

the leeds citizen

Just another Leeds blog

How many houses does Leeds need? Last-ditch attempt to get council to re-think

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A last-ditch attempt is under way to get Leeds City Council to revise its figures for the number of houses the city is going to need over the next 15 years.

Campaigners, opposition councillors and local Tory MPs say that the figure of 70,000 that the city is committing itself to in its official development plan goes against the latest official population estimates – and should be brought down to between 50 and 60 thousand.

Ah, I hear you say. It's the NIMBYs in the leafy suburbs. Keep the numbers down and they've got a better chance of stopping houses being built anywhere near them.

It's more complicated than that.

If the figures are wrong, then there will be one major knock-on that could affect the whole of the city: it will almost certainly be harder to get house-builders to build on brownfield sites.

Why?



Persimmon – building in the suburbs

Because of something called the “five year supply” rule. If the plan says 4,000 houses are going to be built every year, land has to be kept available for 20,000. The higher the target, the more land the council has to offer up for development.

And the more land that’s offered up, the greater opportunity there is for house-builders to cherry pick sites where they’re guaranteed greater profits.

Which will they choose – the brownfield sites in the inner city that have been mothballed because they don’t believe they’re “economically viable”, or greenfield sites in the suburbs and villages that will keep their [profits booming](#)?

After years of preparatory work – including months of public enquiry – the council is set to endorse the 70,000 figure when it formally approves its long-term development plan (covering the years up to 2028) on [Wednesday](#).

The figures – and the way they’ve been arrived at – are being challenged on the previous day at a meeting of one of the council’s watchdog [scrutiny](#) committees.

So, are the figures wrong?

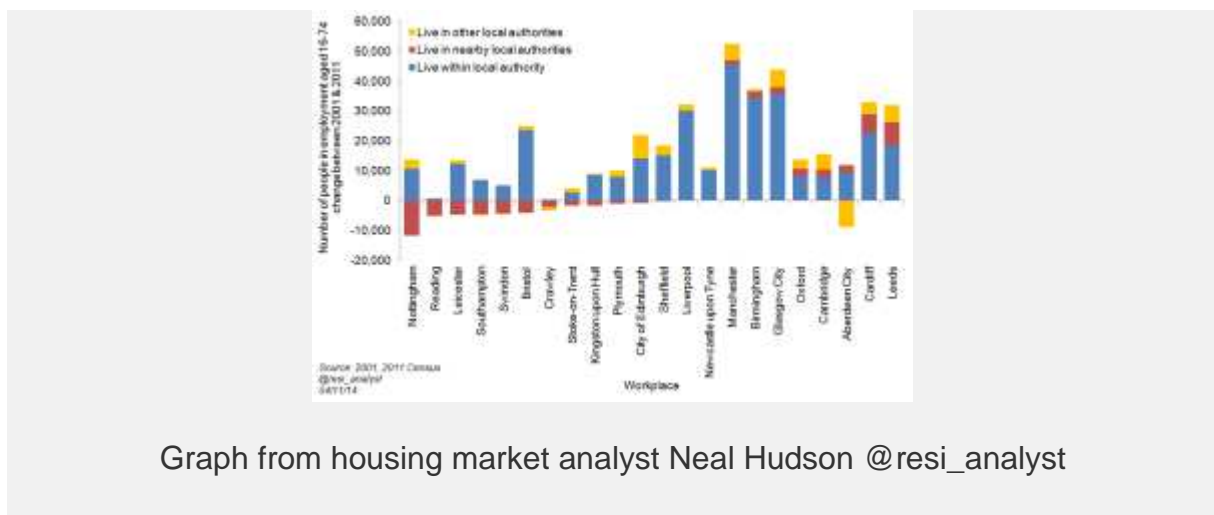
Scenario	Average number of dwellings per year 2022-2028				Dwellings - Plan Period		
	Edge Analysis		SLP		Min	Max	Average
	Economics A (2022-2028)	Economics B (2026-2028)	Urban Technical	Rural Technical			
0 Suburban and 20% of	5,020	5,780			65,800	92,900	69,850
0 Rural 20% of Edge	4,067	4,790			66,800	76,300	70,900
0 Land Core Working	4,870	4,870			70,000	70,000	70,000
0 (SLP 20%)			4,000	4,400	68,700	73,600	71,150
0 (SLP 20%+20%)			5,000	4,900	67,400	69,500	68,450
0 Suburban and 50% of	3,600	4,400			58,300	75,277	66,789
0 Rural and 50% of Edge	3,670	4,300			58,300	65,400	61,710
0 Rural 50% of Edge	3,204	3,810			52,221	62,270	57,200
0 (SLP 20%)	4,184	4,700			50,541	60,613	55,710
0 (SLP 20%+20%)			3,000	3,400	55,011	58,200	56,610
0 Suburban and 20% of	2,707	3,300			46,620	55,420	48,520
0 Rural and 20% of Edge			2,700	2,800	47,000	49,200	47,100
0 Suburban and 50% of	2,120	2,700			34,000	44,710	39,360
0 Rural 50%	2,700	2,670			37,171	40,710	38,940

From 27,500 to 92,000 – those 14 forecasts (science it ain't)

Predicting the need for housing is notoriously difficult. There are any number of models the experts use to come up with their forecasts (14, **yes 14**, in [this report](#) that helped inform the Leeds plan): migration, projected growth in jobs, number of new households that they think will be set up, and population, to name just four.

The Leeds forecast is now being queried mostly because it turns out that, according to official projections released in May this year, the city's population is going to be growing much more slowly (and from a smaller base) than the experts thought when they came up with the 70,000 target.

According to those doing the querying, there'll be 62,700 fewer people living in Leeds in 2028 than was originally thought.



Graph from housing market analyst Neal Hudson @resi_analyst

Ah, say the council and the inspector who ran the public enquiry, our target isn't based solely on population growth, but on the predicted number of jobs there are going to be in the city – and the latest forecast is that the local economy is going to remain on the up.

But there are doubts over that approach too. An [analysis](#) released this week shows that Leeds is bucking the national trend, with more people commuting into the city from other local authorities than anywhere else in the country.

And those commuters don't need houses in Leeds, but in the local authorities where they're starting their cars or jumping on to one of Mr Clegg's decrepit [cattle-trucks](#).

Council to keep an eye on forecasts

The committee at which the challenge is going to be heard on Tuesday is supposed to keep a close watch on all this stuff.

But campaigners are concerned that the committee may not have been following up its own [recommendations](#) about how the council comes up with its housing growth forecast.

Pulling the plan so it can be reconsidered at this late stage would be a major headache and embarrassment for the council, who say they'll [keep an eye](#) on the population forecasts, but the plan needs approving NOW.

Not pulling it for a re-think could condemn all those brownfield sites in the inner city to remain undeveloped for many more years to come.