

COLUMN

Following 'the Norfolk way' on new homes

In his latest column, Mid Norfolk MP **George Freeman** takes aim at "aggressive developers exploiting the planning system".

Building enough houses to make sure everyone in our area has the chance of a home of their own, while also making sure we protect Norfolk's rural landscape, habitats and heritage, is often a difficult balance.

That's why we have a planning system, run by local councils, so that local communities through their elected local councillors can shape the development of their area to meet their needs.

Having grown up in rural Norfolk and seen the way our area has been 'developed', I've long been out-spoken in saying that too often our planning system has failed to provide what we need: the affordable local housing for local key workers in the rural economy, the affordable shared equity homes for first time buyers, the well-insulated brick and flint cottages and bungalows for people looking to retire to a Norfolk town or village, or beautifully laid-out community developments with green parks and play areas, tree-lined cycle and pathways and facilities that local communities need, built by high quality local builders to benefit local people.



Too often we get the same thing: huge high density commuter housing estates dumped on the outskirts of our towns and villages by big national developers with no infrastructure or facilities, for more and more car-based commuting. This isn't "planning" – it's house dumping.

That's why, before becoming MP for Mid Norfolk back in 2010, I founded The Norfolk Way project to champion and promote a different model of planning based on smaller pockets of

housing – planned, designed and built locally, with more people working from or close to home, better digital connectivity, less commuting and people of working age back in vibrant villages and thriving towns.

It's why I also set up The Norfolk Enterprise Festival, Innovation Awards and have worked so closely with local community groups and councillors to push for Local District, Town and Neighbourhood Plans which go with the grain of our Norfolk heritage.

The pace of the innovation economy creating new small businesses on the Cambridge-Norwich corridor and across East Anglia creates a fantastic opportunity for a rural (and coastal) renaissance across

Norfolk by harnessing a new model of growth. No-one in Whitehall will do it for us.

We have to do it. Our way. The Norfolk Way.

The right way to build the houses we need is to allow local councils to plan properly for the right sort of housing and growth where it is needed: around hotspots of economic growth, on brownfield sites in areas needing regeneration, around growth towns with the infrastructure and services available to sustain further growth, and in villages with a Neighbourhood Plan setting out the amount of housing they are happy/able to take and which ensures affordable rural housing for local workers and residents is provided.

That's what the Breckland and South Norfolk Council Local Plans rightly aim to do in Mid Norfolk, and what I continue to support. What we absolutely don't need or want in rural Norfolk are aggressive developers exploiting the



Mid Norfolk MP George Freeman

Image: NEWSQUEST ARCHIVE



Dereham can be a prosperous gateway town to a vibrant local Mid Norfolk, says MP George Freeman.

Picture: DENISE BRADLEY

planning system, undermining local councillors and dumping massive commuter estates in highly inappropriate rural areas

without proper infrastructure, facilities, sustainable transport links or jobs. That's why I'm opposed to the idea of a massive

10,000 house New Town at North Elmham and why I am working with local Breckland Conservative councillors Bill Borrett and Gordon Cambridge to make clear that we will continue to stand together to oppose any revival of the New Town idea we defeated last time.

With proper planning our part of Norfolk has a bright future as a place of great beauty, heritage, and opportunity in a renaissance of exciting local small businesses pioneering innovation from gin to genetics, bicycles to cleantech, with Dereham and Wymondham as prosperous gateway towns to a vibrant local Mid Norfolk.

That's the Norfolk Way we need to support our local councils to deliver.