

Unprecedented levels of housing growth fail to address need

Oxfordshire is facing rates of housing growth that far outstrip anything that has been achieved in the past, and which could result in a doubling of the population and housing stock in the space of thirty years. Yet despite this, current proposals fail to address the need for affordable housing to rent or buy.

These are among the findings of new papers

[poets_housing_need_and_growth_in_oxfordshire_final_nov2019.pdf](#) and [poets_affordable_housing_final_nov2019.pdf](#) produced by a group of local government and academic experts.

The loss of public sector housing through the right to buy, and government policies which have limited the ability of councils to build new homes, mean that England now has a serious shortage of genuinely affordable housing to rent. At the same time, spending on housing benefit has rocketed to some £25bn a year.

Katie Barrett, a member of the group POETS (Planning Oxfordshire's Environment and Transport Sustainably), said that changes were needed both nationally and locally. "The amount that we as a country are spending on housing benefit is like trying to fill a bath without a plug. It would be far better to invest in new public sector housing – something which both Conservative and Labour governments competed with each other to do for over 30 years after the war."

Local plan proposals to earmark more land for housing in Oxfordshire, much of it in the green belt, will benefit landowners and speculative developers, but do little to meet the needs of local people. Original calculations for the amount of housing needed to 2031 have been discredited, but local authorities are still arguing for the same amount of new development. POETS say that there is a need to think again.

The main justification for such high levels of housebuilding now appears to be that this is what the government requires under the terms of its “growth deal” with Oxfordshire councils. Under this, the local authorities stand to receive £215m for infrastructure if the houses are built. However, the local authorities themselves consider that around £9bn is required for the infrastructure needed to support such levels of growth. In other words, the growth deal provides less than 3% of that requirement.

“Some council leaders have hailed the growth deal as a success,” said Gill Oliver, another member of the POETS group. “If that’s success, one shudders to think what would constitute failure. There is an overwhelming case to think again.”

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