



Department for Levelling Up,  
Housing & Communities

**Department for Levelling up, Housing and  
Communities**

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Dear Ms Richardson

Thank you for your letter of 30 June to the Secretary of State on behalf of East Boldon Neighbourhood Forum about local housing need and the potential consequences for the neighbourhood. I have been asked to reply.

I understand your concerns. However, you will appreciate that, because of the Secretary of State's quasi-judicial role in the planning system, I cannot comment on local planning matters or the way an area's housing need has been assessed.

While central government sets planning policy for England through the National Planning Policy Framework, elected local authorities are responsible for planning their areas. Local Plans indicate how land should be used, the type and location of future development, and the presence of restraints such as Green Belt. Each Plan is submitted for rigorous independent examination by planning inspector. The examining inspector acts on behalf of the Secretary of State to make sure the Plan is sound and accords with national planning policy.

The Government is committed to protecting and enhancing the Green Belt, in line with our manifesto. Strong protections for Green Belt remain firmly in place. The Framework states, for instance, that a Green Belt boundary may be altered only in exceptional circumstances through the Local Plan process. A local authority should consider releasing land from Green Belt only if it can demonstrate that it has explored all other reasonable options.

At the same time, the Government expects local authorities to plan and deliver the housing and infrastructure our communities need. We want to get more people on the housing ladder, support local economic growth, and create stronger and more sustainable communities. It is important to strike a balance between enabling development and growth, including housebuilding, while continuing to protect and enhance the natural environment and land for agriculture.

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. The Government expects local authorities to work together to plan for and deliver the housing and infrastructure our communities need. In 2018 the Framework introduced a standard method for calculating local

housing need to make the process simple, quick and transparent. The standard method does not impose a target; it is still up to the local authority to determine its housing requirement, and this includes taking local circumstances and restraints such as Green Belt into account, and working with neighbouring authorities if it would be more appropriate for needs to be met elsewhere. It is recognised that not every community will be able to meet its housing need in full.

I understand that South Tyneside's Local Plan review is undergoing Regulation 18 consultation, due to end on 14 August 2022. The Neighbourhood Forum will have a further opportunity to make representations at the Regulation 19 consultation stage, scheduled for Winter 2022.

We are continuing to monitor the operation of Local Housing Need assessments, particularly as the effect of changes to the way we live and work. We are developing policy on this topic and intend to set out further thinking on direction of travel as soon as we are able to do so.

You mention government intervention, but I take this to be a reference to the fact that South Tyneside Council's Housing Delivery Test result (74%) caused the presumption in favour of sustainable development to be applied. As the Framework makes clear, local authorities which trigger this presumption are expected to approve applications for housing unless policies in the Framework protecting areas or assets of particular importance provide a clear reason for refusing the development, or unless any adverse impacts of approving the proposal would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the Framework's policies taken as a whole. Once again, this is not a matter on which the Department would comment.

Thank you again for writing, and I hope this information is of use.

Yours sincerely

**Alan C Scott**  
*Planning policy adviser*