

## NORTH EAST HERTS CONSTITUENCY LABOUR PARTY

### **Statement on local housing policy**

Labour believes strongly that it is necessary to build more houses to meet demand. Under the Coalition Government, the level of house-building has been the lowest in peacetime Britain since the 1920s. House prices have soared. A Labour government will get 200,000 homes built a year by 2020.

Rental costs have soared as well. A Labour government will support renters with longer-term tenancies and by banning rip-off letting fees.

In both North Herts and East Herts, Labour also believes strongly in the need for more houses. So that local people, and particularly their children, can continue to live in the district, there must be a high proportion of affordable houses to rent and to buy. The waiting list for social housing is also long, but underestimates the need: many believe that the chance of being allocated accommodation is so low that they do not bother to register for the waiting list. A good supply of social housing (which in these two districts would mainly or entirely be provided through housing associations) is essential.

Both district councils have policies that on larger developments there should be 40% of affordable houses, but developers usually escape this condition by claiming that it is not financially viable. Labour councillors will demand that developers adhere to this policy and that there should be a good supply of new homes at rentals low enough to provide decent accommodation for the most vulnerable on the councils' waiting lists.

It is also essential that the proper infrastructure for this large number of houses is provided, including schools, health services, local shopping and leisure facilities and transport links.

#### North Herts

At present, the North Herts District Council draft plan for proposed sites for the required number of houses is out for consultation (ending 6 February 2015). This is a Tory plan, drawn up by a Tory district council, operating within guidance set by a Tory-led government. In the case of the Baldock development BA1, it is also proposed to build on land owned by the Tory county council.

The majority view of the Labour group on the district council was not to oppose consultation on these proposals. This does not mean that they agree in all cases with the proposed location of these houses, but the Labour view is that, if houses are not to be built as in the plan, alternative locations must be found for them. Otherwise, local people will increasingly be priced out of staying in the district.

In addition, Letchworth, as the First Garden City, requires very careful consideration in order not to destroy the special character of this town.

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## East Herts

A different situation exists in East Herts. Consultation has closed on the Tory council's draft plan, but a chaotic situation has arisen.

This Government's bungling has resulted in a period when there is no district plan in force, but there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, so that developers have been able to win approval for sites outside those proposed in the district plan.

As a result, in Buntingford, in spite of the fact that work is beginning as a result of the council granting permission for housing as in the draft plan, developers have won permission on appeal to build on other sites. The council have decided not to oppose another appeal, having been advised that they would lose. There are yet more sites in the pipeline which the council will also find difficult to resist.

As a result, it seems inevitable that Buntingford will end up with far more houses than have been proposed in the district plan. Labour can now only seek to ensure that commitments to affordable and social housing are not whittled down as building proceeds and that infrastructure needs are properly addressed.

*Adopted by the Constituency Campaign Committee on 4 February 2015, following discussion at the Constituency Party meeting on 28 January 2015.*