



The Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Damian,

I read your recent letter to the Secretary of State about housing targets in East Hampshire with interest. I share your concern about the Government's revised standard method, which has increased the district's calculated housing requirement by nearly 100%.

The present formula needs to change. Around 57% of East Hampshire lies within the South Downs National Park, which has its own planning authority with its own Local Plan. Protecting the National Park is absolutely right. But it should not automatically mean that communities outside its boundary are expected to absorb an ever greater share of the housing requirement, regardless of the land and infrastructure available.

You of course have understood this problem for many years and raised it publicly before. That makes it fair to ask why a better system was not put in place during fourteen years of Conservative government, during which you were East Hampshire's MP, served as a government minister and, as Secretary of State for Education, sat in the Cabinet.

The Liberal Democrats have always argued that a cookie-cutter mathematical formula is not a good way to decide housing need. Yet that was the system introduced by the Conservative Government in 2018. And Labour's approach makes the problem much worse.

The current government must take responsibility for the new formula it is imposing; and change it. But we need to recognise that this is not a problem that began with the change of government in 2024.

In any event, the decisions taken at the national level by successive governments cannot explain everything that has gone wrong in East Hampshire. The Conservative-led East Hampshire District Council began reviewing its Local Plan in 2018 and, eight years later, still has no new plan in place. (Indeed, the latest Housing Delivery Test shows that East Hampshire has even fallen short of the targets set by Conservative ministers.)

By contrast, neighbouring councils facing similar constraints have managed to make progress. Liberal Democrat-led Winchester adopted its plan in March 2026. Chichester, also Liberal Democrat-led, did so in August 2025 while facing significant road, wastewater and water-neutrality pressures, and with around 67% of their district lying within the South Downs National Park, even more than East Hampshire.

Without an up-to-date Local Plan and an adequate housing supply against the national target, planning rules tilt the balance in favour of development. Speculative applications become much harder to resist, leaving East Hampshire a speculative development "Wild West", with communities having too little say over where growth goes.

To compound the problem, despite all the development that has taken place, too little of it has met actual local need. Fewer than three in ten homes built since 2011 were classed as affordable, and last year just 18 were homes for social rent. Meanwhile, the council's latest assessment identifies a need for 546 affordable homes a year across East Hampshire. At the same time, residents rightly question whether water, wastewater, roads, schools, GP services and public transport have kept pace.

These are the challenges we need to address: housing targets that do not properly reflect East Hampshire's geography; weakened local control over development; too few genuinely affordable homes; and infrastructure struggling to keep up.

This is not about blame for its own sake. It is about understanding what went wrong and making sure we do better.

Local government reorganisation gives us that opportunity. The new authority will need a genuinely joined-up Local Plan that brings housing and infrastructure together, while nationally we need a housing formula that properly recognises the reality of the South Downs National Park.

There is much in that agenda on which I hope we can agree. But where political parties offer themselves as the solution, residents are entitled to examine their records as well as their promises.

The Liberal Democrats will continue to make the case for infrastructure-led development constructively and offer a different approach: strong representation for East Hampshire at Westminster, combined with competent, forward-looking leadership here at home.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dominic Martin', with a stylized, cursive script.

Dominic Martin

Liberal Democrat Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for East Hampshire