



Department for Levelling Up,  
Housing & Communities

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**Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP**  
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*Dear Cllr. O'Brien,*

Thank you very much for your letter and kind words of congratulations of 12 October to the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, regarding local housing need in Bury and the preparation of the Places for Everyone strategic development plan. I am replying as Minister of State for Housing. Due to the quasi-judicial role of ministers in the planning system I am unable to comment on individual areas, however I do hope that you find the following information useful.

First, I would like to thank you for your efforts to deliver housing in Bury and Greater Manchester. The Government is clear that to help make home ownership affordable for more people, and to help more people rent their own home, we need to deliver more homes and I am pleased to see the ambition in the area to ensure that everyone has a home that meets their needs.

You reference the standard method for assessing local housing need, but I would like to be clear that the standard method is only the starting point in the process of planning for new homes and does not provide a housing target. Councils decide their own housing requirement once they have taken account of local constraints (such as Green Belt, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty etc.) that prevent them from allocating enough sites to meet need. Housing requirements are decided by local authorities when they write their local plans. Nor does the LHN methodology dictate where homes should go, it is up to councils to determine the best locations for new housing through their plan policies.

I note your comments on the use of the 2014 household projections within the standard method and welcome your feedback on this matter. Last year, as part of the consultation around local housing need, the Government carefully considered whether to use the 2018-based household projections and concluded at that time, in the interests of stability for local planning and for local communities, we would continue to expect only the use of the 2014-based projections would be used. After a period of uncertainty due to COVID-19 it was particularly important for local areas to get on plan based on a method and level of ambition that they were familiar with. Indeed, I would like to clarify that household projections are not a measure of how many homes are needed to meet demand, they simply show what would happen if past trends continue. The Office for National Statistics was clear that lower household projections do not mean fewer homes need to be built.



With regards to your comments on the Green Belt I would like to be clear that, as we set out in our manifesto, the Government is committed to protecting and enhancing the Green Belt. That's why national planning policy delivers strong protections, with two tests safeguarding the Green Belt.


Firstly, our National Planning Policy Framework prevents local authorities changing a Green Belt boundary unless there are exceptional circumstances, and they can show that they have examined every other option: using brownfield land; optimising the density of development; and discussing whether neighbouring authorities can take some of the necessary development. Secondly, most new buildings in Green Belt are inappropriate and should be refused planning permission unless there are very special circumstances, as determined by the local authority.

I am pleased to hear of your commitment to utilising brownfield land and would like to reassure you that we are committed to making the most of brownfield land, in line with our policies in the National Planning Policy Framework. As you will be aware, the National Planning Policy Framework strongly encourages the re-use of suitable brownfield land, especially to meet housing need and regenerate our high streets and town centres. Local authorities, both in respect of planning policies and decisions, are expected to make effective use of land and each authority must now publish a register of local brownfield land suitable for housing in their area. The Department and Homes England regularly engage with urban areas to support delivery of homes on brownfield, and we have widened the rules on permitted development so yet more homes can be created.

Finally, as you mention, councils can only adopt a plan that is sound which should be consistent with national policy. Sound plans should be positively prepared, effective and based on proportionate evidence. Plans should also take the views of local people into account. Each plan is subject to a public examination in front of an independent Inspector, who plays an important role in examining plans impartially to ensure that they are legally compliant and sound.

With a new Secretary of State in a new department, we are taking time to review the departmental programmes and engage with key stakeholders. I am grateful for the time you have taken to bring this to my attention. Thank you very much for your invitation to meet. My Private Office will be in touch with an answer to your request as soon as possible.

Thank you again for your letter. I hope you find this information helpful.

*Yours Sincerely,*  


**RT HON CHRISTOPHER PINCHER MP**