



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

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Dear Ms Duckworth,

Thank you for your letter of 22 September to the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, setting out a resolution of Sheffield City Council relating to housing and local planning matters, which was tabled at its meeting held on 8 September. We have been asked to reply on behalf of the Secretary of State and we are sorry that we were not able to respond sooner. Due to the quasi-judicial role of Ministers in the planning system, we are unable to comment on a specific Local Plan. We do hope, however, that you find the following information useful.

The Government is very conscious of the effect that development can have on local communities and our environment. Through our planning reforms we have set out that local and neighbourhood plans are fundamental to giving local people more power over planning decisions that affect them. Equally, there is no doubt we have not been building enough homes to meet our country's need for too long. To help achieve our manifesto commitment to deliver 300,000 homes annually by the mid 2020's, and one million homes over this Parliament, it is important that local authorities plan positively to meet their full housing needs. Our National Planning Policy Framework introduced the standard method for calculating local housing need which gives a starting point for local authorities in identifying the housing need in their area.

Following consultation, in December 2020 we changed the standard method for calculating local housing need to help to deliver our manifesto commitment of 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s, whilst continuing to protect the Green Belt and make best use of brownfield and urban centre land. This is to focus greater need into our biggest 20 cities and urban areas, including Sheffield, to maximise existing infrastructure and to support development that reduces the need for high-carbon travel. All other local authorities in England should see no change compared to the previous method, so will continue to calculate their local housing need in the same way as previously. The uplift in need within our biggest cities and urban centres in England will also support our wider objectives of regenerating brownfield sites, renewal and levelling up.

We would emphasise that local housing need does not set a target for the number of homes to be built. Local authorities take into account land supply, constraints (such as Green Belt and Local Green Space), and cooperation with neighbouring authorities on whether need should be shared, before deciding their housing requirement. This recognises that not everywhere will be able to meet their housing need in full. Local authorities can put forward a different approach to the standard method if they wish

although a different method should only be used in exceptional circumstances and there should be a strong justification for doing so.

This Government is committed to protecting and enhancing the Green Belt and strong protections for Green Belt land are provided in the National Planning Policy Framework. A local authority can alter the boundary of Green Belt land only in exceptional circumstances and where it can show that it has fully examined all other reasonable options for meeting its development need. This means that the authority should show that it has used as much brownfield land as possible, optimised development densities, and discussed with neighbouring authorities whether they could accommodate some of the development needed. The Framework is also clear that most new building is inappropriate in the Green Belt and should be refused planning permission unless there are very special circumstances.

We would emphasise that having an effective, up to date plan in place is essential to planning for and meeting housing requirements in ways that make good use of land and result in well designed and attractive places to live. It is also the best way to protect an area from inappropriate development. The Government expects local authorities to work together to plan for and deliver the housing and infrastructure our communities need. After the consultation on the White Paper last year, the Housing Minister clearly reiterated the importance of having up to date plans in place in his Written Ministerial Statement of 19 January 2021.

We understand your concern that housing must be of the right type and size and of the need for more affordable and social housing. The National Planning Policy Framework is clear that the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policies, including for those who require affordable housing and people who rent their homes. Alongside this, the Government is investing over £12 billion in affordable housing over 5 years, the largest investment in affordable housing in a decade. This includes the new £11.5 billion Affordable Homes Programme (AHP), which will provide up to 180,000 new homes across the country, should economic conditions allow. Since 2010, we've delivered over 542,400 new affordable homes, including over 382,300 affordable homes for rent, of which over 149,400 homes are for social rent. The new Affordable Homes Programme will deliver more than double the social rent than the current programme, with around 32,000 social rent homes due to be delivered.

As the Secretary of State is new to the department, he continues to familiarise himself with the new department's work and what policies he intends to take forward. We are considering the best way forward in relation to proposals to reform the planning system and an announcement on our proposed way forward will be made in due course.

With thanks again for writing in on these important matters.

Yours sincerely

Paul Williams
Planning Policy and Reform Correspondence Team