



Ministry of Housing,  
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*Sn* March 2019

Dear Jim,

I agreed to write to you following the general debate on the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework in Westminster Hall on 21 February 2019. As promised, I set out below in further detail, the planning policy position in relation to setting housing need.

Thank you for your contribution to what was an excellent debate on the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework. I would reiterate that the Government fully recognises how vital joint working between these authorities is to the success of the Greater Manchester area.

As I explained in the debate, I cannot make any comment on the content or merits of the draft Greater Manchester Spatial Framework, as this could be seen to prejudice the Secretary of State's position at a later point in the planning process. However, I can advise the following in relation to national policy and guidance.

When published in July last year, the revised National Planning Policy Framework introduced the standard method for assessing local housing need. It was introduced, after extensive consultation, to speed up and reduce the cost of the plan-making process and to make the process more transparent and accessible.

The expectation is that the standard method is used to identify the minimum number of homes needed per year (as set out in paragraph 60 of the revised Framework). However, the standard method does not provide a target that must be planned for. If using the standard method, authorities can establish an annual figure. They then plan how to meet that need by considering land availability, relevant constraints, including Green Belt and whether the need is more appropriately met in neighbouring areas.

On Green Belt specifically, I would like to reaffirm that only in exceptional circumstances can a strategic policy-making authority establish the need to alter a Green Belt boundary, using the Plan process of consultation and examination (paragraph 136-137). In fact, the revised National Planning Policy Framework


strengthened this policy by saying that local authorities should show fully evidenced justification for a Green Belt boundary change (paragraph 136).

I would also advise that the use of the standard method is not mandatory. In exceptional circumstances an alternative approach may be used, provided that the approach also reflects current and future demographic trends and market signals (paragraph 60).

During the debate you referenced the 2016-based household projections and made a link to these figures suggesting lower housing need. When they were published in September 2018, these lower projections of household growth resulted in the national minimum annual housing need calculated using the standard method falling significantly; from approximately 269,000 homes prior to the publication of the updated household projections, to approximately 213,000 based on the updated data. This is below the 222,190 homes delivered last year.

To ensure that the standard method remains consistent with delivering more, better-designed homes, faster, we confirmed on 19 February, that the 2014-based household projections, should be used as the demographic baseline for the standard method. This is considered to be the most appropriate approach for providing stability and certainty to the planning system in the short-term.

I hope you find this letter useful.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kit Malthouse', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**KIT MALTHOUSE MP**