

MPs and councillors question basis of strategy report

# New housing figures come under attack

OXFORDSHIRE MPs and council leaders have revolted against the Government's recommendation that 100,000 new homes are needed by 2031.

Conservative MPs Ed Vaizey and John Howell have called on the Government to review the method for calculating the figures, and all four Conservative district council leaders have vowed to challenge the target.

The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), published in March, recommended that councils should ensure 40,000 more homes are built in the county than their previous targets by 2031.

West Oxfordshire District Council leader Barry Norton said planning officers were already scrutinising the SHMA to see whether the district's calculated need of 13,200 homes was accurate.

He said: "I think the number is wrong for West Oxfordshire, and if our officers decide it's inaccurate, we will be challenging it."

Wantage MP Mr Vaizey said: "Many local communities are now faced with levels of growth that will fundamentally change the nature of settlements,"

In a letter to Planning Minister Nick Boles, he said: "I would be very grateful if you and your officers could consider an urgent review of

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the planning methodology that leads to such massive numbers of homes being planned, so that more realistic outcomes result."

Henley MP Dr Howell backed the call, adding: "The SHMA is not a tested document; it is evidence only."

Oxfordshire's council leaders are due to meet on Thursday next week and South Oxfordshire District Council leader Ann Ducker said she wanted to use it to work out how to challenge the SHMA.

The Oxfordshire branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England has asked its campaign manager, Helena Whall, to look into the basis for the figures in the SHMA.

Dr Whall said: "We feel the SHMA is unsound, unacceptable and unwanted. We're not happy with the strategic plan for Oxfordshire, such as expansion of the Science Vale, which is where these housing figures come from."

Only Oxford City Council leader Bob Price and Oxford East Labour MP Andrew Smith backed the SHMA.

Prime Minister and Witney MP David Cameron's office was asked to comment but we did not get a response.

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# Homes figure too high, claims CPRE

PRIVATE planning consultants "grossly overstated" Oxfordshire's future housing needs, a planning expert has claimed.

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) Oxfordshire's consultant, Alan Wenban-Smith, says the assessed need to build 100,000 homes in 15 years, was "cobbled together".

He claimed it would give

developers "carte blanche in their choice of which sites to develop".

The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) for Oxfordshire, published in March, recommends councils build 40,000 more homes than their own previous targets by 2031.

As reported in last week's *Witney Gazette*, West Oxfordshire District

Council's leader Barry Norton has asked planning officers to scrutinise the SHMA's calculation that the district needs 13,200 new houses. Mr Norton believes the figure is too high.

Previously the council had been expecting to see 5,500 homes built by 2029.

CPRE Oxfordshire director Helen Marshall said: "The Oxfordshire SHMA is so

overstated and so fatally flawed, both in its interpretation of evidence and lack of adherence to government planning guidance policy, as to be unfit for purpose.

"In the light of the report's findings, CPRE is calling on all local authorities to reject the SHMA and not to use it as a basis for any future planning decisions."

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