

**Press Release from The Wealden Group against Over Development following a meeting with The Rt. Hon Nus Ghani M.P. for Wealden held on 11 March 2022.**

A constructive meeting took place with The Rt. Hon Nus Ghani MP on 11 March 2022 at which the Group expressed its appreciation to Mrs Ghani for addressing the Minister of Housing, The Honorable Stuart Andrew, at the Westminster Hall debate on 1<sup>st</sup> of March, where, amongst other statements, she told the Minister:

- *“If there is not the population need for the homes, what is the justification for the Department’s data and the pressure on Wealden District Council?”*
- *“Those targets are incredibly high and one could even say slightly absurd ....”*
- *“The ONS data is the crux of the problem that we need to resolve. If the population growth is not as it has been tracked, then we need to re-evaluate the numbers that local authorities have to set their targets to.”*

The Group also reiterated its concerns and the concerns of its parishioners about the way the Government’s housing and planning policy is affecting our villages and our district, whereby instead of 450 new houses per year Wealden is now having to plan for 1,221. The Group stressed again that the methodology used for allocating the housing needs of each district with a crude algorithm and out of date data is irrational and indefensible. Furthermore, the Group pointed out that a major cause for the inflated housing number for Wealden is the so-called Affordability Factor included in the Government's standard method. UK Land Registry data shows that new-built house prices are consistently higher than prices of existing houses. In 2021 in Wealden this average premium has exceeded 20%, leading to the perverse situation that increasing building (and selling) of new homes leads to a worsening affordability ratio for Wealden.

The Group and the MP both agreed that the current method of calculating the housing needs is not working and is not providing the affordable homes that Wealden needs.

The Group and Ms. Ghani had a constructive discussion on how they could best work together to influence Government housing and planning policy and change the current method of calculating

housing need. Ms. Ghani confirmed she will continue to make representations to Government to reevaluate their methodology.

The Group grew from a campaign started in the summer of 2021 by Chiddingly Parish Council to see how we could protect ourselves, our neighbourhood and our district from over-development. The problem is so widespread, and people are so concerned that Chiddingly Parish Council quickly found another 6 parishes who agreed to join it in writing to the Secretary of State to explain our grievances. The original 7 parish councils have now become 30 parish councils in Wealden. A further 11 parish councils have done the same in Lewes district. We understand that a similar mood exists in Rother. Uckfield Town Council has just written to the Secretary of State expressing the town's frustration over the unsustainable numbers of new houses demanded by central government. We are united in opposing the current standard method of calculating the housing needs. Our number is growing.

To build on this momentum the Group will be inviting all Parish Councils in Wealden to a special meeting in early April to further discuss over development and agree how we can best advance our concerns.