



**Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government**

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Government**

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Ian Pattenden
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Dear Mr Pattenden

Thank you for your letter of 13 June to the Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP, expressing opposition to a proposal in a draft local Plan to allocate land for a garden village at Tudeley. I have been asked to reply.

It is to the local authority that you should convey any specific concerns about Tudeley. I should explain that, for reasons of propriety, no Minister would intervene in, or even comment on, a proposed Local Plan policy (or planning proposal) on request, because of the Secretary of State's quasi-judicial role in the planning system. If the project you refer to is included in Tunbridge Wells' draft Plan due for publication later this summer, the next stage would be to submit the Plan to formal examination in 2020 by a planning inspector, who acts in the name of the Secretary of State; hence the strict duty of impartiality. The examining inspector will find a Plan sound only if it is properly prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy in the Framework. Once there is policy support for a new land use within an adopted Plan, a planning application to build the garden village would have a greater chance of success, under our 'Plan-led' planning system.

However, you also offered general comments about planning for housing. The Government's expectations of the planning system are spelt out in our National Planning Policy Framework, on the gov.uk website, to which a local authority must have regard when preparing its Local Plan.

We do not instruct local authorities how many houses to build or where to put them. It is for each local authority to determine the area's housing requirement over the lifetime of the Plan, using the standard method explained in our Planning Practice Guidance. This gives the authority a housing need assessment figure to serve as a starting point. The authority has then to plan how it might meet the identified need by considering all relevant local circumstances; determining, for instance, which land would be available locally, whether it is suitable or subject to constraint (such as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), and whether the need might better be met in the area of a neighbouring authority. It can then put its conclusions to the community as part of the Local Plan consultation process, and revise its need figure as and when appropriate.

Your letter mentioned Green Belt. The Framework maintains strong protections for land a local authority has designated Green Belt. It makes clear that openness and permanence are the generally essential characteristics of Green Belt. It has never been the case that an area of Green Belt can never be altered, but any adjustment of a Green Belt boundary could be made only in exceptional circumstances, using the



Local Plan process referred to above. A scheme of 2,800 dwellings would almost certainly be too large to build on land still in Green Belt, so would require the local authority to be convinced that the Green Belt boundary should be adjusted. When we revised the Framework last year, we clarified the 'exceptional circumstances' test. The Framework now makes clear that a local authority can propose a Green Belt boundary alteration only in exceptional circumstances and only if it can show evidenced justification that it has examined all other reasonable options for meeting its identified development needs. The authority should therefore show that it is:

- making as much use as possible of brownfield and under-used land;
- optimising density; and
- discussing with neighbouring authorities whether they could take some of the necessary development, as agreed in a Statement of Common Ground.

Plans are now also expected to set out ways in which the impact of removing land from Green Belt would be offset by compensatory improvements to access and environmental quality in the rest of the Green Belt.

I am advised that the Tudeley garden village scheme does not form part of the Garden Communities Programme, and is not currently supported by our Housing Infrastructure Fund programme. Nevertheless I am grateful to you for taking the trouble to send us your observations, and I hope that you will take part in any further consultation taking place locally.

Yours sincerely,

ALAN C SCOTT
Planning policy adviser