



The countryside charity  
Sussex

**CPRE Sussex**  
Brownings Farm  
Blackboys  
East Sussex TN22 5HG  
Telephone 01825 890975  
info@cpresussex.org.uk  
www.cpresussex.org.uk

PLANNING & INFRASTRUCTURE BILL: Commons Debate Monday 24 March 2025

## Sussex MPs: Ayes, Noes, Votes Not Recorded (VNR), whether they participated in the debate, and what those who did participate said

[Planning and Infrastructure Bill: Second Reading - Commons' votes in Parliament - UK Parliament](#)

<https://votes.parliament.uk/votes/commons/division/1965#notrecorded>

CONSTITUENCY	MP	PARTY	AYES	NOES	VNR	Debate: YES/NO
Arundel South Downs	Andrew Griffith	CON			VNR	NO
Bognor Regis & Littlehampton	Alison Griffiths	CON			VNR	NO
Bexhill & Battle	Dr Kieran Mullan	CON			VNR	NO
Eastbourne	Josh Babarinde	LD			VNR	NO
East Grinstead & Uckfield	Mims Davies	CON			VNR	NO
Sussex Weald	Nus Ghani (Deputy Speaker)	CON				
Crawley	Peter Lamb	LAB	AYE			YES
Brighton, Kemptown & Peacehaven	Chris Ward	LAB	AYE			NO
Hastings & Rye	Helena Dolimore	LAB	AYE			NO
East Worthing & Shoreham	Tom Rutland	LAB	AYE			NO
Worthing West	Beccy Cooper	LAB	AYE			NO
Chichester	Jess Brown-Fuller	LD		NO		YES
Horsham	John Milne	LD		NO		YES
Lewes	James MacCleary	LD		NO		NO
Mid Sussex	Alison Bennett	LD		NO		NO

To promote, enhance and protect a thriving countryside for everyone's benefit

Campaign to Protect Rural England Sussex Branch CIO | Registered charity number: 1156568

Facebook : [www.facebook.com/CPRESussex](https://www.facebook.com/CPRESussex) | Twitter : @cpresussex

## **The Sussex MPs who took part in the debate:**

Peter Lamb (Crawley/Labour): at 18:44

John Milne (Horsham/Liberal Democrat): at 19:34

Jess Brown-Fuller (Liberal Democrat): at 19:51

## **and what they said, extracted from:**

[Planning and Infrastructure Bill - Hansard - UK Parliament](#)

**18:44**

**Peter Lamb (Crawley) (Lab)** - [View Speech](#) - [Hansard](#) - - - [Excerpts](#)

Despite the many fine contributions made by Members so far and no doubt many yet to come, planning is quite a dreary subject for many. Indeed, I heard some senior Members of this House privately describe it as such. I can well remember as a young Labour member sitting through constituency party meetings wondering why we were talking about planning for such a long time. Surely, I thought, we should want to focus on education, health and inequality. I am afraid that it took me a long time to realise—until I was one of those dreary people sitting at meetings saying these things—that planning is central not only to each of those issues, but to just about every aspect of Government policy and, indeed, to our daily lives.

Unfortunately, far too often the system and those we task with running it come under attack, including by those who should know better. Planning is attacked for delays, excessive red tape and perceptions of nimbyism. For every 10 planning applications submitted, nine are approved. That is hardly the sign of a system opposed to development. Where the system struggles is with capacity. The time it takes for a decision to be reached has increased significantly over the years, not just for the application but all the subsequent decisions required for development to commence.

**Chris Curtis** (Milton Keynes North) (Lab) - [Hansard](#) - - - [Excerpts](#)

Does my hon. Friend agree that that is why we need significantly more planning officers in our local authorities to ensure that we can unlock a lot of that development?

**Peter Lamb** - [Hansard](#) - - - [Excerpts](#)

My hon. Friend must be reading ahead. The impact on escalating costs and viability as a result of the delays is hard to overstate. The capacity issues do not stem from laziness or as a covert form of development suppression; they stem from one issue and one issue only: the absence of sufficient numbers of planners in the public sector. The rates of pay at local authorities are massively out of kilter with the private sector. The consequence is that an increasingly small number of extremely hard-working people are left trying to keep the system afloat principally out of their public spiritedness. Yet, instead of receiving the thanks they deserve, all too often they have to deal with public rhetoric that regularly denigrates them and the work they do. I hope that I am not the first or the last in this Chamber to thank those public servants for their efforts on behalf of our communities and country.

Much needs to be done to reverse the decline in public sector planner numbers. While the Bill sets out many positive steps forward, I remain of the belief that few areas in the public sector would be better suited to, or would generate better economic returns from, the introduction of AI than planning. It could use decades' worth of computerised training data to deal with simple applications automatically, freeing up expert human planners to deal with the cases that would genuinely benefit from a human eye.

As a former council leader, I am defensive of the record of local government in planning. However, despite my initial scepticism, I found much that is good in the new national planning policy framework and in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, showing that this Government genuinely listen to voices across the sector.

#### Rebecca Smith (South West Devon) (Con) - Hansard - - - Excerpts

Given the hon. Member's expertise as a former council leader, would he agree that the provision in the Bill that enables councils to set fees for planning could go further, particularly around the fees that could be charged for enforcement cases? He will know the amount of hours that planning officers spend tied up in their inboxes dealing with the enforcement of rogue individuals who seem to play cat and mouse with officials. Would he agree that a look at fees might be a sensible option?

#### Peter Lamb - Hansard - - - Excerpts

I have learned over the years not to look a gift horse in the mouth. This is a positive step forward. No doubt other steps could be taken in future, but this is significant in enabling the system to be far more sustainable than it has been of late.

There must always be a role for local expertise and knowledge in planning decisions and democratic oversight, but that does not mean that the way we have always done things in the past needs to be the way we do it in the future. Indeed, it does not mean a better or fairer outcome, and a longer process is not always a better one. I am sure that we all have

experience of planning decisions, both nationally and locally, that have taken a long time to produce the decision we all knew would be the final decision from day one, and that in no way meet the needs of residents or our community. Planners tell me that planning is a matter of balance, and in this Bill, the Government balance all the relevant considerations well.

Another example of delivering balance is in dealing with nature. Crawley has the second worst housing crisis in the country, and during my time as leader of the council, I delivered over four times the number of units as our centrally assessed Government housing target. I point out that targets are a floor not a ceiling—they in no way restrict future development.

That came to an end when Natural England unilaterally imposed water neutrality restrictions on all development in north Sussex—an area that, according to the figures, has a larger economy than most of our core cities—on the basis that it had concerns about the wellbeing of the little whirlpool ramshorn snail. As a result, since that time, housing delivery in my area has ground to a halt and economic development has been hampered, and Members would not believe the level of debate taking place on Facebook about whether Taco Bell will ever open. All the while, we are waiting for our local water company to build the water infrastructure that has been desperately needed for some time.

I have nothing against little snails, but the consequence of that decision is that, until Natural England feels that its needs have been satisfied, almost 2% of my community is trapped in temporary housing at huge cost to the public sector—not to mention the enormous human cost to those families. The ability to improve our natural environment alongside development is a vital part of being able to avoid forcing a conflict between human and environmental need. The offsetting process that the Bill delivers is exactly the change that we require.

I am also pleased to see in the Bill the development of spatial development strategies, which are a vital part of ensuring that housing needs are addressed beyond the limitations of any single authority. Anyone who has dealt with the current duty to co-operate system will recognise that it is largely a paper exercise that in no way actually delivers the housing required across sub-regions. Spatial development strategies overcome that in a coherent and planned-out way, and at a level far closer and more democratically accountable to residents than the old regional spatial strategies—a significant improvement.

This Government are finally giving the planning system the modernisation that it needs, and I very much hope that they do not stop now. With that in mind, I will end on a topic of great concern to me: affordable housing. The NPPF is right not to set out strict affordability requirements for local plans, given the differences in local viability, in addition to setting out a 15% additional requirement for greenfield land. New towns will no doubt have a significant role to play in delivering new affordable housing, as will the relatively small amount of funding allocated so far, but I believe that much more needs to be done to

deliver the number of affordable homes that are needed. Although I could bore the Minister with many suggestions, I will focus on sub-regional planning through the new spatial development strategies.

Housing is not merely a numbers game. Other factors matter, not least the size and cost of housing. Although there are mechanisms for delivering overall housing numbers, in areas such as my own, where the duty to co-operate is facilitated, meeting those numbers very often delivers housing that is neither affordable nor the right type and for which there are no allocation rights. I very hope that the Government will correct those issues in their work.

**19:34**

**John Milne (Horsham) (LD)** - View Speech - Hansard - - - Excerpts

First, I wholly respect the intention behind the Bill; it is a serious attempt to solve a serious problem. I also recognise that what was happening under the Conservatives did not work, and never could have worked even if we had given it 1,000 years. All it achieved was to fuel house price inflation, which has now created a destructive division into a nation of haves and have-nots. But I judge this new Planning and Infrastructure Bill through the lens of my own constituency—will it work for Horsham? Will it deliver affordable homes in the right places and with the right environmental standards? I think the answer is no.

The main reason is that the Bill is based on the same mistaken premise as the previous system. The problem lies with how housing targets are worked out—not the national target, which gets all the publicity, but local targets. Why are targets so hard to meet? The reason is that the Conservatives invented a catastrophically bad formula for calculating housing need, which is called the standard method. It measures the ratio of local house prices to local wages, and the bigger the gap, the higher the target goes. The idea is that communities just keep building houses until the price comes down. The only problem is that it does not work. It turns out that in Horsham—as in many places—the average price of a new house is higher than the price of the existing stock, so the more we build, the worse the ratio gets and the higher the target goes. That is the exact opposite of what the theory says should happen.

Unfortunately, this new Labour Bill takes the same flawed Tory standard method and pours rocket fuel over it. Targets control planning permissions, but that is not the same thing as actual houses; Horsham already has 13,500 unbuilt permissions, including the emerging local plan. That total could double under Labour's new targets. Does that mean that we are actually going to build tens of thousands more homes? No, it does not. We could cover every inch of Horsham district in permissions, but it is not the lack of permissions that is holding back the market. Houses do not get built faster, because developers cannot sell them any faster. Some 80% of what we build today is aimed at the top 20% of the market—

all of this was described very well in Sir Oliver Letwin's analysis back in 2017. The housing market does not behave as one market; it is like six parallel markets, and the houses we are building are largely serving the top two.

I am desperate to build more affordable homes in Horsham, but clogging up the system with unbuildable permissions is not the way to do it. The best way to build more homes is to build more consent. I said that I would judge this legislation on whether it would work for Horsham, and the answer is that it will not.

19:51

**Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD)** - [View Speech](#) - [Hansard](#) - - - [Excerpts](#)

My constituents and I know how lucky we are to live in such a beautiful part of the United Kingdom. We need to see growth so that our young people can stay in their local communities, buy homes in the areas in which they have grown up, and continue to contribute to the local economy and keep Chichester thriving for generations to come; but the reality is that the planning system in my little patch of the country is not fit for purpose.

With the district council's footprint covering 70% of national park and 5% of national landscape, the ambitious total for housing allocation in our area is confined to just 25% of the available land in a ribbon that is causing coastal squeeze. This has led to high-density developments built without adequate infrastructure, leaving my residents facing daily challenges navigating the horrendous congestion on the A27, finding local school places for their children, or simply obtaining an appointment with a GP. The current system has left my communities frustrated, my local businesses unable to grow, and local councils tied up in red tape, unable to plan.

Housing developers have a duty to create communities, not just buildings, but the very nature of the current planning system means that developers are putting forward proposals that look only at the patches that they are trying to develop rather than the wider picture surrounding it, and the councillors who are elected to represent their areas are fighting with their hands tied behind their backs. In both Chichester and Arun district councils, an application may be refused by the planning committees—perhaps owing to flooding risks, loss of grade 1 agricultural land or inadequate infrastructure in the area—only for that to be overturned at appeal, which is a costly, time-consuming process, taking planners out of the departments where they are trying to plan.

The previous administration in Chichester district council allowed the local plan to expire, which left developers riding roughshod over areas on the Manhood peninsula, a low-lying coastal plain that is susceptible to extreme flooding which seems to be getting worse and worse. The new administration in 2023 focused on producing a robust local plan, which has now been through inspection—to the relief of communities across Chichester—and

protects areas such as the Manhood peninsula while prioritising brownfield development, which all of us, on both sides of the House, agree should be the priority for planning. However, the Government's ambitious new housing target could force the council back to square one and put all the power back into the hands of developers, because we are being asked to increase our housing target by nearly 100%.

We do not have a planning crisis; we have a building crisis. Developers are land-banking consents rather than getting on with delivering the homes that we need, because demand drives up prices. Since 2007, more than 1.4 million homes given fully consented permissions have not been built. The Bill does not tackle the workforce issues or the supply chain issues, and it also does not acknowledge that water companies, which are responsible for vital infrastructure to ensure that their reliance on storm overflows can reduce over time, are not consulted over individual planning applications because they are not statutory consultees. As the Minister knows, I have called for such consultation in other debates.

Finally, there is no target for social homes in the Bill. Registered providers in Chichester are currently refusing to take on the social homes on smaller mixed-use sites, favouring the larger developments and prioritising upgrading their existing housing stock, which is putting the viability of social homes in my area at serious risk—and they are homes that we are desperately crying out for.