



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

Helen Whately MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Stuart Andrew MP
Minister of State for Housing

*Department for Levelling up, Housing and
Communities*

Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Tel: 0303 444 3430
Email: stuart.andrew@levellingup.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/dluhc

Our Ref: 16435519
Your ref: HW37075

28 March 2022

Dear Helen

Thank you for your email of 8 March to the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, enclosing correspondence from your constituent Dr Harold Goodwin, Chair of The Faversham Society, 6 Plane Tree Court, Church Road, Faversham, Kent, ME13 8GZ, regarding the standard method for calculating local housing need and the protection of greenfield land from development. I am replying as Minister of State for Housing. I am sorry that Dr Goodwin did not receive a reply to his email of 11 January to the Secretary of State.

I would like to start by assuring Dr Goodwin that the Government is very conscious of the effect that development can have on local communities and on our environment. We recognise that it is important to strike a balance between enabling vital development and growth, including the new homes we need, while continuing to protect and enhance the natural environment. Through the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), we have made clear that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. I know how important this is to people in Faversham, who rightly place a high value on the protection of their local and historic environment.

Equally, there is no doubt that we have not been building enough homes to meet our country's need for too long. To support working towards our target to deliver 300,000 homes per year and one million homes over this Parliament, it is important that local authorities plan positively to meet their housing needs. Our NPPF introduced the standard method for calculating local housing need which makes the process of identifying the number of homes needed in an area simple, quick and transparent.

Dr Goodwin asks whether any local planning authority has successfully challenged the standard method and whether speculative development could be avoided if Swale Council decide not to meet the housing requirement arising from the use of the standard method. I hope you will appreciate that, due to the quasi-judicial role of Ministers in the planning system, I am unable to comment on local issues or specific plans. However, I can offer the following general comments to address these points.

The standard method is used by councils to inform the preparation of their Local Plans. Councils decide their own housing requirement once they have considered their ability to meet their own needs in their area. This includes taking local circumstances and constraints into account and working with neighbouring authorities if it would be more appropriate for needs to be met elsewhere. This recognises that not everywhere will be able to meet their housing need in full.

Paragraph 11 of the NPPF sets out that, for the purposes of plan-making, local planning authorities should provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, unless the application of policies in the NPPF to protect the areas, set out in Footnote 7, provide a strong reason for restricting development in the plan area. These policies include National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Green Belt.

Councils can only adopt a plan that is sound. A sound plan should be consistent with national policy, be positively prepared, effective, and based on proportionate evidence. Each plan, including the approach to housing requirements, 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.

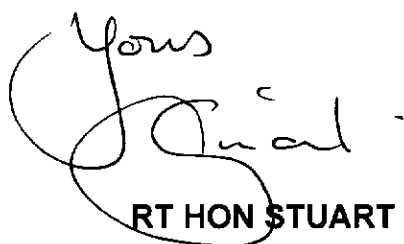
The use of the standard method is not mandatory. If it is felt that circumstances warrant an alternative approach, authorities can expect this to be scrutinised more closely at examination. There is an expectation that the standard method will be used and that any other method will be used only in exceptional circumstances. It is for local councils to evidence and justify their housing requirement figure at examination.

I understand that the emerging Swale Local Plan completed a Regulation 18 consultation stage in November 2021, and that the Council intend to undertake a Regulation 19 consultation on the Plan before it is submitted for examination in May 2022. An up-to-date Local Plan is the best way to protect an area from speculative development. This applies whether the housing requirement figure in the adopted plan was arrived at by using the standard method, or an alternative approach which has been found sound at examination.

I would like to assure Dr Goodwin that we are monitoring the effect of the standard method, particularly as the impact of changes to the way we live and work and levelling up become clear.

Ministers are also considering how best to take forward any changes to the planning system. An announcement on next steps, including further detail on how the changes will contribute to protection for the environment and public access to nature, will be made in due course.

Thank you again for your email. I hope you and Dr Goodwin find this reply helpful.

Yours


RT HON STUART ANDREW MP