

## Build more houses?

Labour proposes two main ways of boosting growth. They wish to lift new homes from 200,000 a year to 300,000 a year. They want to double onshore wind, treble solar and quadruple offshore wind investment.

If the government is serious about building 1.5 million homes by 2029 it will need to talk to the banks and the Bank of England about the credit squeeze. The main reason housebuilding has got stuck is the scarcity of mortgages and the high prices of credit.

Homes are very expensive, in part because the government has allowed in so many additional people all needing accommodation. If the government wants to ease housing shortages and curb price rises it needs to stick with the government's changes to eligibility to gain legal entry to the country and to tighten the criteria further.

The government says the main blockage is planning. Local authorities say there are over 1 million available plots for homes with planning permission. The English planning system is based on a five year supply of building land, meaning there should always be available site to lift the build rate when demand is available.

The government's proposed change is just to put a centrally determined house building target into every Council's local Plan by amending the national Planning Policy which guides the planning system. We had such targets until September 2023 when they were removed. When we had them the system did not deliver 300,000 a year.

Presumably this old system will be introduced in any given Council area when they need to revise their current local plan. Councils usually revise every five years so it will take time to get these re introduced.

The U.K. government does not have planning powers outside England. The devolved governments will have their own approach and have not agreed to match England.

The government will only build 1.5 million if they resolve money and credit, demand pressures and the Bank's money squeeze.

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## My disagreements with One Nation Ministers

I have set out my local reasons for not seeking election in 2024. I also had

a number of reasons related to national direction that meant I was in disagreement with One Nation Ministers.

Lord Cameron at the Foreign Office was offering concessions on Gibraltar's borders and in pursuit of the Windsor Framework in Northern Ireland that were damaging to U.K. independence. Whilst he agreed we should not transfer NHS powers to the World Health Organisation he did not withdraw from talks about an unsatisfactory text.

James Cleverly at the Home Office refused the sensible amendments to our laws about illegal migration proposed by Suella Braverman and Robert Jenrick based on their Ministerial experience. He did not get his preferred Rwanda plan to work or come up with a substitute deterrent to people trafficking.

Business Ministers failed to repeal or improve large numbers of restrictive and unhelpful inherited EU rules.

Jeremy Hunt allowed the Bank of England to sell bonds at huge losses, sending the bill to taxpayers. He believed 5 year out OBR forecasts which constrained tax and spend policy. He failed to help the Health Department resolve the doctors dispute where the loss of young doctors abroad or to non doctor jobs showed pay is too low.

One Nation Ministers were slow to let the government toughen criteria for legal migration and seemed to think we could invite in 650 ,000 extra people a year without exacerbating the housing shortage and without over stretching everything from NHS capacity to our energy and water utilities. The January change of policy was welcome but did not go far enough to fulfil the 2019 Manifesto pledge of lower levels of legal migration.

These and other disagreements made me apprehensive about what the 2024 Manifesto would contain. Because the election was brought forward the 1922 Committee and its policy committees had not been consulted on the Manifesto and there had been none of normal dialogues about what it would contain. I did not fancy defending a Manifesto sight unseen. I disagreed with the economic , health and migration policies the government had been following.

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## **Why I did not seek election in 2024**

I decided not to run both by weighing up what I could hope to achieve as an MP in this new Parliament for Wokingham and for the wider nation. I assumed Conservatives generally would suffer a heavy defeat, though when I made the decision not to run I thought I had a decent chance of holding my seat on a very much reduced majority. The calculated majority for the new seat was much better than the old one. The Conservative Manifesto and election campaign were worse than I imagined. This blog considers my local thoughts.

I recognised that my ability to get better outcomes for Wokingham would be increasingly impaired by the dreadful conduct of a Lib Dem led Council. They refused my offer to work with them, denying me any briefings on their financial position, cash needs or cases to Ministers.

I had to make my own arguments to government based on public information to get extra money for social care, which was most successful. I supported the need for more Special Education provision leading to two new schools. I belonged to Conservative MP groups to get rid of top down housing targets to leave Wokingham and other Councils free to decide on local plans, only to see the Lib Dems unwilling to make timely use of the new freedom. We will now lose this under Labour. I worked with other MPs to secure a substantial uplift in road maintenance budgets and new targeted money to repair potholes.

The Lib Dems not only failed to collaborate but tried to get their own meetings with the very Ministers I was regularly talking to. It seemed they did this in order to put out a press release blaming the government for whatever had gone wrong.

The Lib Dems were nasty, putting out that I did not do the job properly or was part time. I was the only MP who wrote a daily report of my thoughts and deeds seven days a week 52 weeks a year. I answered constituent emails and queries on Saturdays and Sundays when my staff were not in the office and on working days talked to them about how I wanted to respond to new campaigns or cases where they were handling matters for constituents.

I was an assiduous attender at Westminster with a good voting record. When I abstained in protest at a government action I was there in person to tell Ministers why I did not support.

I could not see a way to get the Lib Dems to behave responsibly and saw them allowing Wokingham to become litter strewn, with overgrown and weed filled public spaces, blocked road drains and missing or overflowing litter bins. They have splattered the place with red road closed signs, yellow diversion signs, temporary lights and plenty of cones. Their passion to waste money on impeding use of vans and cars is vexatious. Their failure to let out empty office space and to control staff costs lumburs us with high taxes, and their aggressive car park charges reduce business in our shopping and leisure areas. All the Lib Dems wanted to do was to blame Conservatives to cover up for their bad management. The answer to every problem they faced was to send out more leaflets full of self serving spin.

I was worried that with a Labour government the lack of cooperation from the Council which was an irritant in getting a decent deal from a Conservative government could become a major obstacle. I thought a new Conservative candidate might have a better way to shame or persuade the Council to cooperate for the greater good. A Lib Dem MP is unlikely to have any influence with Labour. I imagine he will not even try to get them to change policy on top down housing targets, adding to the extra development in Wokingham he says he opposes.

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## The people voted No to changing the voting system

In 2011 the Coalition government at the request of the Lib Dems gave us a referendum on abandoning the first past the post voting system. Recognising the fact that many voters support the idea of single member constituencies where the MP has to provide a good service to retain support they offered the country the Alternative Vote system. This is a cheaper and easier version of the French two round system. It is designed to ensure every elected MP has the support of more than half the voters.

Under AV like the French system if a candidate attracts more than 50% first preference votes they are elected. If they don't then the second preferences of candidates attracting few votes are allocated until someone does achieve 50%. So if this system had applied this time there would probably have been more Conservative or Reform MPs on reallocations.

This was decisively rejected with 68% voting against. England was more strongly against but all four parts of the Union voted No.

Reform now campaign for PR. PR systems often break the link between an MP and a single constituency, or creates two classes of MPs. Some can be elected locally and others are chosen as top up MPs from a party list. The U.K. system of electing MEPs was a list system. It meant many MEPs were casual over regional constituency correspondence, often redirecting to U.K. MPs who needed to take constituents issues seriously. An MP/ candidate who is top of his or her party list knows they will get a seat so there is no pressure to listen or serve well.

Labour of course need to remember that their large majority is based on only a third of those voting wanting them in government. They should also worry that so few voted. A heavily distorted Parliament relative to public wishes is a concern but there is no obvious voting model that is better or would be supported in a referendum.

No government should change the voting system without a referendum

We should be reluctant to abolish single MP accountability to a local area.

EU countries with PR end up with coalition governments. Coalitions often take a long time to create. They start by the parties in the coalition dumping many of their Manifesto promises to electors to find a common platform with other parties they disagree with.

How is that better?

The Netherlands decisively threw out their old government. It took seven

months to form a new one out of four parties. . They had to chose a civil servant as PM as they couldn't agree to support the leader of the largest party to be PM.

If the U.K. this time had wanted a Reform or Conservative government it could have voted for one in sufficient numbers to secure it.

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## Conservatives and Reform

Some contributors write in as if this is a Conservative site or to tell me to back Reform. Please read the recent statement over what this site is seeking to do.

I propose to welcome the new government's main aims on growth, law and order and helping people get on in the world. This site will explore what changes and remedies are needed in pursuit of these aims. It will appraise the likely impact of their policies and propose things that might work better.

Whilst it is true only 34% of people voting voted for Labour, if people had wanted a Reform government they could have voted for one. We need to work with the government we have, as they can pass any law and spend anything they want all the time they have such a large majority.