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PARISHIONERS' REVOLT AGAINST GOVERNMENT LAND-GRAB WITHIN ANCIENT PARISHES

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Categories:

Comments Received

PARISHIONERS' REVOLT AGAINST GOVERNMENT LAND-GRAB WITHIN ANCIENT PARISHES

Dear Editor

Philip Johnston's article in The Daily Telegraph [Oct 22 2025]: 'Labour's Planning Power Grab Will Trigger a Revolt in Rural England' - along with Ben Morris's magazine article in All About Horsham-AAH [Feb 2024]: 'Land Grab' - could not be more prophetic.

Here, in the ancient Parishes of Ifield, Crawley and Rusper, that revolt has already begun - and the local communities are rising up ['Hundreds of letters objecting to 3,000 homes plan sent to council', Crawley Observer/WSCT, Oct 22/23 2025].

Parishioners are standing up to defend their meadows, heritage, and democracy against centralised control ['Moral responsibility', Crawley Observer/WSCT, Letters, Oct 22/23 2025].

What Johnston describes at a national level - the bypassing of local councils, the silencing of communities, the erosion of genuine devolution - is being enacted here through Homes England's speculative 'West of Ifield' planning application [DC/25/1312].

Horsham MP John Milne is raising deep concerns: "If we ever questioned this government's commitment to the environment, we should be deeply worried about it now" ['Chancellor intervenes in Horsham planning battle', WSCT, Oct 23].

Paul Steedman of CPRE Sussex shares that concern: "These proposals remove power from local people and risk causing irreversible damage to wildlife, communities and the wider environment" ['Planning amendments are "extraordinary capitulation" to big developers', Crawley Observer/WSCT, Oct 22/23].

This Government speaks of empowerment and growth, yet what we witness is disempowerment and loss - loss of local voice, loss of countryside, loss of parish landscapes, loss of wildlife, loss of heritage - and loss of trust.

When the right to shape our own parish is removed, the moral contract between people and place is broken.

The Parishioners' Revolt in Ifield is not a revolt against homes, but against the destruction of local democracy and the commodification and power-grab of ancient land that has sustained these parish communities for over a thousand years.

This local revolt is the first spark in a wider rural awakening - a stand for freedom, fairness, and the future of our ancient parishes.

Yours sincerely

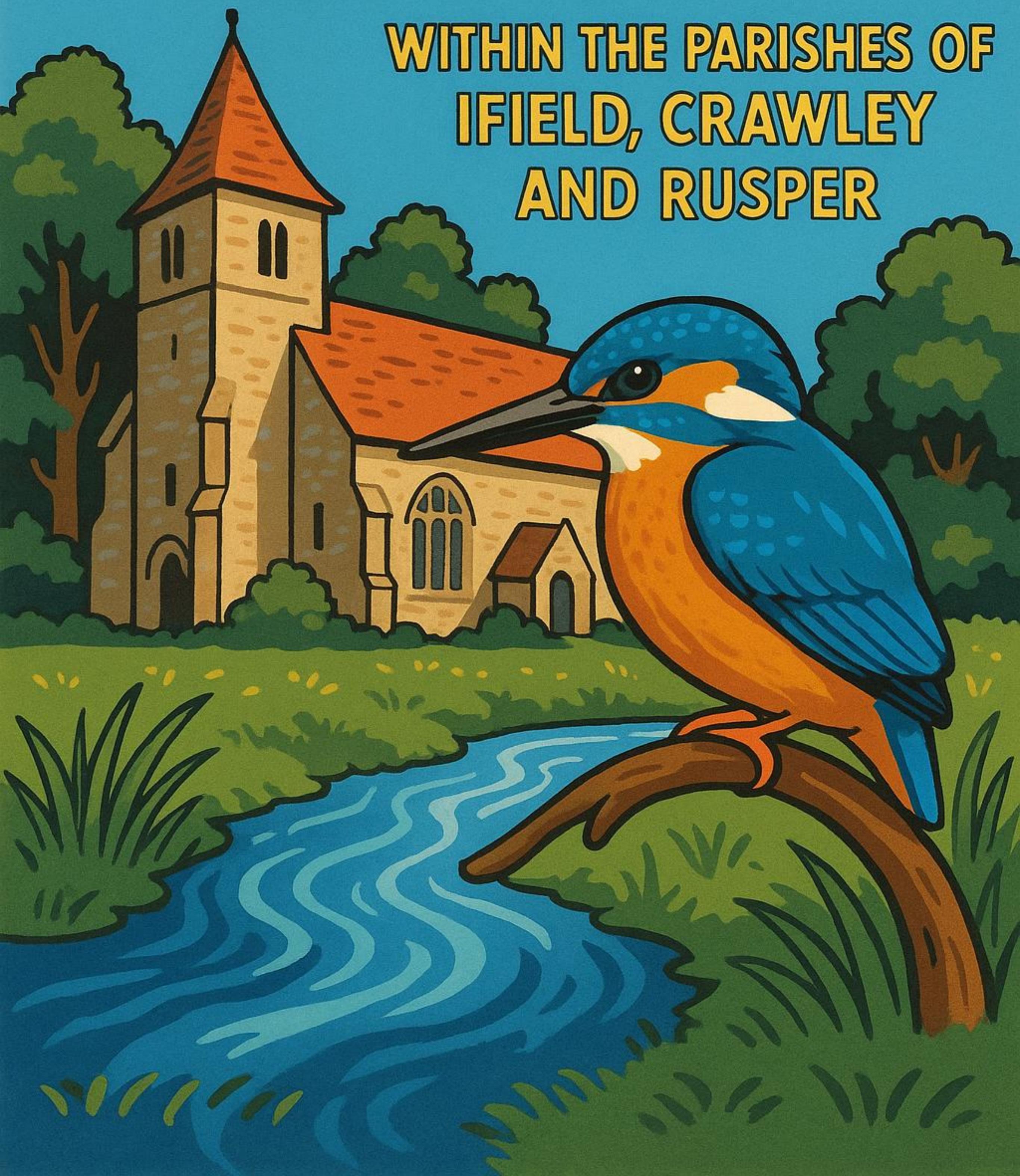
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THE PARISHIONERS' REVOLT

WITHIN THE PARISHES OF
IFIELD, CRAWLEY
AND RUSPER



Labour's planning power grab will trigger a revolt in rural England

This Government says it is committed to devolution, but is centralising control to a hitherto unseen extent

PHILIP JOHNSTON



We don't hear the term Nimby much nowadays. The Government's preferred word is 'blocker', presumably because it suggests a more actively obstructive role in stopping development. The acronym for Not In My Backyard was imported from America into our political lexicon some 40 years ago by Nicholas Ridley, the environment secretary in the Thatcher government.

He set out plans for a network of new towns in the South of England to tackle housing shortages and stimulate growth. Nothing much changes. In a speech defending his policy, Ridley said: "Our English countryside is one of the most heavily man-made habitats in Europe. To make it into a green museum would be to belie its whole history."

However, Ridley broke the oldest political law of all: that ministers insisting people behave in a certain way must do so themselves. It transpired that he had objected to a low-key housing development in the Cotswolds close to his constituency rectory in a Gloucestershire village. He was a Nimby.

The essential nature of Nimbyism is not a national policy, for instance green energy or more houses, but insisting that the consequences

should be felt by other people. There is always a tension between the greater needs of society to see building take place and local opposition.

Getting the balance right has proved problematic ever since the post-war Labour government introduced the Town and Country Planning Act, which remains the template for decision-making despite incessant tinkering over the years in a bid to speed up building.

Another attempt is currently under way with the Planning and Infrastructure Bill now in its final stages in Parliament. This had passed through the Commons and was almost at the end of its Lords journey, whereupon the Government suddenly introduced 67 amendments.

This is how we legislate – a measure that should have already been properly scrutinised is toughened up virtually overnight when it is too late to object. It is a piece of chicanery partly designed to assuage the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) as it prepares to give its verdict on the November Budget. Reportedly, the Prime Minister ordered a last-minute rewrite of the Bill following indications that the Government will never reach its target of 1.5 million homes by the end of this parliament.

If it can be shown that house-building and new infrastructure schemes will actually happen, thereby boosting growth forecasts, perhaps the OBR will give the Chancellor greater wriggle room in meeting her fiscal rules. Or that is the theory. Few, if anyone, in the building or planning worlds think there is the remotest chance of the 1.5 million target being reached. So far this year there has been a sharp decline in planning applications.

However, Steve "build, baby, build" Reed, the Housing Secretary, insisted

that the Planning Bill was the vehicle for making it happen and success would be "all the sweeter" given the level of current scepticism. So what does this measure do that gives Mr Reed such cause for optimism that he has promised to resign if the target is missed?

Essentially, it bypasses local council and community objections to any development that central government deems to be necessary. Officials claim councils are "dragging their feet" on building, with nearly 900 major housing schemes "blocked" in the past year.

New housebuilding targets will be mandated and the Secretary of State will be able to issue holding orders on planning applications and call in "unreasonably" rejected schemes. Who decides what is unreasonable?

Green Belt protections are being watered down and a new concept of "grey belt" introduced for low quality land that can usefully be developed, though it will still be up to councils to identify suitable land.

In addition, there are powers for ministers to force through "nationally significant" projects, such as reservoirs as well as solar panels, windfarms, pylons and electricity sub-stations. Most of the latter will be situated in the countryside to provide power to the towns and cities in order to meet Ed Miliband's madcap dash to decarbonise the grid.

The cumulative impact of all these developments could be considerable in some areas and yet their objections will likely be overridden or considered piecemeal. The Government also wants to see more reservoirs built – there has not been a new one for 40 years – which are also going to cause local planning battles.

The question, then, is does this Bill

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strike the right balance between the wider needs of society for new housing and infrastructure and the democratic rights of people to object and for their opinions to be taken seriously, not just brushed aside?

Mr Reed said: "Sluggish planning has real world consequences. Every new house blocked deprives a family of a home. Every infrastructure project that gets delayed blocks someone from a much-needed job. This will now end."

But it will only end if the Secretary of State essentially takes on the function of a one-man planning system, stripping local communities of any say in their future. That will stoke resentment among people who blame successive governments for allowing mass immigration to push up the population to a level where housing shortages are at crisis levels. The forced march of pylons and gigantic windfarms across the countryside to meet Miliband's green agenda will not be welcomed by those who do not benefit from the power they produce. A rural revolt looms.

Critics say the Planning Bill is such a dog's breakfast that it will never achieve what it has set out to do. But it nevertheless contains powers that the central government has rarely possessed in peacetime to impose its wishes on a recalcitrant populace.

And what of Mr Reed? Last year, before he became Housing Secretary, he objected to a housing development in his London constituency. The mayor Sir Sadiq Khan, writing: "Residents have... relating to direct overdevelopment and overshadowing given the proposed height of the development."

He turned out to be a Nimby – or a blocker. There would probably be many more.

The forced march of pylons across the countryside will not be welcomed by those who do not benefit from the power they transmit

LAND GRAB

THE PATCH OF CRAWLEY UNDER THREAT FROM HORSHAM

With so much of Crawley being densely populated, it's easy to forget that there are parts of the Borough that have retained their historic charm.

Ifield and Worth were recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086, and although the former is now dominated by housing east of Rusper Road, the old village has survived on the other side of the road. Here, a close-knit community centres around the Plough Inn, Barn Theatre and the Grade I listed St Margaret's Church, parts of which have stood since the 13th century.

Ifield Village is a designated conservation area, making it popular with ramblers and dog walkers. The church is home to a yew tree thought some 700 years old, while in the meadows children can leap between ancient ant hills. Beyond the meadow you'll find Ifield Brook, linking Ifield Mill Pond (which rail commuters to London will be familiar with) to the south and the River Mole to the north. Turning to face Ifield Village from just beyond the brook, you'll see the view in the photo here, with the spire of St Margaret's rising above the tree line. You're no longer stood in the Borough of Crawley, but on the north-eastern tip of the Horsham District.

This is significant, as this area – known as West of Ifield in planning documents – has been earmarked by Horsham District Council for development. It would initially accommodate 3,000 new homes, making it the largest new site for 'strategic scale' development in the latest version of the HDC's Local Plan. However, this number could eventually rise to 10,000 homes, significantly bridging the gap between the towns of Horsham and Crawley.

In some parts of the Horsham District, there was a sense of relief when the latest version of the Local Plan was released. Proposals to develop at Buck Barn and Adversane are no longer included and these sites have been shelved, for now. Yet in Crawley, there is a feeling that Horsham is unloading a huge part of its housing allocation on its doorstep.

Cathy Durrant of the Save West of Ifield group, said: 'This is the last remaining place where people living in Crawley can walk to without having to cross a major road and enjoy the solitude of the countryside. We find it frustrating that Horsham District Council has gone to great lengths to protect its own rural escape at Chesworth Farm, yet are prepared to completely destroy ours. It just feels wrong.'



A footpath through the development site with St Margaret's in the distance (©AAH/Alan Wright)

PARISHIONERS' REVOLT AGAINST LAND GRAB WITHIN ANCIENT PARISH OF IFIELD



“planning power grab will trigger
a revolt in rural England”

THE DAILY *Telegraph*