

30th June 2022

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

Cc: Tracey Dixon, Leader of South Tyneside Council
Joan Atkinson, Deputy Leader and Ward Councillor
Ian Forster, Ward Councillor
David Herbert, Ward Councillor

Dear Mr Gove,

South Tyneside Housing Requirement, the implication for the Green Belt and our Villages.

I write on behalf of East Boldon Neighbourhood Forum regarding the above.

East Boldon, a village within the Borough of South Tyneside, adopted a Neighbourhood Plan in 2021. The Plan was supported at referendum by 95% of those residents who voted in a 42% turn out. Among other objectives, the Plan sought to protect the green belt and the distinctiveness of East Boldon Village by adopting a positive but proportionate approach to future housing in the Forum area.

South Tyneside's newly published draft Local Plan seeks to allocate 1,500 new homes on Brownfield sites. However, the Borough's housing requirement, based on the Government's Standard Method, requires Council to find sites for another 3,000 homes. The absence of alternative brown field sites means that it will be necessary to build these properties on Green Belt land. Approximately half of these are to be in and around the villages of Whitburn, Cleadon and the Boldons.

As far as the East Boldon Neighbourhood Plan area is concerned, around 650 dwellings are proposed in an area which already contains around 1800 existing dwellings, an increase of more than a third. By contrast, the Housing Needs Analysis prepared as part of the Neighbourhood Plan identified that a total of 192 dwellings would deliver the needs of East Boldon over a similar period.

The housing numbers proposed to meet the Government's Target, will put an enormous strain on the infrastructure of these small villages, especially the existing highways around which the villages have developed. Not only will the Green Belt in and around these areas be greatly eroded, but the distinctiveness and the unique identity of these long-established settlements will be significantly and adversely affected by the requirement.

Green Belt development is opposed by many residents. South Tyneside's Draft Local Plan published in 2019, which was subsequently withdrawn, sought to build extensively on the green belt and received over 18,000 objections.

Most of the properties that will be built in and around the existing villages where land prices are high, will result in expensive, executive style houses that neither reflect the need of local residents nor address the current housing crisis.

South Tyneside Council's failure to meet the Government's Housing Target in the short term, has resulted in Government intervention. This has resulted in a situation where the East Boldon Neighbourhood Plan is compromised and its policies are currently undermined.

The Plan was informed by an extensive consultation exercise with the local community. The thoroughness of this was highlighted by the independent examiner who scrutinised the Plan. It is unsurprising that many residents now feel powerless and 'not listened to'.

It is also a huge frustration that the Government's Standard Method is based on 2014 household projections. If more up to date figures were used, our housing requirement would be less. This anomaly has been made even clearer with the publication of the 2021 census data. This shows that the population of South Tyneside in 2021 was 147,800, continuing the trend of population reduction since 1961 when the total was 187,123. Against this background, the Government's housing requirement for South Tyneside of 4,500 new homes over the next 18 years covered by its Local Plan looks plainly wrong.

The green belt here in South Tyneside, makes up over one third of the Borough's area, and has made a significant contribution in protecting the identity of its villages and providing a habitat for wildlife. Going forward it will play an important role in combating climate change and providing food security. We believe it must be protected for future generations. We want to add our voice to the many who believe the Government must change its policy concerning housing targets, and take account of the situation of where there is Green Belt constraint on land availability.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'KR', with a horizontal line underneath.

Kirstin Richardson, Chair
On behalf of East Boldon Neighbourhood Forum