

Gloucester or Swindon. I throw that into the mix because it is important that the overall local plan and how we think about plans take into account employment, infrastructure links, travelling to work and everything else that would necessarily be connected with planning. I am not satisfied that the Labour-led Stroud district council has done all those things. We want the local plan to be in place, because any plan is better than no plan, and that will be the mantra until a plan arrives.

I have four specific questions for the Minister. First, how much reliance can we place on the prematurity issue in connection with local plans that are in the process of being agreed and implemented? That is the key issue for many residents of my constituency. They know that a plan is being considered, but while it is being considered, it is not in force. We have all these developers wanting to develop in areas where that plan would not want to see development taking place. We need to know in clear reassuring terms what the prematurity issues are and how we ensure that we can give comfort to residents in the valley and vale. We raised that issue at the public meeting and we got an answer, but I would like that to be on record today through this debate.

Secondly, what latent powers do previous plans have? Stroud district council had a plan until 2011. That is relevant, because any hope for residents in that respect would be good, and it is another strand that is well worth exploring.

An interesting issue, which to my surprise was raised at the public meeting, is that of housing numbers and how they relate to existing planning permissions that may not have been fulfilled. One would logically assume that any existing planning permission that has not yet been implemented would be considered in the total housing numbers as suggested by the council. We need evidence that Stroud district council has been told that that is indeed the case—a confirmation that guidance is clear about this matter—because there was certainly a lack of clarity at the public meeting, with at least one councillor expressing doubt about the matter and a number of residents also expressing doubt about it at that meeting and subsequently. The total number of houses to be built ought to include planning permissions that have already been given, and we need clarification on that.

My last point is one that I have been talking about for three years: neighbourhood plans, because they are a powerful instrument for local communities to use. As I have already said, we have 51 town and parish councils in my area, so potentially we could have 51 neighbourhood plans. We will not get 51; we have about a dozen in formulation, at one stage or another, and that is absolutely excellent news. However, we would have more if more people simply understood what a neighbourhood plan is. It is a statutory