

Letter published by the West Sussex County Times, 8 July 2021

Dear Sir,

Has the giving of donations enabled developers to gain leverage and influence?

Public inquiry urgently needed.

Thanks to the WSCT (July 1st) we now know that Thakeham Homes, which is currently promoting its Wealdcross site at Buck Barn for 3,500 new houses as part of the yet-to-be revealed local plan, has between 2017 and 2020 donated £526,020.22 to the Conservative Party.

Other developers, too, donate to political parties, and because the Conservatives are the ruling party substantial sums have been donated to them. According to the Guardian (11Jun21), property developers gave the Tories £891,000 in the first quarter of 2021.

Radical changes to the planning system, as detailed in last year's 'Planning for the future' White Paper, apparently shaped by and for the benefit of developers, including streamlining the planning process, for example by designating growth areas for substantial development, with automatic approval for applications to build, are now looming.

Implementation will minimize or remove the right of communities and their elected representatives to say no to inappropriate developments in their area, thereby putting developers even more firmly in the driving seat than now.

Hence, the White Paper neither acknowledged nor addressed the fundamental reality that developers and housebuilders will not build more houses than can be sold at an acceptable to them profit - and in the event of diminishing sales reduce build rates regardless of targets set by the Government for councils.

Instead, the Government erroneously blamed and continues to blame councils, great crested newts and the current planning process.

Note, too, the declaration in the White Paper of the Government's intent to "*deliver at least as much on-site affordable housing as at present*". At present, government policies enable developers, on grounds of financial viability, to deliver fewer affordable homes than is required by local plan policies, hence the substantial and shaming undersupply of affordable homes. No change then.

Is there a link between the sweeping changes to the planning system now in prospect and donations received?

Has the giving of donations enabled developers to gain leverage and influence?

A public inquiry is needed urgently, and in the meantime all monies received from developers should be returned to them – and though 'pigs might fly', we can most certainly vote at the next election.

Yours faithfully,

Dr R F Smith