

House of Commons

Wednesday 14 May 2014

Stroud Valleys and Vale (Planning)

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): I particularly welcome you as Chair, Mr Davies. It is the first time I have served under your chairmanship. I did not realise that you were on the Panel of Chairs, so I congratulate you on that. I am also pleased to note that my hon. Friend the Minister is here. He has already been to my constituency and we had a successful public meeting, which had the particular characteristic of attracting almost national attention. At that meeting, we raised several issues and I thought it would be helpful, in such a debate, to ensure that all those issues and all the answers to various relevant questions were put on record.

The Stroud valleys and vale is a particular beautiful part of England. I guess that most Members of Parliament could say that about their constituency, but I can say it without fear of contradiction. The five valleys and the vale amount to a spectacular area of incredible beauty. It is a place where a lot of people want to live. Furthermore, it is a place that many developers want to develop. It is therefore all the more important that we have a local plan. The pressure on development, both because it is a nice place to live and because of its particular characteristics, is intense. For that reason, I am particularly disappointed that the Labour-led Stroud district council has so far failed to produce a plan that is in force. The last plan effectively terminated in 2011, and we desperately need a plan now. I know that there is a plan with the Department for Communities and Local Government that is going through the appropriate checks—I hope that it will be given the green light—but in the meantime, we have a huge problem with developers literally circling parts of Stroud and the valleys, identifying possible sites for development. The pressure is huge, for the reasons I have outlined.

The other problem is that with 51 parish and town councils, we have a huge number of different communities, and they feel that they are effectively under siege. Those that are being encircled by developers do not know where to turn next for support, advice or encouragement. I want to speak for all those communities in this debate. I am very much on their side in protecting the characteristics, their livelihoods and the ways in which those villages and communities have developed.