

100
YEARS



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
Cornwall Kernow

Cornwall Matters March 2026

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To mark this year of CPRE's Centenary -

100 years of campaigning to protect the countryside -

we are presenting a series of special events. In collaboration with National Landscapes (formerly AONBs) and Farm Cornwall, we offer a series of guided walks and visits: for details of the first ones, see below.

The financial climate for small charities such as ourselves is extremely tough – even the most enthusiastic supporter is hard put to find money for a donation, but a legacy can be an easier way of offering support. This year, we have received a legacy that will enable us to keep going: our beloved advisor and planning champion, the late William Corbett, left a generous legacy in support of our work here in Cornwall. If YOU could possibly make a bequest, please see our website for guidance: [Donations or membership - CPRE Cornwall](#)

The government's Planning and Infrastructure bill, including the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), received Royal Assent in December 2025. It brings urgent concerns about housing in Cornwall, examined here from two angles by **Stephen Horscroft** and **John Killick**. There is further in-depth commentary on our website and we welcome feedback from you, our members and supporters on the issues they raise.

Please note that our AGM will be held in May and full details will be sent out in April. Please do come along if you can – we very much welcome feedback from our members on what we do and what we stand for.

AND THANKYOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT



Come and join us on our "Natural Beauty and the Beast" guided walks to celebrate CPRE's centenary.

Understanding the Countryside

1. Natural Beauty and the Beast

Guided Walks with Iain Rowe, National Landscapes expert and respected Cornish historian. These walks are intended for people interested in the relationship between mining history and the natural environment in the area. They will follow accessible walking routes and include access to café and toilet facilities at both locations.

Golitha Falls, Friday 10th April, start at 10.30 am or 12.30 pm

meet at Golitha Falls noticeboard

Phoenix Mine, Friday 8th May, start at 10.30 am or 12.30 pm

Meet at the Minions Heritage Centre car park.

Walks are free, but please book your place at admin@cpccornwall.org as numbers will be limited.

2. From Plough to Plate

Farm visits in association with Farm Cornwall, with talks to show how farmers produce our food and work sustainably to protect our soils and the natural environment. Details will be ready for the May issue of Cornwall Matters.

A leaflet giving full details of both these programmes will be ready at the end of March. For a copy please e-mail: admin@cpccornwall.org

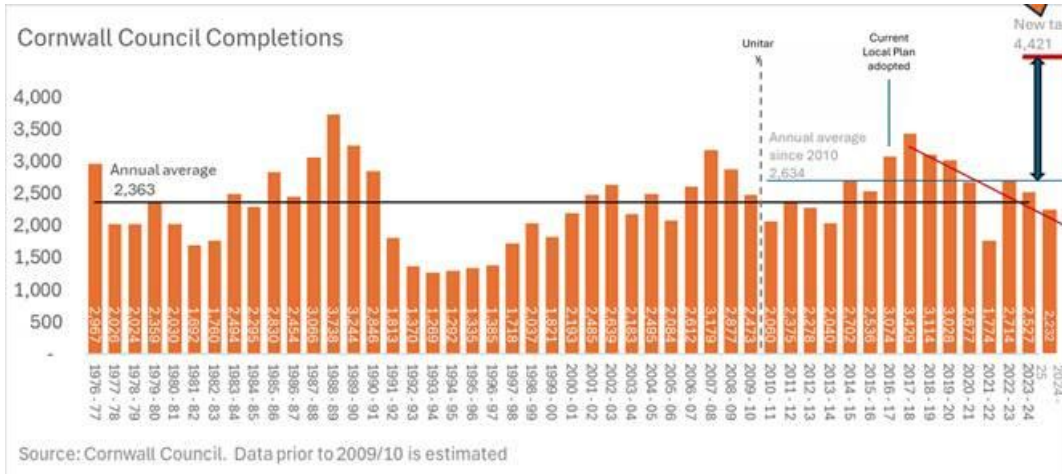


Housing: Strategy and Delivery

Stephen Horscroft

Cornwall Council (as of February 2026) has still not published its housing growth prospectus for public consumption. Senior Councillors have spoken to Government Ministers about it, and Cornish MPs have referred to it in the media, but the public is still not privy to the details. This may be because it has still not been formally adopted by Cornwall Council. It has been put together because of the challenging housing target being forced on the Council – and on Cornwall – by the Government: 4,421 homes to be delivered each year (the Council's website says 4,454 – but 33 houses a year is not a big discrepancy!). What is debatable, however, is the 2,707 homes per annum in the current Local Plan that would require an increase of delivery by over 60%.

The chart below shows the stark challenge of trying to do this:



Source: Cornwall Council

The new annual target of over 4,000 new homes has 'only' been achieved around half of the time in the last fifty years. There was some delivery consistency in the late 1980s and early 1990s and more recently in the late 2010s and early 2020s. We can speculate that larger developers may have been responding to market demand in both periods: firstly, the housing equity boom and then later the role of digitisation in enabling work mobility to enable workers to live somewhere (like Cornwall) but work elsewhere.

The political discussions around housing strategy aim to help policymakers in Cornwall identify what they need from the government to help meet such an ambitious target, including how priorities such as affordable housing can be delivered.

In connection with this, a 'carrot' being offered by Cornwall Council is how it can use its various land assets to deliver 7,000 of the almost 90,000 houses being demanded by the Government up to 2050. Included within these 7,000 houses are both the Langarth development (in total 4000 homes, which were due to be completed by 2040) and the Pydar site, both of them in and around Truro. Both have been stalled for years, with not a single home being built on either of them, and the Council is asking for Government help in getting them built.

The 'Consultation' on Housing Strategy, which should be happening as widely as possible, does not seem likely to extend beyond Cornwall Councillors and Parish Councillors. I have been told by a Cornwall Council officer that it is in its 'early days'.

However, the strategy will not simply be a numbers game, with Cornwall having to accept the second highest target of any local authority in England. It is also about what types of homes are to be prioritised, such as supported, rented or shared ownership housing, specialist housing, extra care facilities, homes for young people and sustainable, energy efficient schemes. It will also set out how the Council intends to work with developers, investors and providers, and look at grant funding opportunities.

One of the perennial concerns of the Council and social housing providers is the lack of Cornish construction capacity to build homes. Although there are around 4,000 individual businesses working in the construction sector in Cornwall, almost two-thirds of them have an annual turnover of just £250,000 or less: small local firms, in other words. Furthermore, it is claimed that there is a skills shortage in the sector. Ironically, a lack of suitable housing for workers may contribute to this shortage, but more specific constraints are affordability and access to consistent work for construction workers. Volume house building is what is implied by the new figures. More relevant, though, are an ageing workforce and the need for a change in the skills profile. While bricklayers, plasterers, carpenters, joiners and roofers are in demand; so are engineers, renewable energy experts and project managers, and this is where there is a shortage.

If there is a genuine shortage of workers with the right skills to deliver housing, it makes no sense that Cornwall was, in fact, the second highest deliverer of 'net additional dwellings' in 2022/23 out of 317 local authorities, after Birmingham, according to the Department for Communities & Local Government. Indeed, in the seventeen years between 2008 and the publication of DCLG's preliminary figures for 2024/25, Cornwall delivered 2000 more new homes than in Birmingham. And incidentally, Birmingham City Council also claims that there is a shortage in key construction skills for delivery.

However, the difference is (and should be) that over the twenty or so years between 2004 and 2025, Cornwall saw a net increase of around 21,000 jobs, but in Birmingham it was 95,000, which would surely justify more housing there, depending on how many empty and under-used properties they had.

In effect, for Cornwall, the unsaid fact is that we need more housing built because the stock is taken by both net migration and loss to second home and holiday rental ownership. The strategic approach – if there is one – is to build to facilitate migration demand but also to increase building to try and house the growing tens of thousands of homeless households. If the market mechanism is the tool to achieve this, then, like in the past, such a strategy will not work. The imposed housing target for Cornwall lacks a reasoned justification.

Without Cornish house building capacity, larger companies from elsewhere are stepping in to provide the housing we really need, but (they will argue) this will impact their profit margins – one of the reasons they may be less keen to fulfil planning obligations for community facilities to support housing and population growth.

To make it more worthwhile for the developers, the homes need to be open market and of course speculative development, and speculation is an enabler of migration. Less money for community facilities will exacerbate issues of congestion, inadequate school facilities and isolation from the economy of the rest of Truro, which are already issues.



Cornwall's Housing Crisis: Will Labour's NPPF Help?

John Killick

NOTE: This is an edited version of a longer paper available on our website. It provides essential detail and supporting evidence. References to the necessary charts and tables are included here to show how the evidence slots in. Click below for the full length paper on our planning policy page of our website.

[Planning Policy - CPRE Cornwall](#)

1. Introduction

The present housing crisis developed rapidly between 2000 and 2015, as Cornwall's long-term growth, together with demand from outside the county, outpaced housing supply. Cornwall Council's (CC's) previous Local Plan aimed to deliver 52,500 homes by 2030, or 2,650 per year, including more affordable homes than in many larger UK cities. Yet, 23,000 Cornish households remain in housing need, and about 800 are virtually homeless. Despite our good record, the government has now set Cornwall Council a new target of 4,421 homes per year, the second highest of any local authority in England. This reflects their national strategy to redistribute population from congested cities to peripheral areas, such as Cornwall.

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) questions whether this approach is necessary and whether it will solve the housing crisis. Historical experience suggests that simply building more homes may, in fact, worsen it. For example, Cornwall's housing stock increased from 146,000 in 1971 to about 293,000 today, yet the crisis persists. The environmental costs of this expansion are significant. Completing large urban projects such as Pydar near Truro may benefit long-term residents with less harm to the

countryside, but the broader approach of relentless housebuilding is questionable.

Recent policy statements usually frame the crisis as a social issue to be solved by more building, but it is more useful to analyse housing growth as part of urban or community history. Rapid expansion does not guarantee the elimination of poverty or homelessness: it may even exacerbate them, as seen in Victorian London and some modern emerging economies.

Cornwall is a rather different case, but its rural character and economic structure mean that, while more homes are needed for locals, aggressive growth policies risk attracting more outsiders, driving up prices and disadvantaging residents with lower incomes. Tourism and second homes further complicate the situation. Effective solutions require context-sensitive policies. This essay first inspects the deeper background of the housing crisis, then the more immediate causes, and finally some possible solutions.

2. Cornwall's Rapid Growth and the Roots of the Crisis

Chart 1 in our full version shows population growth since 1801 in Cornwall, Norfolk, North Yorkshire and Cumbria, all counties with similar geographies and tourist interests. It projects Cornwall's population under the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to rise from about 600,000 in 2021 to just under 900,000 by 2051. After rapid expansion during the early industrial revolution, all four counties slowed in the mid-19th century, with Cornwall particularly affected by the collapse of the mining industry. Since 1961, Cornwall and Norfolk have grown especially fast, North Yorkshire at a medium rate, and Cumbria more slowly. Cornwall's recovery began after World War II but accelerated after 2000, largely due to increased integration with the English economy.

Cornwall's main 'advantage' since World War II has been its ability to attract tourists, second-home owners, and long-term migrants. Our Table 1 presents ONS estimates (2018) of demographic variables for the four counties, plus Leeds, London and England, averaged over 2019-25. The four counties show declining natural growth, offset by much larger increases in immigration. Cities, by contrast, have high natural growth rates and high international in-migration, but also high gross out-migration. The total estimated rise of c. 6,200 pa in Cornwall over these years was a product of a 7,300 pa net gain from immigration, offset by a loss of 1,100 pa from births minus deaths.

Cornwall's net inward migration averaged about 5,400 annually between 2001 and 2023, considerably higher pro-rata than the other counties. If roughly 2,200 of these net incomers purchased about 1,000 houses annually out of the 2,500 built each year, at £200,000 per house, this would equal an annual inflow of £200 million. While some of this left Cornwall for building materials and developers' profits, a substantial proportion remained, including ongoing pension transfers.

Our Chart 2 shows growth and welfare measures in Cornwall between 1990-2013, illustrating that capital inflows into Cornwall were supplemented after 2000 by EU development programmes that provided infrastructure, such as the A30 dual carriageway and university expansion. Cornwall received approaching £100m pa. 2000-

2020, which was then halved under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Chart 2 shows the results were rapid growth from 2000-2020, with unemployment falling and GVA per capita rising faster than in similar areas.

Our Chart 3 shows house prices 1997-2021 in Cornwall, Cumbria, Norfolk, etc., as before, and Table 2 shows bank and mortgage rates 1995 - 2025. These indicate that not just Cornwall but also London and other counties experienced rapidly rising house prices from 1997- 2008, spurred on by falling interest rates. Even after the 2008 -11 financial crisis, low mortgage rates inflated London prices especially fast and enabled Londoners to sell property at high prices and inevitably to outbid local Cornish competitors.

3. The Impact of Growth on the Housing Crisis

This rapid growth set up intense competition for accommodation, with 20,000 to 30,000 gross entrants annually, only partly offset by younger emigrants and an ageing resident population. Many incomers aimed to retire and bought new or open-market homes, but the majority were drawn by work in construction and services, perpetuating the cycle.

Our Chart 4 shows the interaction between internal migration, housebuilding, and housing need 1987- 2025. Net annual migration into Cornwall can readily be extrapolated from the Census at least since 1961, but annual in and out figures are only recorded from 2001. The volume of annual transfers - the 'housing churn' involved - against a population of 550,000 must have raised the number of families on CC's Home Choice Register.

Housebuilding, measured by new completions and conversions, averaged about 2,700 per year from 1987- 2024. Multiplying this by 2.2 (the average household size) gives about 6,000 people housed annually, roughly matching net moves into Cornwall. In principle, this should be sufficient to solve the crisis, but rising numbers on the Home Choice Register show that extra provision is not enough, especially after the year 2000. A major problem is that incomers are generally elderly buyers while out-goers are younger, often leaving family homes that may not be sold immediately. New housing provision, while better than in many other places, gradually declined as a proportion of total homes.

This gradual decline was aggravated by the interaction between the changing structure of the housing market and the tourist trade. Table 3 shows the housing stock in Cornwall, 1971- 2025. It shows 174,000 houses in 1971 and 293,000 in 2025. Social housing stood at 31,000 in 1981 and 32,000 in 2021. Cornwall Council's housing stood at 31,000 in 1981 and 10,000 in 2021. Overall, owner-occupation predominates, private renting is rising, social housing is declining, and council housing has fallen due to Right to Buy. The tourist trade has shifted from hotels to second homes and holiday lets, including Airbnb, which took 12,000 homes in 2021. More social provision by housing associations has helped - but not nearly enough.

4. The Housing Crisis: Evidence and Interpretation

The sudden increase in housing need shown in CC's Housing Register after 2000 (as illustrated by Chart 4) was due to the interaction between the longer-term factors listed above, and the sharp increase in house prices, especially in the London market after 2000, as well as rising immigration between 2011 and 2022 (breaks in the register in 2010 and 2017- 21 are likely administrative omissions and not substantive). The increase from 2020 - 24 is almost certainly due to Covid, the popularity of Cornwall, and the rise of second homes and holiday lets. The Register itself is hardly a precise guide, including many households with up to £50,000 in savings and a £60,000 annual income, who are clearly not in acute need.

5. Comparison with Other Peripheral Counties

Comparing Cornwall with Cumbria, Norfolk and North Yorkshire sharpens that point. As Chart 1 showed, Cornwall and Norfolk both had faster population growth than Cumbria and North Yorkshire. Chart 5 suggests housing registers initially responded accordingly, supporting the thesis that faster growth can worsen housing problems.

Chart 5, Peripheral counties housing lists 1987- 2025, shows that since 2011, housing lists in Norfolk and North Yorkshire fell, while Cornwall's fell from 2015, then rose again. This does not necessarily contradict the thesis. Declining figures in Norfolk and North Yorkshire were due to stricter qualification and local connection rules, periodic reviews and cancellations, and banding changes that moved adequately housed applicants out of the count. Cornwall also reviewed its register, but the scale remains substantial (21,000 to 23,000 households), with CC's policy emphasis on managing high demand rather than excluding less needy cohorts.

6. Implications of the New NPPF and Conclusion

Rapid growth in any society usually induces shortages as demand outpaces capacity and supply responds unevenly. The government's new target of 4,421 homes per year may harm rather than help. The new houses, at 2.2 persons per house, should, in theory, provide homes for about 10,000 people annually, potentially freeing up more space for residents. Initially, this might help, but in the medium term, the volume of new people and capital required to build the houses and service the new communities would also rise, increasing competition for homes.

In practice, the new required houses may never appear. Robert Lacey, Planning Policy Manager for Cornwall Council, noted in response to the NPPF Consultation (September 2024) that "We have no problems getting planning permission - but it is much harder to secure delivery. Even under existing requirements, there are 26,000 buildings [already] permitted and not under construction, even though we are pushing hard in all possible ways... Market capacity in Cornwall is being realised and exceeded. Without significant changes to increase the skilled workforce and address supply chains, delivery will remain below what is required". He feared Cornwall would fail the 'housing delivery test' and therefore face increased freedom for developers to build on attractive sites, risking far more environmental harm.

A more sustainable approach would be to build a more doable 1,500 to 1,750 homes per year with stricter location and eligibility criteria, focusing on social housing and protecting valued landscapes. Inevitably, while reducing building rates would ease migration-driven pressure, it would also reduce capital inflows, posing financial challenges. Nonetheless, unchecked growth threatens Cornwall's natural appeal and risks long-term environmental and social damage, as seen in other coastal areas - a dead-end trap.

Locally, taxing second homes and buy-to-lets at levels the market will reasonably bear, and marginally raising council tax to encourage downsizing or more occupants per house, could help. Cornwall has a relatively low occupancy per house suggesting underutilisation rather than overcrowding. These revenues could fund more social housing – but there are obvious limits.

Nationally, the aim to spread the population out from the big cities to Cornwall and other such areas would make sense—were it not for repeated housing crises, environmental costs, and low returns from moving capital into low productivity areas. The government should build new housing where it is really needed – adjacent to existing big cities and vital new industries and trades. In Cornwall, and in the country's other peripheral areas, it should moderate its target, but secure as much new building as practically possible by better supporting more social housing, infrastructure, and workable new services and industry.

Planning



An artist's impression of the proposed holiday camp at Holywell Bay. Credit CABU

On 03 January 2025, Cornwall Council refused planning application PA22/02896 submitted by Clerkenwell Estates (Holywell Bay) Ltd for the partial demolition of existing buildings and development of a holiday park comprising short stay holiday accommodation units and associated leisure facilities on the old Penhale Army Base. This decision was against the advice of the Planning Officer, who stated that the site was an effective use of previously developed land and an appropriate location for the scale of holiday development proposed.

The reason for refusal was as follows:

The proposal would not constitute an appropriate scale of development to its location and is not accessible to a range of transport modes, the development would therefore adversely impact the surrounding area which is designated as an Area of Great Landscape Value and would not constitute sustainable development, contrary to policies 5(3), 21 (C) and policy 23 of the Cornwall Local Plan Strategic Policies 2010 – 2030

Despite the chough, an endangered species, now feeding and breeding again at the site, the surrounding area being an Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV), Kelsey Head and Penhale Dunes, being a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Penhale Dunes also being a designated Special Area of Conservation (SAC), the Planning Inspector allowed the appeal in January 2026.

The inspector stated, *“I conclude that the proposed development is of an appropriate scale to its location and would not have a harmful effect on the surrounding area, including the area of great landscape value (AGLV).”*

The inspector also concluded that the site is “reasonably accessible” by public transport, providing access to a range of services and facilities. He acknowledged the long-standing presence of the former military camp but stated it remains visually discordant with its surroundings, particularly given its deteriorating condition and appearance, which are likely to worsen over time.

A disappointing outcome for those who campaigned so strongly against the development of the site, particularly the residents in Perranzabuloe, Holywell and Cubert parishes.

Recent Decisions

Castle Horneck, Penzance Development of 140 dwellings Planning application PA25/00085 APPROVED	APP/3368536 (PA22/028960) Penhale Camp, Holywell Bay Holiday and leisure park ALLOWED
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Objections Awaiting Decision

White Cross, Cury Outline permission for 12 dwellings Planning application PA25/06135	Mawgan Outline permission for 33 houses Planning application PA25/07215
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<p>Lost Gardens of Heligan Car park and crossing Planning application PA/25/02624</p>	<p>Cold Northcott Wind Farm Repowering & extension of wind farm Planning application PA23/02727</p>
<p>Tyringham Place, Lelant Development of 50 dwellings Planning application PA25/01847</p>	<p>Halgavor Moor Development of up to 540 dwellings. Planning application PA20/10618</p>
<p>Pandarosa Farm, Bodmin Development of 58 Dwellings Planning application PA23/07573</p>	

Appeals to the Planning Inspectorate

<p>APP/3373503 (PA24/00042) Pendower Beach House Hotel 20 unit aparthotel complex</p>	<p>APP/3352891 (PA23/05034) Land South Of Pengelly, Bosavern Construction of a pond</p>
<p>APP/3369960 (PA24/06454) Cove Hill, Port Navas Self-build dwelling</p>	<p>APP/6000863 (PA25/00680) Boat Cove Lane, Perranuthnoe Replacement chalet</p>
<p>APP/3370949 (PA23/09696) Land At Lanyon Farm, Gwinear Solar farm</p>	

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CPRE campaigns for a better future for the English countryside. We work locally and nationally to promote, enhance and protect a beautiful, thriving countryside for everyone to value and enjoy. Founded in 1926, we're a grassroots organisation, with more than 100 local groups, a branch in every county and 60,000 members and supporters. CPRE is a registered charity (1089685) and a company registered in England (4302973).