

Sir Ian Diamond
National Statistician
Office for National Statistics
Government Buildings
Cardiff Road
Duffryn
Newport
NP10 8XG

20 February 2020

Dear Sir Ian

I previously corresponded with Mr [REDACTED] in March 2018, sadly without response.

As you may know, there has been considerable disquiet about the ONS population projections underpinning the adopted Coventry City Council Local Plan. I have also written previously to the Housing Minister (Dominic Raab MP). The Minister was clear that the population projections are your responsibility – hence this letter.

With two years of actual evidence of population growth after the adoption of the plan, I am writing to ask that you urgently:

- 1) **Re-evaluate the population estimates and projections for Coventry**, including all of the latest data available from the Home Office Exit Checks, and HESA student destinations surveys;
- 2) **Issue appropriate guidance to local authorities**, where international migration forms a significant component of projected growth, and;
- 3) **Take into account, in the SNPP2016, the former Prime Minister's statement** "students coming in for the period of their education and then leaving actually wash through the numbers – they don't have a long-term impact on the numbers."¹

The overall numbers projected for Coventry appear implausible and may be leading to poor long-term planning decisions. Potentially unnecessary development in the greenbelt not only damages the green lungs of our towns and cities, but also discourages inner-city regeneration.

The impact is not limited to Coventry. Because the requirement cannot all be accommodated in the city, total unmet demand for the West Midlands is being increased, putting particular pressure on the 5 neighbouring districts. Moreover, I am very keen to understand and address this issue for other West Midlands locations.

In your policy document, *Better Statistics, Better Decisions*, you recognise the need for reliable fine-grained population statistics to guide decision-makers. I continue to believe that the figures in SNPP2012 and 2014 for Coventry do not reach this standard, largely because of

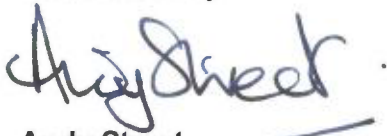
¹ Theresa May softens stance on migration and foreign students, 2 Feb 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com>

mistakes, originating in the International Passenger Survey, in estimating student migration. I would therefore be grateful of your personal view on this matter, not only for the Coventry situation, but the wider applicability across the West Midlands.

I wonder if it might be possible for us to arrange to meet to discuss these matters, either in the region or London? If so, your PA might find it helpful to contact my PA, [REDACTED], via email at [REDACTED]@wmca.org.uk so that we can find a mutually convenient date.

I look forward to hearing from you shortly.

Yours sincerely



Andy Street
Mayor of the West Midlands

CC: The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

From: BLUNKETT, Lord <[REDACTED]@parliament.uk>
Sent: 24 July 2020 10:33
To: National Statistician <[REDACTED]@statistics.gov.uk>
Subject: Message from L Blunkett

Dear Sir Ian,

I think you're probably aware that I have raised issues over the last few years of the statistical analysis of population growth projections.

The importance of this cannot be overstated. The analysis by the ONS and published estimates, are used constantly in the public arena. These are highly political matters, not just bare statistical analysis. I don't simply named mean that they used politically but the methodology and therefore the projections themselves are subject to wider "interpretation".

You will be much more aware than I am, that a very large range of European countries are currently projecting a substantial drop in the birth rate, including with recent migrants, which in itself is interesting.

However, as far as I'm aware, the statistics produced by the ONS continue an analysis which is out of line with our European counterparts. Am I wrong?

It might of course be that the drop in European inward migration and the substantial acceleration of migration from outside Europe over the last three or four years, will, according to your statistical analysis, lead to an increase in the birth rate. Is this correct? If so, could it be made clear! This is not just a pedantic point but an absolutely essential appreciation of how statistics and politics go hand in hand.

At present, those who have a mouth using that's about Malthusian view the world, believe that European migration has been responsible for an upsurge in population levels. What is the evidence for this?

Do you do you still believe that over the next 20 years there will be a 6 million increase in the UK population? Based of course on the most recent changes in policy, and your analysis of what's happened since the referendum when European

citizens have in their hundreds of thousands, decided not to come here or to go home, and those from outside the EU have taken the signals from government that they (above all) are welcome.

Bare statistics tell us nothing. Getting down to the granular detail and understanding the impact that announcements make, is surely a critical element of the transparency and responsibility of the ONS?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

David Blunkett

**Lord Green of Deddington K.C.M.G
Weston House
Deddington
OX15 0TG**

Tel: [REDACTED]
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28 October 2020

Dear Sir Ian,

Zero migration variant for 2018 based household projections

Thank you for your letter of 19 October which meets some of my concerns.

The link turned out to be a page of numbers that would be incomprehensible to the general public. Moreover, it was presented as merely the response to a request. Fortunately we have the skills to interpret it and have produced the one page note (attached) which we will publish in due course.

Broadly, we conclude that, in England, we will need an additional home roughly every five minutes just to house immigrants and their families. Your staff must have been aware of this broad outcome yet, when we enquired as to why the zero variant was, for the first time, not published we were told that there had been no demand for it. Given the ramifications of the present housing crisis, this seems entirely unjustified.

I realise that you have many pre-occupations at present but this touches on the reputation of the ONS. May I ask you, therefore, for an assurance that the main statistical bulletin will in future include a graph of the zero net migration variant and the low, principal and high variants together with some explanatory comment so that the public can get a full and balanced picture of the impact of immigration on housing demand?

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Green

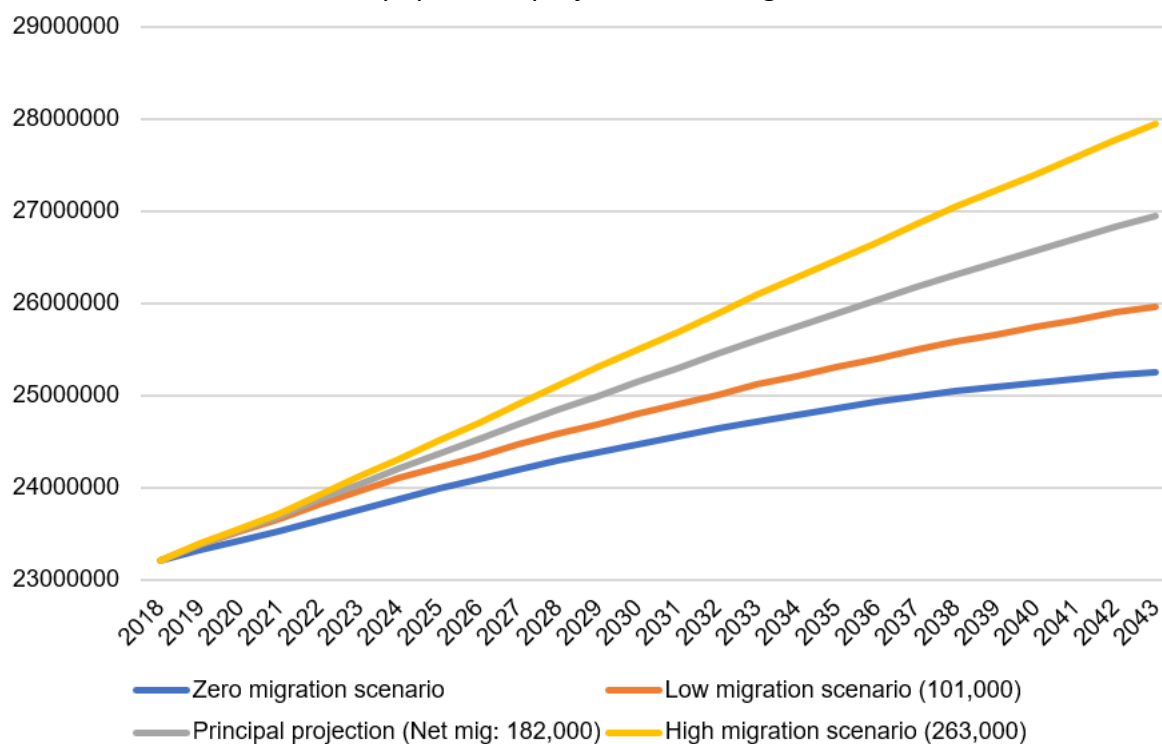
The ONS has now provided the [zero migration scenario](#) to compare with the 'high migration scenario' (with international net migration to England at 263,000) in their [2018- based household projections](#) for England which were released in June 2020.

Net migration to England averaged just below this - 255,000 - over the past five years (2014-2018).

A comparison of the zero and high migration scenarios suggests that we will have to build **2.69 million more homes** over a 25 year period (2018-2043) solely as the result of immigration if it recovers to (or exceeds) the levels that pertained just before Covid struck.

This amounts to 107,400 homes needed each year in England or **a home needed every five minutes** (this compares with one every six minutes, under the 2016-based projections - see our [comment](#)).

Figure 1: ONS 2018-based household projections for England: comparison of different migration variants. NB International migration variants are derived from the 2018-based sub-national population projections for England.





Sir Ian Diamond
UK's National Statistician
Office for National Statistics
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Cardiff Road
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Our Ref: TO2804

7 September 2020

Dear Sir Ian Diamond,

Re: ONS projected population forecast for Coventry

I am writing to you with regards to the latest population projection published by the ONS.

Based on the population forecasts, the City Council has approved the construction of 11,000 new homes. These homes have been marked to be built on the green belt around Coventry as well as next to woodlands in Warwickshire.

The ONS has projected that Coventry's population would rise by 32% by 2031. Many constituents have contacted me, concerned about the veracity of this particular statistic. I share their concerns.

Coventry City Council is right to ensure that we have adequate housing in Coventry to meet the demands of a growing population. However, my concerns about the current projections is that I do not believe that it considers the following realities:

0. Coventry's Student Population

Part of Coventry's charm is that it is a student city. We are blessed to have two universities in close proximity to each other (Coventry University and the University of Warwick). During term-time, of course, the population of Coventry increases, however, these students do not remain in Coventry once they graduate. Only a small proportion of students remain.

0. Economic Recession

The coronavirus pandemic has plunged us into the worst economic recession since the end of WWII. Between March and May 2020, figures show (Coventry City Council) that there has been a national decrease of 600,000 employees from company payrolls. I have no doubt that this figure has increased since then. We have seen the closure of large employers in Coventry, such as IKEA as well as job losses from Rolls Royce and many others.

Constituency Office:

Unite the Union, Short Street, Coventry, CV1 2LS

Email: [REDACTED]@parliament.uk | Tel: [REDACTED]

Website: www.taiwoowatemi.com

0. The New Normal

Due to job insecurity and instability, it is likely that more and more young people will stay at home as opposed to moving out. Research has indicated that young people are also impacted hugely from redundancies. Lack of employment, coupled with soaring housing prices and extortionate housing rental costs, many young adults are choosing to stay at home with their families for longer.

As previously mentioned, I understand the City Council's reaction and desire to challenge current population forecasts. I understand that the Council is legally bound to ensure that local plans are in place to deal with the inevitable housing demands that come with a rising population. However, demands to build more houses, inevitably puts our city's green spaces at risk.

Green spaces are a haven for my constituents in Coventry. These green spaces have been a source of comfort and peace of mind for so many during the lockdown period. Some of them are packed with historical reverence and significance. News that we will lose some of our green belt as a result of an arguably questionable forecast, comes at a time where historic woodlands around Coventry are already at risk from the construction of HS2. It would be a shame to destroy our green space, to meet a population demand that may not come to be.

I would be grateful if you could explain how you arrived at the population estimate - considering the reservations I have raised above - and provide assurance to myself and my constituents.

I look forward to your response.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Taiwo Owatemi', is placed over a light grey rectangular background.

Taiwo Owatemi MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Sir Ian Diamond
National Statistician
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3 April 2020

Dear Sir Ian Diamond,

I am writing to you regarding the ONS population growth projections in the area under the jurisdiction of Coventry City Council.

I understand that you have received other correspondence on this matter raising concerns. You can find the arguments brought to my attention on page 8 of the attached newsletter by the British Society for Population Studies.

My constituents are concerned that the overall population growth projection for Coventry is inflated, and that this might compromise the accuracy of strategic forward planning.

I would like to request a briefing on the methodology and models used to reach these population growth projections. If possible, I would suggest that this is produced in a format that I may then forward to my constituents for comment.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zarah Sultana'.

Zarah Sultana
Member of Parliament for Coventry South