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House-building – Politics and Policy

It's looking as though Housing will be a key battleground for the general election. Plus Homes England could be facing a shake-up. So here's a quick run-through of recent events, and possible implications for West of Ifield – 3,000 and 10,000.

What was said at the Party conferences?

Housing was a central issue for Labour and featured prominently in Keir Starmer's speech. Much less so for the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats – it didn't feature in speeches by Rishi Sunak or Ed Davey.

All parties talked about the need to build more affordable houses, to prioritise building on 'brownfield land first', and the need for rental reform.

House-building targets

The recent rate of house-building is set to continue:

- The Conservatives are still aiming at 300,000 new homes a year by the mid-2020s,
- Labour is planning to build 1.5m more affordable homes over 5 years, ie also 300,000 a year,
- The Lib Dems maintained their commitment to a national target of 380,000 new homes a year, including a target of 150,000 social and council homes a year.

We must fight to ensure that government action is also taken to reduce empty properties, reduce land-banking by developers, and to address the insane distortion of house prices caused by land speculation particularly in the South-East.

What to build?

- The Lib Dems gave top billing to their target of 150,000 social and council homes a year.
- Labour pledged a boost in affordable and social housing in a generation, and that includes council housing.

Would we see Homes England's proposals change to deliver the housing that is really needed and put this ahead of developer profit?

How and where to build?

- Labour will deliver 'the next generation of new towns' and the Lib Dems have a goal of 10 new garden cities.
- Michael Gove made significant reference to protecting the green belt in favour of development of brownfield sites. "We will build in the hearts of towns and cities and on brownfield land....".
- Labour pledged to prioritise brownfield sites – to include fast-track approval and delivery of high-density housing on urban brownfield sites, and no more brownfield land-banking. He said "I will bulldoze through planning laws" and in subsequent interviews said that he would bulldoze through local opposition and NIMBY MPs.

Great to hear about 'brownfield first' pledges, but this doesn't mean a reduction in the building on greenfield sites. It's likely to be a way to boost overall delivery.

Although there is no greenbelt land around Horsham and Crawley, the West of Ifield is obviously greenfield, with rich biodiversity and habitats, and highly valued by the community – not least Ifield Golf Course.

- Interestingly the Conservatives' levelling-up agenda wasn't prominent, prompting one observer: "... there was little at the conference to suggest that ... the goal to reduce longstanding regional inequalities, remains this government's priority. Michael Gove ... focused mostly on housing ... with little to say about his department's flagship agenda."

Why has levelling-up been deprioritised? This plays into developers' hands.

We must continue to fight the insane way local housing targets are set – putting more and more houses in the most profitable south of the UK.



Homes England

While we're on the subject of levelling-up, Homes England and Michael Gove were in front of the HCLG Select Committee in 2021 and the Chair said: "... **the current requirement on Homes England to spend 80% of its resources in the richer parts of the country** that have the most housing pressures in terms of demand (80:20 rule), and the way the Treasury Green Book measures the success of housing investment, **effectively judging it by how much land value has increased**. Both those things are completely counter-productive in getting housing investment to be part of the levelling-up agenda." In response Michael Gove told the Committee he wanted Homes England to "invest in proper urban regeneration".

Looking at their new Strategic Plan would suggest they are now entirely concerned with urban regeneration – no mention at all of greenfield development. And their current research into evaluating the social value of what they deliver is entirely urban. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homes-england-strategic-plan-2023-to-2028>

And yet they press on with huge greenfield developments in the south.

We must challenge the idea that Homes England is working in the public interest set up to deliver the right houses in the right places. That's not the reality. The truth is that Homes England is basically a financial body – much more concerned with buying, selling and managing land assets, making loans and subsidies to developers, and facilitating mortgage lending, than it is with ensuring the right homes are built in the right places.

And we must challenge Horsham Council's notion that Homes England is a 'silver-bullet' promoter – government backed, and therefore well-funded to deliver infrastructure. The problems and lack of infrastructure delivered at Homes England's flagship (greenfield) site at Northstowe tell a different story <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-66156561>

Help needed NOW

With the publication of the new Horsham Council Local Plan expected in next couple of months, Save West of Ifield are doing their best to try to ensure West of Ifield does not get allocated for development.

We're meeting Jeremy Quin MP later this month to discuss the issues and are also meeting key members of the Horsham Council cabinet next month.

We're also working hard on our formal objections, for submission in the 6 week Reg 19 consultation period following the Plan's publication. To ensure our objections are as robust as possible, we are working with various expert advisors and professional consultants. Already over the last 2 years, and thanks to your donations, we have spent over £6,000 on professional fees, as well as benefitting from much generously

given free advice, and from our work on areas of mutual interest with Rusper Parish Council.

However, to complete our submission to the highest standard, and taking into account emerging areas of interest, we think we would need to spend up to another £16,000 on professional fees.

This is where we need help. We simply do not have that money available. We currently have access to around £9,500, so need to raise at least £6,500. So we're asking for donations. We know that times are hard and that not everyone is in a position to do so, but we ask, if you are able, please donate whatever you can afford. Help us to help save our landscape, wildlife, infrastructure and heritage.

Please also see our upcoming fundraising events.

Thank you.

You can donate online:

(Business) Account: Save West of Ifield
Number: 55426514 Sort Code: 53-50-39
<https://www.savewestofifield.co.uk/take-action>

Or send a cheque (payable to Save West of Ifield) to:
Treasurer – Save West of Ifield
46, Green Lane
Northgate, Crawley, RH10 8JP

Dates for your Diary

October 21st – 4pm – History and Hauntings walk around Ifield. Find out about the history of Ifield Village as well as tales of hauntings. Start and end at The Plough, Ifield. Suggested minimum donation £5.



November

7th – Fund-raising **Quiz**, 8pm at The Plough Rusper. Call 01293 871215 to book table – and dinner beforehand.

11th – **Race Night!** A joint fund-raising event with Ifield Cricket Club in the clubhouse on Ifield Village Green. Doors open 7.30. First race 8pm. All bets £1, plus buy as many horses as you like for £5 each to maximise winnings. Please contact ifieldcc@hotmail.co.uk for details or just turn up!

The June Race Night was packed and a LOT of fun!! And SWOI and ICC jointly raised nearly £500.

December – 5th – Quiz, 8pm at The Plough Rusper.

