

Subject: Re: Chiddingly PC Working Group on Over-Development of the Wealden District (Case Ref: NG30913)

Date: Friday, 4 February 2022 at 11:55:25 Greenwich Mean Time

From: Nusrat Ghani MP

To: Cllr Nikos Mikelis

Dear Councillor Mikelis,

Thank you for your recent email concerning planning in Wealden. I am sorry for the delay in my reply during this most busy time, there was also an administrative error that meant your previous email wasn't responded to, for which I would like to apologise.

I note your comments regarding my pieces in the parish magazine. Please do keep reading the magazine over the next few months and I believe it will not be too long until I address the issue in question.

I am very grateful to you for drawing your views to my attention. However, my ability to influence such situations is limited, given that planning is the responsibility of the local authority, Wealden District Council.

Following speaking with residents and after seeing a clear increase in planning being raised with me as a local concern, I recently arranged and attended a meeting between Secretary of State for Housing, Michael Gove MP, and the Wealden District Council Leader, Councillor Bob Standley, and Portfolio leader, Councillor Ann Newton to discuss the housing numbers the local authority is working towards in developing the local plan. Both councillors were able to reiterate the points already made to ministers previously, but welcomed the chance to discuss them directly with Mr Gove.

The Secretary of State, Mr Gove thanked the councillors for raising the topics and officials say he was clearly sympathetic to issues and solutions proposed. Government is reviewing the position and further details are expected early in the New Year. Councillor Bob Standley said he felt the minister understood the concerns raised and both he and Councillor Newton were encouraged by the responses to their issues. You can read more about this meeting here: <https://www.nusghani.org.uk/news/michael-gove-meets-wealden-council-leaders>

I trust that you have formally contributed to this specific planning application during the consultation phase and have also made your objections known to your local Councillors. If you have not yet done so, I would encourage you to do so as emails to your MP are not included in any official decision on the application.

I appreciate you may feel frustrated following the collapse of the Wealden Local plan, and how this leaves applications with the Council. However, planning is a locally devolved matter and as such there is nothing it would be appropriate for me to do in order to influence current or future planning policy or applications in any way. I recognise that without a ratified Local Plan, Wealden is vulnerable to speculative development. The earliest the new Wealden Local Plan is expected to be ready to be voted on by residents, and then ratified is Spring 2023. Therefore, until this is in place, Wealden will have to respond to applications it receives, some of which may not be appropriate or in the best interests of the Wealden constituency in the longer term.

If you check my record you will see that I am working with all the neighbouring MPs and with the government to ensure that Wealden does have a Local plan in place, as soon as possible to make it less vulnerable to applications that may be speculative or damaging to the historic and environmental nature of much of the Wealden constituency.

Personally speaking, I would welcome the right type of limited development, that respects Wealden's rural nature, and protected areas such as the Ashdown Forest and SSSI's. Wealden planning should be appropriately sustainable and truly affordable, allowing local people the opportunity to purchase homes in the areas they live. I would also strongly encourage the necessary infrastructure, that is so crucial to any future economic and building development alongside the existing community, being given the proper forethought and centrally involved in the planning process from the outset for every application.

It is Wealden District Council that have the legal imperative to set planning policy and while I will continue to support them to do this in a reasonable way when asked, local planning policy must be properly taken forward by them directly. To reiterate, I am working with all my neighbouring MPs and directing all my energy to ensure that Wealden District Council is supported to bring forward a successful Local Plan that residents across Wealden can support.

I will, of course, follow the Council's individual decisions going forward closely and I always appreciate residents taking the time to let me know their views on applications under consideration and the issues they feel should be considered as part of any potential development.

Thank you again for contacting me and for taking the time to share your views.

Best wishes

Nusrat

Nusrat Ghani MP

Member of Parliament for Wealden

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Due to the impact of Covid-19. I have seen a dramatic surge in the volume of casework and policy emails I am receiving. This means it may take me longer to respond to your email than I would like. Thank you for your patience and understanding in the meantime.

From: Cllr Nikos Mikelis

Sent: 24 January 2022 12:21

To: GHANI, Nusrat

Subject: Chiddingly PC Working Group on Over-Development of the Wealden District

Dear Ms Ghani,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Chiddingly parish council Working Group against Over-Development.

Further to the earlier approaches made to you by the Working Group on Over-Development set up by Chiddingly Parish Council, we are reiterating our request for you to write on the subject of over-development in Wealden - notably the massive surge in proposed housing developments - in one of your regular contributions to the parish magazine. We would very much like to understand your stance on the matter to assist with our research and planning, and to inform our actions. You will already be aware that parish councils across the district and beyond are linking up to coordinate policy-making and collective actions to address the mounting apprehension on the part of those we represent about the existing and proposed plans for housing and related construction projects of a scale and intensity that is wholly inappropriate to a rural habitat that is already under great environmental and infrastructure pressure.

We first wrote to you four months ago on 20th September 2021 and again two months ago on 22nd November 2021. We know that you are very busy with your other responsibilities, national party matters and your international concerns. We also know that you have to take into consideration the general interests of the nation as a whole but we are disappointed that we have not had a response to our earlier approaches to you on this matter of grave concern to so many people in Wealden, even if it is a simple statement that you would prefer not to write such an article to illuminate us on your stance on over-development.

Our expectations have been raised by Parliament's own published guides and public information in which, for example, it is stated in the Code of Conduct: Duties of Members: III (6): "Members have a general duty to act in the interests of the nation as a whole; and a special duty to their constituents." With respect to policy, legislation and regulations promulgated at national government level, such as the algorithmic setting of housing targets for districts, Parliament's website further states: "The UK public elects Members of Parliament (MPs) to represent their interests and concerns in the House of Commons. MPs consider and can propose new laws as well as raising issues that matter to you in the House. This includes asking government ministers questions about current issues including those which affect local constituents." Given the key role of central government and Parliament in this

matter, those we represent would be most grateful if you were to take advantage of your prerogatives and rights as an MP to address our concerns.

We know from your voting record in the House that you have on a number of occasions spoken out and voted with an independent mind on matters of principle, and we would very much appreciate hearing your voice in our parish magazine on the causes of concern to so many of your constituents represented by the district's other parish and town councils and our own.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Nikos Mikelis

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