

# KENT ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS



## THANET AREA COMMITTEE

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
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Thanet Area Committee KALC  
c/o 2 Albion Road  
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Dear Prime Minister

Government ambitions for sustainable and 'green' development are laudable and offer considerable potential benefit to the nation.

However, current government policies and the proposed changes put forward in the planning White Paper fail to serve the ambition; poorly equipped communities and local planning authorities lacking capability face the prospect of being overwhelmed by unsustainable overdevelopment.

Here are some of the major issues we face 'on the ground' here in Thanet.

Thanet is a peninsular settlement of about 145,000 people on the eastern tip of Kent, The Garden of England; traditionally a holiday and leisure destination, but currently trying to find ways to 'level up' after a long period of decline.

Other than agriculture there is little significant commerce or industry in the area, the port at Ramsgate and the airport at Manston closed years ago. This is a low wage economy built largely on agriculture and seasonal service and hospitality sectors; we have an unemployment rate of 9.8% overall and rising (Kent 6%; UK 6.5%), the rate for 18-24 year old's is almost 16% (9.6%; UK 9%) - the highest in the south east. Consequently, Thanet has pockets of extreme deprivation which rank amongst some of the worst in the country.

The Thanet Local Plan adopted in 2020 provides for development of 17,140 new homes and hopes of up to 5,500 new jobs by 2031. There are no realistic economic, infrastructure or social strategies underpinning these goals nor any significant enabling funds; this is very much a Local Plan developed in a vacuum solely to serve central government demands for housing.

Independent needs-based assessment of housing in Thanet has identified the need for about 9,000 new homes by 2031, about half the government algorithm allocated number. Evidence gathered to support the Local Plan identified need, over the same period, for about 4,500 Affordable Homes for local residents currently in unsatisfactory accommodation. Simple maths shows a needs-based net increase in households of about 4,500 (i.e. 9,000 - 4,500) compared to the algorithm target of 12,640 (i.e. 17,140 - 4,500).

The algorithm provides for almost three times as many homes than necessary. This mismatch is so significant that we are deeply concerned for our communities and the future, we believe government policy in forcing housing targets from the top down with no consideration of local circumstances is neither sustainable nor 'green'.

The current absence of employment opportunities and the disproportionate number of planned new houses compared with new jobs would simply drive up commuting for those who find work and increase numbers of unemployed for those who do not, reinforcing the unsustainable downward cycle of dependency and deprivation.

Thanet is a peninsular which is already well populated along the coast, the only options for development are brownfield sites, redundant commercial and industrial land, land 'banked' by developers or virgin top-quality agricultural fields.

It is estimated that a large proportion of needed development could be achieved without building on countryside, but the Local Plan allocates over 600 acres of prime arable land for the government required overdevelopment. It is this which is being prioritised by developers and where the local authority is failing to heed the Secretary of States' mantra about developing brownfield sites first. Loss of agricultural land is unsustainable, not 'green' and of course it destroys jobs in the farming and associated sectors.

Transport infrastructure in Thanet is widely acknowledged to be inadequate for current needs, there is heavy congestion in parts and major junctions experience extremely high levels of pollution. The Local Plan identifies a new ring road as a means of relieving current and anticipated congestion, it would be achieved by connecting a patchwork of new highways across farmland and upgraded country roads.

However, there is no funding for this; the local authority is taking a gamble that future developer contributions of £50+m will be forthcoming at an unspecified point in the future. Such contributions are not guaranteed, and they are only paid after houses are built and occupied. This is a very high-risk and foolhardy strategy which depends on completion and sale of a high proportion of the planned new homes over many years, meanwhile health and lives are put at risk by increasing traffic chaos and air pollution.

This approach is further damaging because by allocating large proportions of developer funds into roads the local authority is depriving communities of those funds to develop and enhance much needed social and leisure facilities to provide for the expected influx of new residents.

The local authority has under invested for many years in maintenance and replacement of amenities in the public realm. Public toilets, leisure facilities and many other services are run down and neglected. Roles in education, health and social care are the most advertised in the area; there is a shortage of general practitioners and primary care staff. Without major improvement to public utilities and services and with the prospect of about 40,000 more residents the outlook for the future is grim and unsustainable.

National policy is failing communities like Thanet; the 'one size fits all' algorithm approach to housing is not fit for purpose without flexibility and meaningful supporting strategies for employment, the environment and communities.

We support sustainable and 'green' development, but it has to be proportionate to the locality and environment.

Thanet faces a unique set of circumstances. A peninsula capable only of development around the periphery and to the middle; an economic, career and transportation cul de sac unattractive to investors and an area struggling with high levels of unemployment and deprivation. As such, the national algorithm for housing and the associated assumptions about employment and infrastructure do not fit.

We call upon the government to:

- Recognise the special needs of communities like Thanet.
- Stop unsustainable under or over development by adjusting housing targets to match local need.
- Require that land designated for development must be capable of supporting Affordable Homes at the rate set in Local Plans and that this requirement be non negotiable.
- Stop planning approval for any further major development of new homes on agricultural and unspoilt land in Thanet until the local planning authority can demonstrate publicly and beyond doubt that all other options are exhausted (i.e. built).
- Mandate that major infrastructure and community facilities be funded (capital and revenue) and built before major developments (10+ new homes) are commenced.
- Require that all major development (10+ new homes) is accompanied by an economic and employment strategy which identifies where new residents will find work.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely



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Chairman Thanet Area Committee KALC

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