Addressing Hastings' Housing Crisis

Small Plots: More Ambitious Targets



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Capture Politics

Acknowlegements & Report notes

Many thanks to Ken Davis, local researchers and local estate agents for giving advice that helped put this report together.

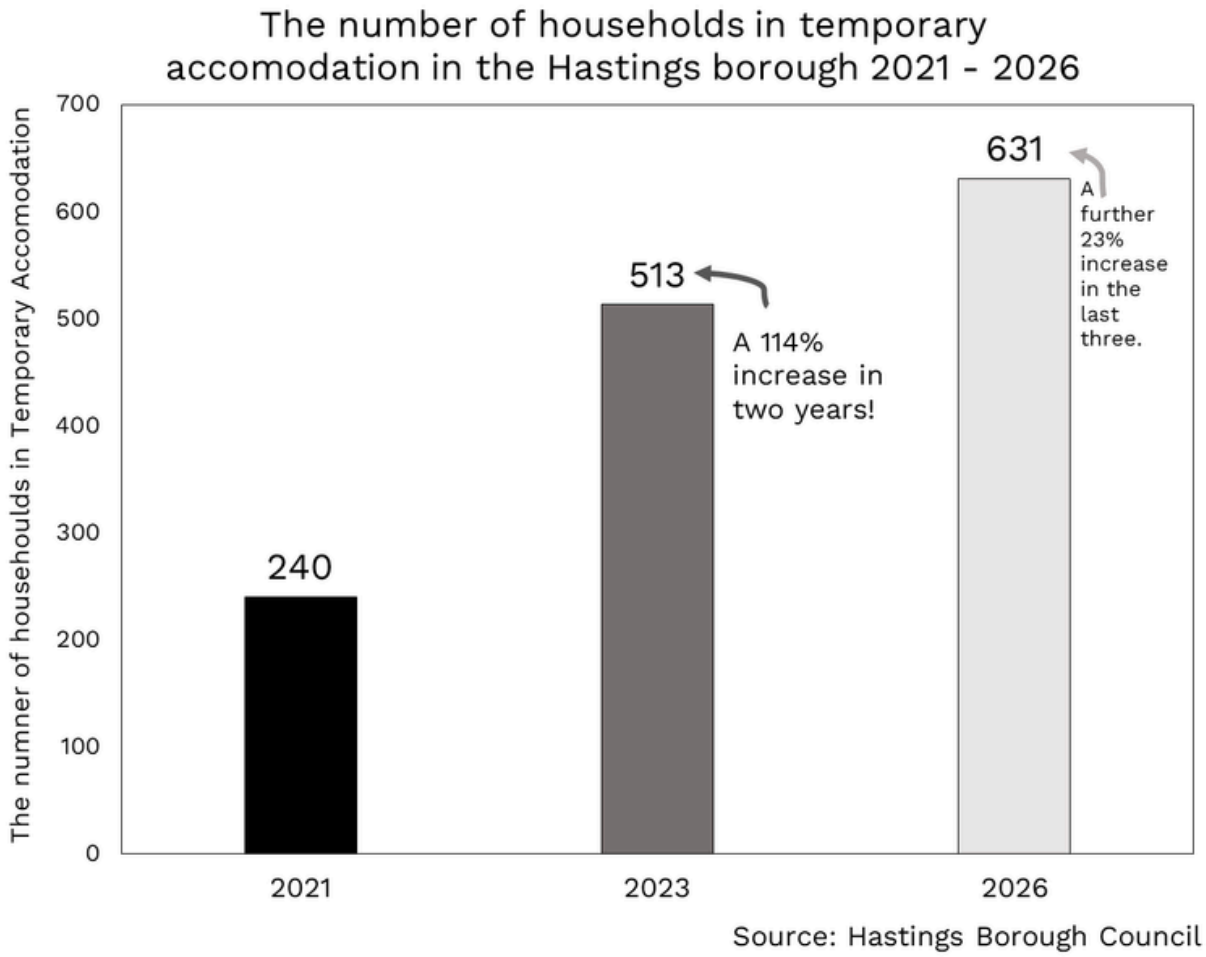
Note on the Report: The report's purpose is not to comment on the plan or on the people who drafted it. The information in this report is designed to complement the Local Plan rather than seek to criticise it. The report is also not seeking to make a political intervention or comment on any political party within Hastings. Its core purpose is to highlight how the town's housing needs can be met without further impacting the natural environment by focusing on small overlooked plots and empty units. The report does this by outlining where these small plots exist within the town. The message of this report is simple: building on smaller plots can generate more ambitious housing targets that better meet the town's housing needs.

The report has been informed by multiple local researchers who span traditional political party boundaries. There are no financial or funding interests to declare. The report only represents the views of the writer and not any other person or organisation.

Core Findings & arguments

- The current density approach stops us from building more units and does not allow the town to meet its housing needs.
- Filling smaller plots, industrial zones, and empty units can provide more housing.
- In total, our approach adds 2,423 units. These units can meet current housing needs.
- Our small search finds overlooked plots that can produce 1,323 additional units.
- The Strategic Housing & Economic Land Availability Assessment stops at 0.25 hectares, missing sites with housing potential.
- It is estimated that many of these smaller sites have been overlooked, missing the potential to develop 300 additional units.
- It also estimates there could be 200 more potential units by using employment zones for mixed housing and commercial use.
- Also, potential is being missed in current empty housing and retail units. Addressing this issue could generate another 300 homes.
- Through retrofitting, large empty units could supply an additional 300 units.
- Hastings isn’t as dense as some similar areas.

Introduction: The challenge of building to meet Hastings' housing needs



The housing crisis in Hastings is well-known. Post-Covid, there has been a large increase in the number of households and people in temporary accommodation. The graph to the left shows how, in a short period, the number of households placed in temporary accommodation has more than doubled in five years.

A primary cause of this is the rapid rise in housing costs, coupled with the sudden increase in the cost of living and stagnating wages.

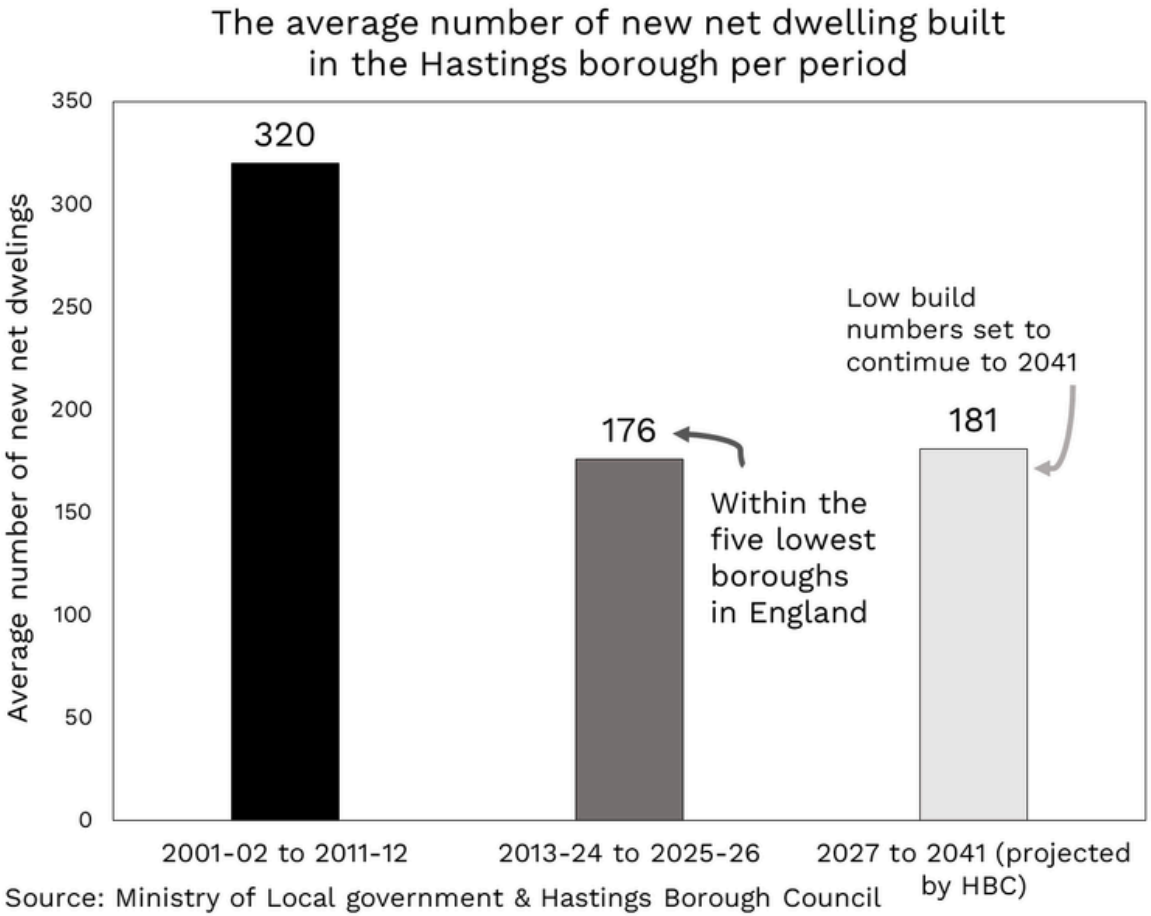
This has left increasing numbers unable to find anywhere they can afford to live, making them effectively homeless. The council is legally required to support these people, something which BBC

South East has demonstrated is putting Hastings Borough Council (HBC) under severe financial strain. This has left HBC buying properties at a market rate to increase its stock of temporary accommodation. This has cost taxpayers millions and is not financially sustainable, as without building social units the housing bill will grow and the money to buy houses will run out.

However, the issue goes further than HBC's finances. The recent Indices of Multiple Deprivation released by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government revealed that Hastings had persistent and increasing levels of poverty. It demonstrated that the main cause of this in the last five years had been a persistent lack of access to affordable housing that could meet people's needs.

With housing being the main driver of high and rising poverty levels, the inability to build more affordable homes will not just continue to weaken HBC finances; it will also ensure that relative poverty will remain stubbornly high. With the Local Plan in its final consultation phase, the housing debate in Hastings is very topical. The debate is often framed around the argument that the geography of the town prevents further building, meaning housing demand cannot be met.

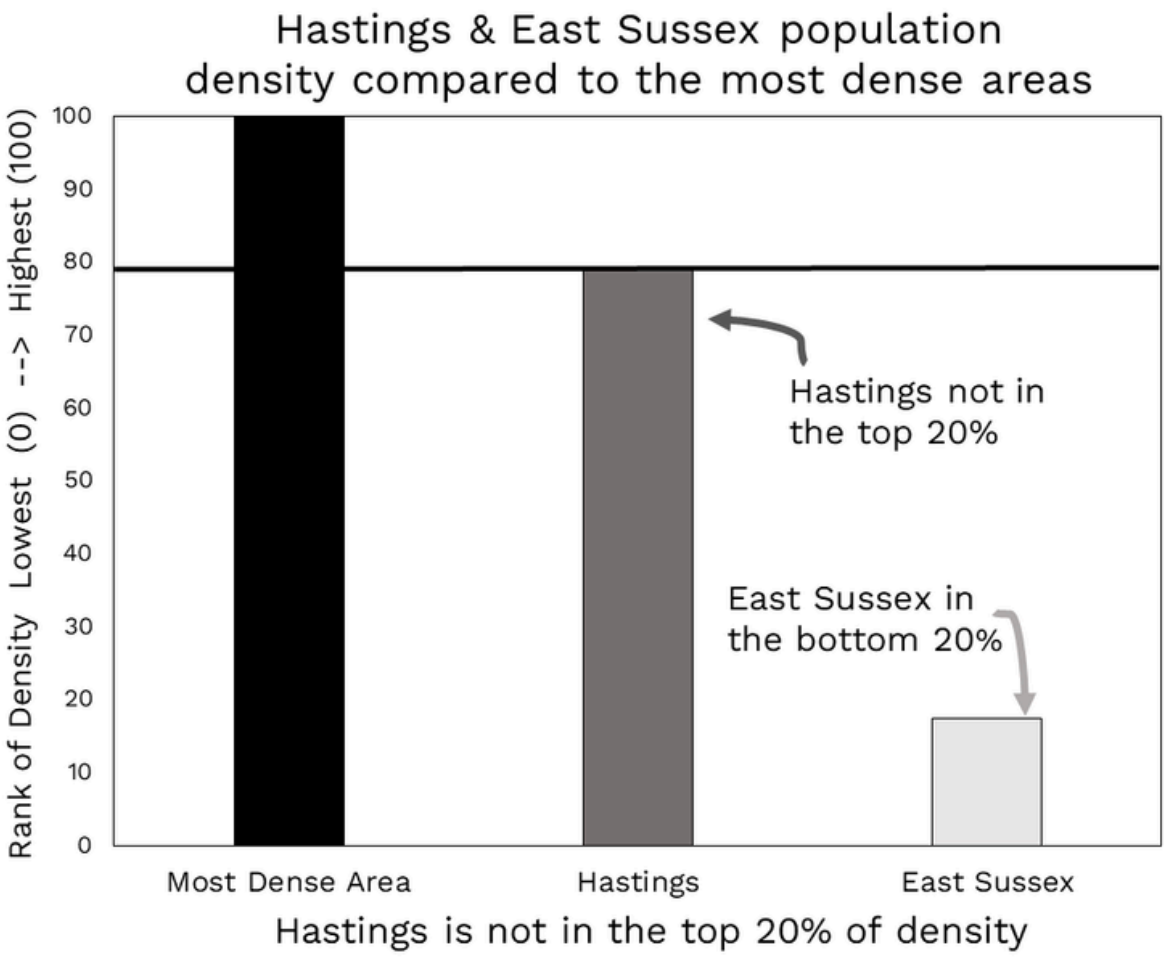
The local plan seems to have followed this logic, where it is asserted that many areas of the town can't be developed due to current density. The council commissioned the London-based consultancy, Allies and Morrison, at £xxxk to survey the town's density in order to examine where new housing can potentially be built.



It argues that, to keep the character of the town, the only areas where a good quantity of new housing can be built are in already densely populated areas. It argues that building in less dense areas would result in a loss of environment and character. Therefore, building more units in less dense areas is unlikely to occur.

This analysis has resulted in the draft seeking to meet 27% of the town's housing needs.

It asserts that only 181 homes can be built per year up to 2041. This continues the Borough's trend of being in the top 5 worst performers among all English authorities for building new homes. Yet, is the density report right? Can the local plan not go further? Is it not possible to build housing to meet the town's needs without harming the environment? If it can't, then the town is conceding that local government finances will continue to be poor and relative poverty rates will remain high.



Information from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows that Hastings is not in the top fifth of population density; see the image to the left. Hastings is less densely populated than similar coastal towns, such as Worthing, Southend & Blackpool, which all build more than Hastings.

Further, page 93 of the Hastings Local Plan shows that there are areas of very low density in the town. The density plan also misses that even within highly dense areas, the town still has small areas that can be developed to provide more housing. To explore land density and new potential sites, the consultancy used a SHELIA (Strategic Housing & Economic Land Availability Assessment), but it did not explore sites smaller than 0.25 hectares. This broad approach misses small plots with great housing potential. Therefore, by developing smaller plots, the town could better meet its housing needs whilst facing less objection.

Our Method, Purpose, and Findings:

To prevent overlooking these potentially useful small sites, local researchers have instead taken the approach of identifying small plots of land to generate more ambitious house-building targets. The approach of this report is to explore small sites within already built-up areas that are not being efficiently used, hold little environmental value or are not being used by the wider public. The purpose of this approach is to avoid building on the most controversial greenfield sites whilst also providing more homes to meet housing need. The report's purpose is also to identify a range of additional sites not included in the Local Plan, thus adding to the current work gone into the Local Plan.

The theory behind this approach is simple: building on these small plots can generate enough new units to make a significant contribution to Hastings' future housing needs. Therefore, by developing these small plots, the town can reach more ambitious housing targets. A brief analysis of the town by local researchers indicates that using these smaller sites could provide 1,323 more additional homes beyond what the local plan identifies. Additionally, it is estimated that by filling in very small sites (less than 0.25 hectares), the town could produce another 300 sites.

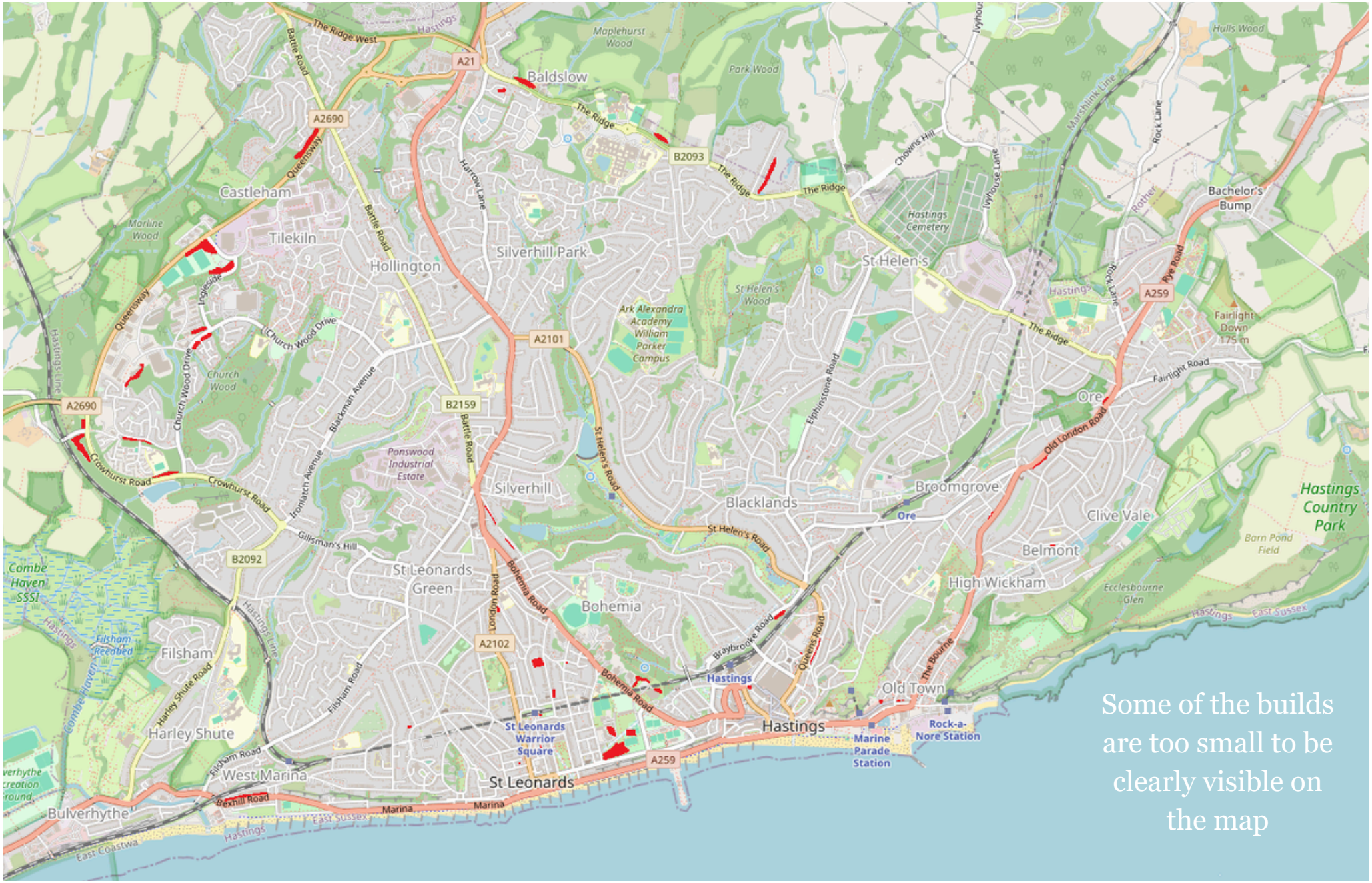
The report also explores how employment zones can offer more units. As retail is not performing as strongly as it once was, spaces on these sites often remain empty.

Also, these sites can use their land more efficiently. By converting and building new units into mixed-use units (combining commercial and housing units), this could increase the number of new builds in the town by 200 units.

It also explores how the large volume of empty units and unused retail outlets in the town represents potential for greater development. The value in these properties lies in both using the town's housing stock more efficiently and expanding existing buildings upwards to provide more living space. This could increase the number of new units by 300 without sacrificing any additional environmental space the town possesses. Further, our research also considers how retrofitting large empty property units can not only regain lost capacity but also increase it. It is estimated that such an approach would add another 300 units.

Together, the report demonstrates that by focusing on developing smaller plots, filling unused units and more efficiently using employment zones, the town can have more ambitious housing targets. Collectively, this would produce 2,423 additional units currently not in the local plan to better meet the town's housing needs. These units could house an estimated 3,300 people. If 30% of these were social or affordable (727 units housing 990 people), this would provide enough housing for all 631 households in temporary accommodation. Also, this, on top of housing outlined in the Local Plan, would provide housing for the 1,611 households currently on the waiting list. Therefore, the financial and social case is clear; Hastings must be more innovative and ambitious with housing targets.

The red shows where the building would roughly occur - there would be minimal impact on the town's landscape



The next two pages of this report outline a list of potential small sites and where these sites are located. For those without time, the report ends here. For those with time, the report then outlines the sites that could be better utilised in more detail. This helps the readers to understand how the numbers presented in the previous pages can be achieved.

N	Description	Location	Proposition	Ward	Units	People
1	Unused land off main road	Chruchwood Drive	Flats - large build	Hollington	100	150
2	Unused land off main road	Queensway Gateway	Flats - large build	Hollington	250	350
3	Unused land off main road	Queensway Gateway	Pefabricated units	Hollington	12	20
4	Land off Bodiam Drive	Churchwood area	Houses - smaller build	Hollington	15	50
5	Gritting Site - lack of use	Crowhurst Road	Houses - smaller build	Wishing Tree	20	60
6	Combe Valley Way	Crowhurst Road	Houses - larger build	Wishing Tree	40	60
7	Employment Zone for sale	Whitworth Avenue	Flats - large build	Conquest	100	200
8	Unused land slope	Bexhill Road	Two bedroom flats	West St Leonards	8	15
9	Spare land plot 44-46 Pevensey	Pevesey Road	A couple of Flats	Maze Hill	6	10
10	Spare Land Devlopment CPR1	Chapel Park Road (Upper)	Small row of flats	Gensing	15	30
11	Spare Land Devlopment CPR3	Chapel Park Road (lower)	Small row of flats	Gensing	15	30
12	Cherry Tree- spare Corner	Cherry Tree	A corner house	Gensing	1	5
13	Unused land on off-road	Clarence Road	Houses - relatively small	Gensing	8	40
14	Unused land rear of house	Woodland Vale Road	Flats - relatively small	Gensing	25	50
15	Unused land next to woods	Summerfields	Flats - large build	Gensing	200	300
16	Disused Braybrooke Road site	Braybrooke Road	Houses - smaller build	Braybrooke	24	35
17	Unused land on backroad	Wellington Mews	Flats or small homes	Castle	25	25
18	Small empty plot CH street	Courthouse Street	One block of Flats	Old Hastings	3	5
19	Robertson Hill Bank	Robertson Hill	Small row of houses	Tressell	5	20
20	Belmont south end	Belmont Road	Adjacent House	Old Hastings	1	5

21	Ashburnham Back	Old London Road	Row of small flats	Ore	20	60
22	Former Garage	Old London Road	Some houses	Ore	10	10
23	Linley Drive X2 sites	Lindley Drive (Rear)	Unused Council Land	Baird	12	20
24	Potential back land sites	Parkwood Road	Houses - larger build	Conquest	50	100
25	Land behind stores	Stockton View	Small row of houses	Ashdown	5	10
26	Spare Land - The Ridge	Maple Heights	Houses - larger build	Ashdown	40	80
27	Queensway Land	Washington Avenue	Houses - smaller build	Ashdown	20	60
28	Opposite Prince Albert Pub	Town Centre	Building flats in space	Castle	4	5
29	Gap in George Street	George Street	Building flats in space	Old Hastings	30	30
30	Gaps in West Street	West Street	Building flats in space	Old Hastings	10	15
31	Gaps in Old Town High Street	High Street	Building flats in space	Old Hastings	4	5
32	Vacant Tennis Courts	St Margaret's Road	One block of Flats	Central St Leonards	10	10
33	Empty spaces on Western Road	Western Road	Building flats in space	Central St Leonards	5	5
34	Former Convent site	St Margaret's Road	Historic England Plans	Central St Leonards	200	300
35	Disused Café'	St Leoanrds Station	One block of Flats	Central St Leonards	10	10
36	Empty Space near Queensbury House	Priory Road	Building flats in space	Castle	20	20
37	Empty Buildings, Unused Retail Space & Empty Retail				300	300
38	Additional units from Retrofitting				300	300
39	Empty Spaces less than 0.25 hecters				300	300
40	Better Using Employment Zones				200	200
	Total				**2,423**	**3,300**

The table above shows how the numbers listed in the report's introduction are reached. Each site is given a breakdown of how many units could be built and how many people could potentially live within these spaces. None of these sites are in the Local Plan and therefore can be added to produce more ambitious house-building targets. As this report hasn't conducted an extensive survey, these numbers are conservative estimates based on a very small analysis of available plots in the Hastings borough.