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17 December 2025 13:01
LAMB Peter (MP)
MILNE John (MP); [REDACTED]
HOMES ENGLAND AND WEST OF IFIELD: WRITTEN EVIDENCE SUBMITTED TO THE
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Categories: Comments Received

Dear Peter Lamb MP

Please could you submit this to the Public Accounts Committee and National Audit Office.

Thank you

Yours sincerely

Richard Symonds

Ifield

<https://www.sussexexpress.co.uk/news/opinion/letter-to-the-editor-institutional-lunacy-west-of-ifield-is-this-rational-5446041>

WRITTEN EVIDENCE SUBMITTED TO THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Homes England: £3bn Land Acquisition at Ifield (2019) and the West of Ifield Development Proposals

Submitted by:



On behalf of: The Ifield Society

1. Introduction

1.1 This submission concerns Homes England's reported participation in a £3bn land acquisition programme in the Crawley area in 2019, including land at Ifield Golf Club, and the subsequent promotion of development proposals known as West of Ifield.

1.2 The submission raises issues relevant to the Public Accounts Committee's remit, including:

- stewardship of public land and public money
- governance and accountability
- risk management and value for money
- the robustness of assumptions underpinning major public land transactions

1.3 The purpose of this evidence is not to argue the planning merits of development, but to identify whether the acquisition and subsequent asset management decisions demonstrate adequate financial control, oversight, and public accountability.

2. Background

2.1 In July 2019, Estates Gazette reported that Homes England was involved in a £3bn Crawley “garden village” land deal.

2.2 The land associated with this programme includes Ifield Golf Club, a long-established community recreational facility located within the historic parish of Ifield.

2.3 Since the acquisition, Homes England has:

- moved to close Ifield Golf Club, and
- promoted development proposals under the West of Ifield scheme.

2.4 These proposals have been advanced prior to the adoption of a sound and legally compliant Local Plan and prior to planning permission being granted.

3. Planning and policy context

3.1 The West of Ifield proposals have attracted formal objections from:

- Crawley Borough Council
- Gatwick Airport Ltd

- environmental and ecological organisations

3.2 Despite the existence of unresolved objections and policy uncertainty, Homes England has proceeded on the basis that development outcomes are sufficiently secure to justify:

- the closure of existing community assets, and
- proposed changes to land management arrangements affecting Local Green Space.

3.3 This raises questions as to how planning and policy risk was assessed and managed following the 2019 acquisition.

4. Management of public assets

Ifield Golf Club

4.1 Ifield Golf Club functioned as a community recreational asset and formed part of the social and historic fabric of the parish.

4.2 Its closure occurred before the resolution of planning consent, raising questions about:

- whether asset disposal or withdrawal of use was premature
- whether interim or alternative community-led options were fully explored
- how public value was assessed beyond financial return

Ifield Brook Meadows

4.3 Ifield Brook Meadows is designated as Local Green Space.

4.4 Proposals have included placing the Meadows under private management arrangements.

4.5 While framed as professional stewardship, such arrangements raise governance questions concerning:

- long-term public access
- accountability of managing bodies
- the preservation of community control over public land

5. Governance and decision-making

5.1 Key governance issues include:

- what assumptions underpinned the 2019 acquisition, particularly regarding planning certainty
- how stakeholder risk was evaluated at the point of acquisition
- whether Homes England revisited those assumptions following formal objections and delays in plan-making

5.2 It is unclear what formal review mechanisms were triggered once significant objections emerged from statutory and strategic bodies.

6. Risk management and value for money

6.1 Potential risks to public value include:

- planning risk, should development be delayed, scaled back, or refused
- stranded asset risk, where land acquired at development value underperforms
- opportunity cost, arising from the loss of community assets prior to confirmed outcomes
- reputational risk, where public confidence in the stewardship of public land is undermined

6.2 It is not clear what contingency planning exists should the assumptions underlying the acquisition not be realised.

7. Accountability and oversight

7.1 The case raises wider questions about:

- the effectiveness of oversight arrangements governing Homes England's land acquisitions
- the balance between delivery targets and public value
- how democratic objections are weighted in financial and operational decision-making

7.2 These issues are relevant to the PAC's interest in ensuring that public bodies operate within frameworks that safeguard value for money and democratic accountability.

8. Issues for potential examination

8.1 The Committee may wish to consider:

- whether the 2019 acquisition was supported by a sufficiently robust business case
- whether risk reassessments were undertaken when planning uncertainty increased
- whether asset management decisions were appropriately sequenced
- whether governance safeguards adequately protect community and environmental value

9. Questions for scrutiny

9.1 What was the business case for Homes England's participation in the 2019 £3bn land acquisition, and how was planning risk quantified?

9.2 What reassessment, if any, occurred following formal objections by Crawley Borough Council and Gatwick Airport Ltd?

9.3 Why was the closure of Ifield Golf Club implemented prior to the granting of planning permission?

9.4 How does Homes England ensure that Local Green Space is not effectively alienated from public control through management arrangements?

9.5 What is the potential financial exposure to the public purse if development assumptions are not realised?

10. Conclusion

10.1 This submission suggests that the West of Ifield case may provide a useful example for examining how Homes England:

- manages planning and stakeholder risk,
- safeguards public value in land acquisitions, and
- balances financial objectives with democratic accountability.

10.2 These matters fall squarely within the remit of the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office.

Submitted by:

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