

Cambridge Centre
for Housing &
Planning Research

**Variations in housebuilding rates
between local authorities
in England**

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Introduction

In early 2014, Michael Oxley received an ESRC Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) award entitled “Promoting policy change to boost the supply of affordable housing”. It supported a series of actions designed to influence (a) public policy on affordable housing supply and (b) public understanding of policy measures that would increase the supply of affordable housing.

One of the IAA activities was a Policy Workshop that was planned and executed with the assistance the Cambridge Centre for Science and Policy (CSaP). It was held on October 30th 2014 at Trinity Hall, Cambridge and chaired by Dame Mavis McDonald. Seventeen high profile policy and housing experts attended. It generated a series of ideas which have led to the establishment of a small working group (including representatives of the Home Builders Federation and Places for People) that is taking forward ideas generated by the workshop. Subsequent to the Cambridge workshop this group (which also includes Dame Mavis McDonald) has met to consider the actions to take the agenda forward.

A question that emerged in discussion at the workshop was “Why do house building levels (for all types of housing – not just affordable housing) vary so much from place to place”? CCHPR subsequently agreed to look at the evidence base for the assertion that some locations have much higher levels of house building than others. Here we present some basic data to support the proposition that house building rates do indeed show large geographical variations within England. CCHPR intends, subject to the provision of appropriate funding, to carry out further work to explore the reasons for the variations. We set out some evidence that shows the variations between local authorities in England. We show the details for the local authority areas that have, over recent years, had the highest and the lowest house building levels. We do not offer reasons for the variations. We suggest some research questions that might be addressed to investigate the reasons. We are not therefore at this stage presenting evidence to explain the variations. We are rather seeking views on which possible explanatory factors are worth exploring.

What the data shows

In the Tables below, data is presented on house building rates per capita for local authorities in England. House building rates for recent years are shown. We have done these calculations for every local authority in England. Figure 1 maps the variations by local authority in England for the period 2004/5 to 2013/12. The national average house building rate for this period was 2.624 dwellings completed per year, per thousand population. In Table 1 the top thirty local authorities (those with the highest rates of house building) are shown and in Table 2 the bottom thirty (those with the lowest rates). It can for example be seen that in Tower Hamlets, Corby and Winchester more than 7 dwellings were built per year in the last ten years for every one thousand inhabitants. However, in nine local authority areas less than one dwelling was built per year for every one thousand inhabitants with the lowest levels of house building being in Kensington and Chelsea, Blackpool and Stockport.

It is clear that there are large variations in house building levels between local authorities in England.

Why do house building rates vary between local authorities?

We know little about why house building rates vary between local authorities.

A key research question is thus:

1. Why do house building rates vary between local authorities in England?

And the additional questions might be:

2. What part do geographical variations in housing demand and housing need play in explaining variations in house building rates between local authorities in England in the last ten years?
3. What are the contributions of private and social sector house building to variations in house building?
4. Are variations in house building rates between local authorities in England in the last ten years a consequence of variations in the performance and capacity of local authority planning departments or even more broadly variations in the degree of constraint on house building imposed by the planning system?

It might additionally be postulated that the different house building levels can be explained by variations in physical capacity – principally land availability and infrastructure provision - or by variations in the “appetite” for house building by private house builders and housing associations.

This is not an exhaustive list of possible explanations. Variations in the volume and characteristics of the housing stock might play a part and whether the explanation lies mainly in market or planning factors, some aspects of these may be more important than others. How important are house prices, building costs and land prices? What are the relationships between demographic changes and house building levels and where is cause and where is effect? Does the status of the local plan have a big impact? These are all important questions for which we lack a firm evidence base.

The need for ideas and evidence

There is clearly a need for research which will provide evidence for alternative explanations for geographical variations in house building levels. CCHPR intends, subject to the availability of appropriate funding, to conduct such research.

A first step is simply to seek views on the reasons for the variations. What are the appropriate explanatory factors that might be investigated?

If you have a view let us know.

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Figure 1 Dwelling Completions per capita (Number of dwellings per capita average per year 2004/05 to 2013/14)

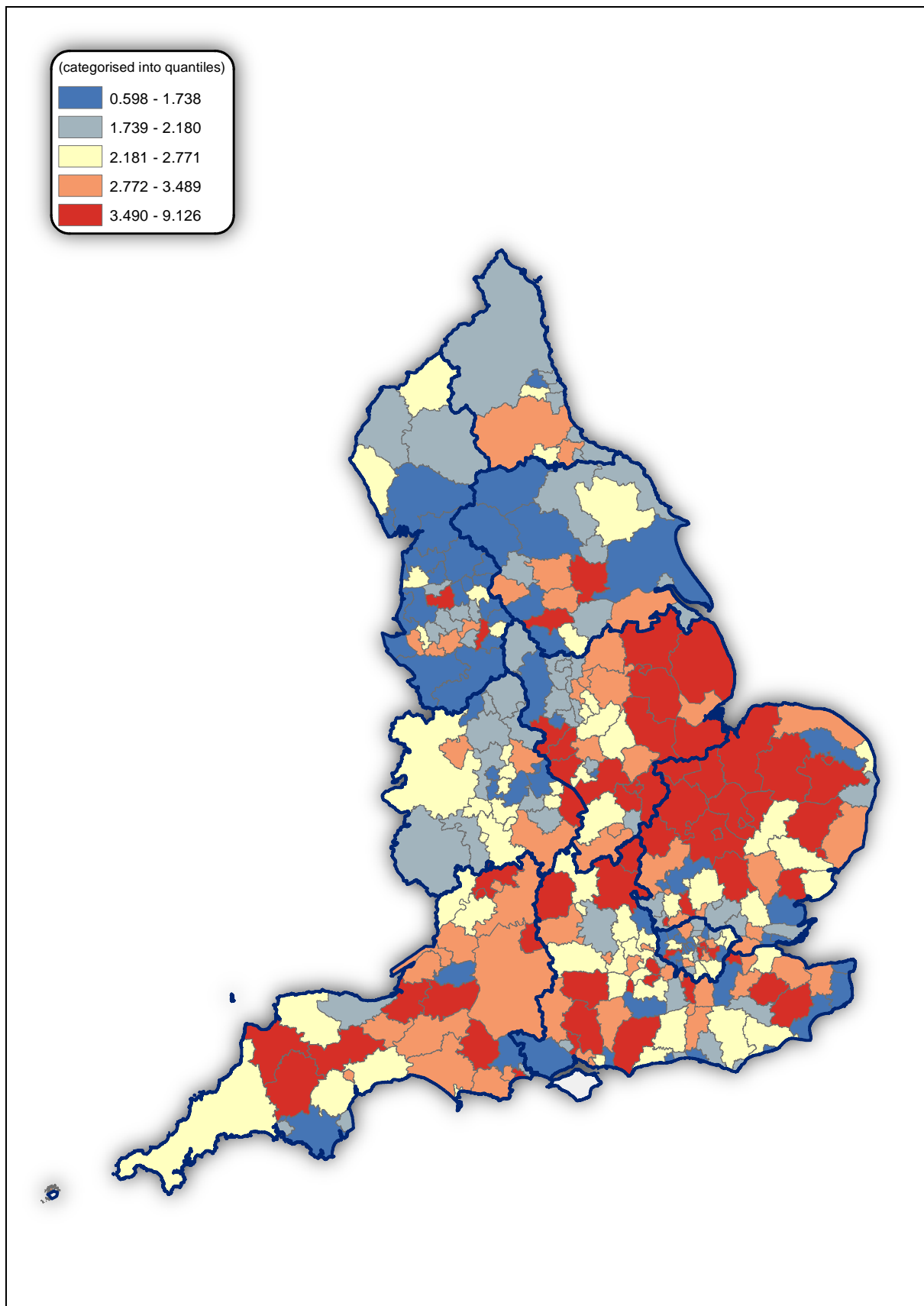


Table 1 Dwelling Completions per Capita (‰): Highest 30 local authorities

local authority	region	DC per capita (‰)	annual average DC
Tower Hamlets	London	9.126	2,173
Corby	East Midlands	8.595	504
Winchester	South East	7.876	896
Milton Keynes	South East	6.511	1,550
Forest Heath	East of England	6.236	367
North West Leicestershire	East Midlands	5.483	505
Uttlesford	East of England	5.455	417
Swindon	South West	5.391	1,086
Colchester	East of England	5.356	903
West Devon	South West	5.302	278
East Cambridgeshire	East of England	5.056	411
Basingstoke and Deane	South East	5.031	823
South Norfolk	East of England	4.922	592
South Kesteven	East Midlands	4.897	644
Gloucester	South West	4.877	579
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	4.739	684
Torridge	South West	4.734	300
Peterborough	East of England	4.709	833
West Lindsey	East Midlands	4.670	410
Rugby	West Midlands	4.664	450
Kettering	East Midlands	4.649	423
North Kesteven	East Midlands	4.583	483
Selby	Yorkshire and The Humber	4.572	373
Hounslow	London	4.532	1,093
Maidstone	South East	4.509	679
South Derbyshire	East Midlands	4.428	408
Dartford	South East	4.416	417
Eastleigh	South East	4.389	537
Fenland	East of England	4.347	405
Mid Suffolk	East of England	4.317	408

Table 2 Dwelling Completions per Capita (‰): Lowest 30 local authorities

local authority	region	DC per capita (‰)	annual average DC
Kensington and Chelsea	London	0.598	97
Blackpool	North West	0.665	95
Stockport	North West	0.768	217
Sefton	North West	0.809	223
North Warwickshire	West Midlands	0.853	53
Lancaster	North West	0.853	117
Thanet	South East	0.882	117
Cheshire East	North West	0.892	327
Cheshire West and Chester	North West	0.923	304
Oadby and Wigston	East Midlands	1.016	57
Hammersmith and Fulham	London	1.021	181
Richmondshire	Yorkshire and The Humber	1.037	54
Wirral	North West	1.043	331
Westminster	London	1.089	240
Barrow-in-Furness	North West	1.092	76
Brighton and Hove	South East	1.121	296
Kingston upon Thames	London	1.143	180
Harrow	London	1.167	270
Pendle	North West	1.201	107
Harrogate	Yorkshire and The Humber	1.211	189
Bexley	London	1.245	284
Hastings	South East	1.249	111
Castle Point	East of England	1.263	111
Luton	East of England	1.266	247
Hyndburn	North West	1.271	103
Preston	North West	1.285	178
Worthing	South East	1.294	133
Sevenoaks	South East	1.297	148
Burnley	North West	1.318	115
Southend-on-Sea	East of England	1.321	223

Notes on the definitions and sources

- Dwelling completions: DCLG Live Tables.
- Population: DCLG mid-year population.
- Dwelling completions were recorded for each of the fiscal years, while the population was as at the middle of the calendar year
- To calculate the measure of dwelling completions per capita, firstly the average of the denominator and the average of the numerators were calculated. Then, the two averaged were used.
- There are some missing values in dwelling completions at local authority level. The missing values were ignored to calculate the measure of dwelling completions per capita – e.g. where one year data was missing, the 10-year average was created with 9-year datasets (no imputation for the missing value).