

## Are dwindling planning powers worrying trend?

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**There are calls to wrestle back control from Whitehall and shape our own future as figures show planning applications are on the rise but the workforce which processes them is dwindling.**

Figures obtained by this newspaper show there has been a 46 per cent increase in the number of planning applications across Dacorum in the last five years – a jump from 2,355 in 2011/12 to 3,443 in 2015/16.

In the same time period, the Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) planning department workforce has been slashed by 41 per cent. There were 39 members of staff in 2011, compared to 23 now.

But Lib Dem Ron Tindall, leader of the opposition, thinks the council's hand has been forced because of a recruitment issue and a lack of government support.

He said: "I know they (the planning department) are under pressure but it's not so

much cuts but being able to recruit the appropriate people.

"It's a skilled job, working in planning, and planning staff are at a premium everywhere – it's a real problem.

He added: "We are very close to London. People can live out in Herts and live nice domestic life but then jump on a train to a high-paid job in London.

"We are constrained by that and it's a nightmare."

Mr Tindall wants to see a return to greater influence for local government.

"I'm old enough to remember when local government used to control its own future," he said.

"But now it's so constrained by Whitehall – we are the most centralised country in Europe, apart from Bulgaria.

"It seems local people are just not trusted to make their own decisions.

"It's down to devolution – they need to release the shackles."

Plans for 2,500 new homes and 8,000 jobs have attracted hundreds of people to meetings in recent weeks.

The Crown Estate is planning for the major town extension to the east of Hemel



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**'It seems local people are just not trusted'**

Hemelstead and has held a range of consultation events to harvest people's views.

Another development which has piqued people's interest is plans for 'the world's most sustainable tower'.

**The Beacon**, a 17-storey tower in Whiteleaf Road, has been designed to generate enough heat and power from on-site renewable energy to power most of the building's requirements, resulting in an

expected 70 to 80 per cent reduction in heating costs compared to normal properties.

Planning permission has been granted for the new build in Hemel's regeneration district, and Lumiere Developments is now demolishing the existing commercial building on the site.

There are also plans for a 'business improvement district' as the multimillion pound revitalisation project of Hemel Hempstead continues.

DBC has joined forces with a major town centre investor to continue the scheme after the success of its £30 million Hemel Evolution regeneration programme.

Speaking about the district, Councillor Graham Sutton, DBC's portfolio holder for planning and regeneration, said: "We've laid the foundations for a revitalised town centre and opened the doors to investors.

"The time is now right to work in partnership with the private sector to help businesses in Hemel Hempstead decide what is right for their town and take an active hand in achieving their goals."

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THE BEACON



LUMIERE