

Cllr Eamonn O'Brien
Leader of Bury Council

Date 12 October 2021
Please ask for Cllr Eamonn O'Brien
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Rt Hon Michael Gove
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
Sent electronically

12 October 2021

Dear Secretary of State

Many congratulations on your appointment as Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. I am pleased to learn that you will also have cross-departmental responsibility for levelling up. I truly hope that you are able to give this agenda the impetus it needs to have a real and lasting impact on our communities because, after all, if we're not in politics to make people's lives better then what are we in it for?

I expect your in tray will be quite full as you rise to the challenge of your new role, but I would like to draw your attention to a matter that is of great importance to myself and the residents of my borough-the Places for Everyone strategic development plan.

This plan, formerly known as the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF), sets out where development will take place across nine of the 10 boroughs of Greater Manchester, Bury included, up until 2037. It outlines how we will secure investment in infrastructure, deliver new affordable and market value housing, provide new employment opportunities, and create new and protect existing greenspaces.

Under the government's standard methodology for determining local housing need, Bury is required to allocate land to accommodate 9,456 homes over the plan period (591 homes a year), but because we are collaborating with the other boroughs of Greater Manchester, excluding Stockport, we are able to offset 2,228 homes to other districts, giving a local housing need of 7,228 homes or 452 a year. Existing brownfield sites in Bury could accommodate 3,776 new homes. This means we are facing the prospect of releasing three large green belt sites in our borough for housing.

We recognise that it would be irresponsible to submit a plan to the planning inspectorate for examination that is not in line with the National Planning Policy Framework and the with the government's standard methodology. In fact, we have had two previous local plans rejected – one in 2011 as it did not include green belt release to meet housing need and one in 2014 as the inspector said we needed to wait until the then Greater Manchester Spatial Framework was approved. And we are committed to producing a joint plan that provides the benefits around offsetting housing need in other boroughs and leveraging in investment for infrastructure and low carbon affordable housing, as is our ambition.

However, we do take umbrage with the government's standard methodology, particularly the use of 2014 ONS population figures as opposed to the revised 2018 figures, which would lead to a reduction in the local housing need for Bury and would, therefore, take pressure off our green belt.

Moreover, the recent changes to the standard methodology, which led to a requirement for Manchester City Council to accommodate a 35% uplift over its previous housing target (increased its local housing need by over 14,000). This meant that the increased targets in Manchester removed the ability of the local authority to absorb some of the housing targets from elsewhere in the conurbation, including Bury, as a result of Stockport's withdrawal from what was then the GMSF.

I wholeheartedly support the development of new homes in my borough. We are not building enough homes either locally or nationally and home ownership for too many, especially our younger residents, remains out of reach. I am ambitious for Bury and believe that a bold approach to development across housing, town centre regeneration and employment is vital to our post-Covid recovery. That being said, the need for progress and economic growth must be balanced with the need to protect our greenspaces in Bury.

On your own website as the Member of Parliament for Surrey Heath, you say that you have campaigned on green issues for two decades and that you "will fight any incursion into our green belt". If you do not support any incursion onto the green belt in your own constituency then how can you sanction it in my borough.

I would welcome a meeting at your earliest convenience to discuss how you are going to approach the issue of calculating local housing need and delivering on your manifesto pledges to deliver 300,000 new homes a year and protect the green belt. Consultation on the Places for Everyone plan has recently concluded ahead of the plan being submitted to the planning inspectorate for examination. I would urge you to take a look at this plan and consider, truthfully, whether the minimum housing numbers determined by your government's methodology are appropriate.

As an aside, I would also be grateful if you could confirm that local housing need as determined by the standard methodology is a minimum requirement other than in exceptional circumstances.

I am grateful to you for considering the information I have provided in this letter and I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Eamonn O'Brien
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