

# Housing in Cornwall

Part One, August 2014



## Introduction

The ancient tradition of Common Law allows a government to rule by consent of the people, thus using a social contract to protect the general good.

At the heart of this is the preservation of our natural rights, so that no harm will come to the life, liberty or possessions of the people. If the government fails to fulfil this obligation, the citizen's duty to obey is at an end.

In Cornwall today, there is a plan to build over 47,000 houses and - as the core strategy is to build them around existing major towns - most of the dwellings and supporting network of roads are to be built on green fields, with a permanent loss of rural beauty and eco-systems.

This report by CPRE Cornwall will show that the speed and scale of such housebuilding (it's the equivalent of more than five Truros) does not stem from local need. It is an invasion. The incursion is by those who can exploit a commercial opportunity in both property development and energy. Government policy enables this situation and ignores the desperate local pleas for an approach that respects the interests of those who live here.

Government has therefore failed to use its power to secure our natural rights and we need to find an alternative form of redress. The power of the individual to resist this is limited and thus the role of CPRE Cornwall is to be a voice for all those who wish to object. To this end, we invite you to join with the thousands who have signed the CPRE Charter and to speak out for the countryside you love.

**Orlando Kimber, August 2014**

## Key points

- At current rates of growth, the built-up area of Cornwall will double within an individual's life span.
- The equivalent of 4.2 Penzances, 5.1 Cambornes, 5.3 Truros or St Austells, 6.5 Saltashes or 10.7 Liskeards must be built within the next two decades to meet the demand of the current draft Local Plan.
- In relation to population growth, housing growth in Cornwall is faster than elsewhere in the UK.
- The official datasets from DCLG do not concur with those of Cornwall Council, yet these are the basis for projections of housing need.

## Past Trends

When driving past Launceston on the A30, visitors to Cornwall may be surprised to learn that the population of the town has more than doubled since 1961. Relatively rapid growth has not been confined to Launceston; the population of Cornwall rose by 57% over the last half century. The following figure compares Cornwall's population growth since 1971, with other UK regions.

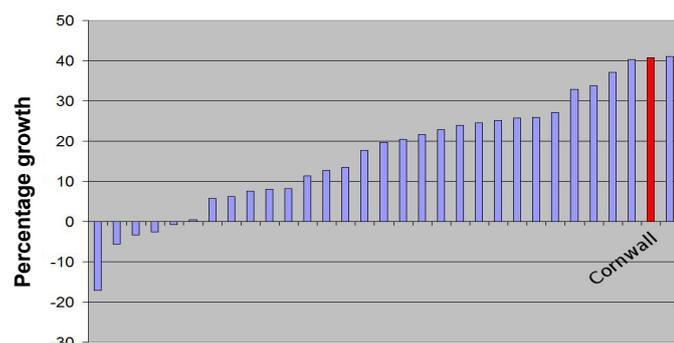


Figure 1: Population growth by region, England and Wales, 1971-2011  
(Source: Census, 1971-2011)

The overall picture hides a significant contrast between the first 20 year period (1971-1991) and the most recent (1991-2011).

From 1971 to 1991, no UK region grew as fast as Cornwall. After 1991, population growth in Cornwall slowed down considerably, from 24.1% in the first 20 year period to 13.4% in the most recent. Seven UK regions in the east and south-east, plus Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Avon in the south-west and east Wales, saw a faster population rise from 1991 to 2011 than Cornwall. Nonetheless, because of the rapid growth in the 1970s and 80s, Cornwall's population growth of 40.7% over the whole 40 year period was exceeded only by East Anglia. Meanwhile, the population of England as a whole rose 13.9% in the same period - just one third of the Cornish rate - while the Welsh population grew even more slowly, by just 11.3%.

## Growth in housing stock

More people require more houses. Over this same period, Cornwall's housing stock grew even more

rapidly - almost doubling from 146,000 household spaces (separate dwellings, plus apartments and flats) to 259,000 in 2011<sup>1</sup>. As we might expect from the profile of population change, the first 20 year period, from 1971 to 1991, saw the bulk of this growth. However, while Cornwall's population growth ranked tenth highest among UK regions in the most recent 20 year period, its housing growth was second highest. In Cornwall the number of houses built was therefore greater in proportion to its resident population than in other regions.

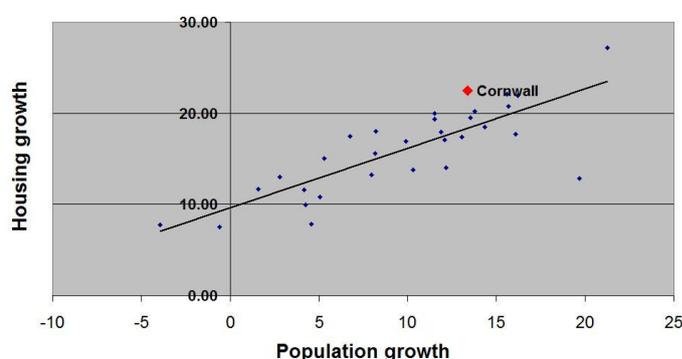


Figure 2: Housing growth and population growth by region, 1991-2011  
(Source: Census, 1991 and 2011)

This is illustrated by the above scatter gram. Cornwall appears as an outlier above the trend line, showing that the number of houses built relative to population was higher than the norm. Most regions cluster closer to the trend line, the principal exception being London, which had a far lower growth in housing stock than its population growth should lead us to expect. Perhaps this is the origin of the quip "*The UK has more of a London problem than a housing problem.*" (Financial Times 'Money', August 2, 2014)

So, despite a declining population growth rate since the 1980s, more houses were constructed in Cornwall than one would expect. One reason that more houses are being built in Cornwall than the population needs, given the level of population growth, is that houses are built for second homes or holiday letting.

<sup>1</sup> Cornwall Council, *Cornwall Structure Plan draft for consultation*, 1979, 37 and Census 2011

As Figure 3 below illustrates, Cornwall also has the highest number of properties with no usual resident.

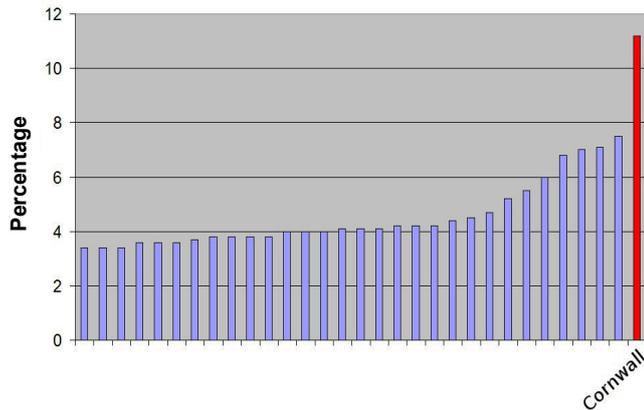


Figure 3: Household spaces with no usual resident, English/Welsh regions, 2011  
(Source: Census 2011)

### Major Residential Developments

Current data also informs us that Cornwall attracts a larger number of applications for ‘major residential developments’ (defined as developments of more than 10 houses) in relation to its resident population, than do other regions. In the year ending September 2013, 2.0 such applications were granted permission to build for every 10,000 resident population in Cornwall, compared with just 1.2 permissions for every 10,000 people in England.

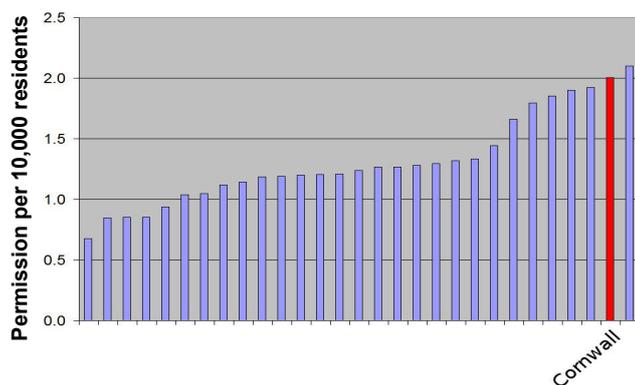


Figure 4: Major residential planning applications granted in relation to population, English/Welsh regions, 2012/13  
(Source: 2011 Census and DCLG (Department for Communities and Local Government) Live Table 136)

Only Cumbria had a higher rate of planning permissions for major housing developments in

2012-13 in relation to population.

The result is that the countryside adjacent to Cornish towns is being urbanised more quickly than either the English norm or the historical trend when related to population growth and size.

Cornwall Council’s current draft Local Plan carries this error forward over the next 20 years to include a housing target of 47,500 new houses by 2030.

### Future targets

Cornwall Council’s Annual Monitoring Reports (written by its planning department) tell us that 42,106 houses were completed in the 20 years from 1990 to 2010. This implies that the current draft Local Plan intends a 13% increase on the last plan period. However, according to the Census, the increase in the stock of household spaces in the 20 years from 1991 to 2011 was 47,492 (a considerably higher figure than 42,106) and this suggests that the current plan has a ‘business as usual’ approach. Meanwhile, DCLG data for ‘permanent dwellings completed’ gives us far lower totals, running over the past five years at between 69% and 77% of the figures reported by Cornwall Council<sup>2</sup>. As the source of the DCLG statistics is supposed to be local planning authorities, it is difficult to explain this large anomaly.

**“official datasets are sometimes prone to inexplicable variation and are not the precise measures they pretend to be.”**

The discrepancy between local authorities’ own statistics of housing completions and DCLG totals is not confined to Cornwall. This mystery suggests that official datasets are sometimes prone to inexplicable variation and are not the precise measures they pretend to be. Claims built based on DCLG statistics in particular, have to be approached with a due degree of scepticism.

<sup>2</sup> DCLG Live Table 253 at [www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-house-building](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-house-building)

Moreover, Cornwall's planners state that 'in Cornwall ... development targets have consistently been met or exceeded'<sup>3</sup>. A target of 47,500 houses is therefore the minimum that the council intend to sanction. Over the next 20 years, we can expect a continuation of the strategy of the past 50, which has been one of directly or indirectly encouraging the expansion of the built environment with a rapid rise of population.

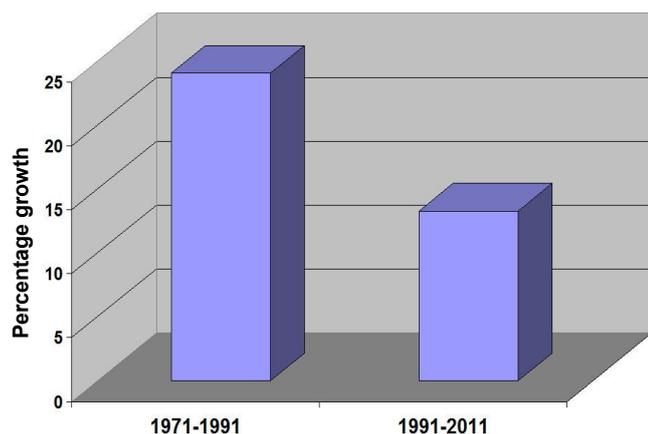


Figure 5: Population growth in Cornwall, 1971-91 and 1991-11  
(Source: Census, 1971-2011)

Despite a long-term falling trend of population growth in Cornwall, as noted in Figure 5 above, the number of houses proposed in the Council's Local Plan implies a significant increase.

Our housing stock (and by implication, our built-up area) will need to grow by at least 18.3%. If that rate continues beyond the plan period, the built-up area doubles every 77 years or the expected life span of someone born in Cornwall tomorrow.

In reality, some houses will be built on previously developed land and this will reduce the rate of urbanisation. However, the majority of housing on so-called 'brownfield' sites is actually built on re-vegetated land. Sites of former, demolished housing are few and far between in Cornwall, although old hotel sites are now being used for housing in places like Newquay and Falmouth. However, new hotels are being built to replace them further inland; in the main on greenfield sites.

## Conclusion

Although Cornwall Council base their projections on data available to them, this information does not give a just representation of Cornwall's need. Historical data shows that the region has grown disproportionately to the rest of the UK in terms of both population and housing, but that much of the housing does not have a 'usual resident' and therefore does not provide the local population with housing that meets their needs. Furthermore, the data itself appears to be unreliable and thus the proposals based on this information are themselves unsound. Finally, the current strategy of building a large number of houses on green field sites will result in the urbanization of rural communities, the loss of farmland and a degradation of the visual appeal of Cornwall.



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<sup>3</sup> Cornwall Council Housing Evidence Base, *Briefing Note (BN) 15: Housing backlog and shortfall*, 2013, p.1.