy, simply because they cannot fill their vacancies. Without those businesses and without economic growth our area will begin to decline.

Most local people will recognise these problems. In fact, these are problems faced by desirable places to live across the country. Most will also recognise that an increase in the supply of housing is the solution.

At Harrogate Borough Council we are determined to address these problems by providing the number and type of houses we need.

**Local politicians have ducked this issue for decades. But I am proud to be a part of this administration which is finally working for young people and families, reducing congestion, tackling air quality, addressing homelessness and supporting businesses.**

I hear people across the whole of our district telling me that they accept the need for more houses, but that they should be built somewhere else.

Clearly, if everybody holds this position and we accept that everyone is correct then no houses can be built anywhere. But everyone is not correct. There are many places where houses can be built, just not places where people nearby want them to be built.

Professional planning experts have assessed how many new homes we need, based on natural population growth, job vacancies, people on the housing waiting list, projected employment requirements and other statistics. To meet this local need we have looked across the district and assessed every site on its planning merits then put those sites in front of the public to ask what they think.

During the current consultation period, local residents, groups, councillors and Parish Councils will have the opportunity to present their own case to rebut the evidence provided by professional planning officers. This case can be based on local knowledge, expertise found from within the community, evidence from planning and legal professionals or any other source of information. I expect Councillors to campaign alongside their constituents and welcome the contributions that all will make to gathering that evidence.

It is natural that the vast majority of those with a site near them will disagree that this is a suitable site. When all the public comments are received during the consultation period the Council will produce its response which may remove or add sites from and to the draft Local Plan. Following another public consultation the plan will be submitted to a Government Planning Inspector. That Inspector will then make a decision based on their professional experience, training and their assessment of the evidence placed before them from both the Council and from local people and their representatives.

So the process is a thorough one with all sides able to present their case and an independent professional assessing that evidence and coming to a conclusion that will provide us with the land for housing our area needs.

**Development is rarely popular with everybody but we will, as a Council and a community, fail future generations in terms of housing, the environment and jobs if we fail to address the housing issue.**

We are proud that we are doing so and making our district a district where future generations can live, work, have families of their own and see their children and grandchildren continuing to grow while being part of our community.

Clir Rebecca Burnett  
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Cabinet Member for Planning