



10 DOWNING STREET
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THE PRIME MINISTER

19 March 2013

Dear Crispin

Thank you for your letter of 11 February about the protection of Green Belt where there is no up-to-date Local Plan, and the assessment of housing need.

My support for Green Belt is a matter of public record. A Green Belt boundary can be altered only in exceptional circumstances, through the Local Plan process, with local consultation and robust examination of any proposed change.

The National Planning Policy Framework also asks local authorities to plan to meet assessed local housing needs in full wherever possible. Evidence of housing need (and any evidence about windfall sites) should be gathered locally, and put forward for consideration at examination. You will understand that I cannot get into a discussion about numbers. We simply must build many more homes and - while we all want to see more on brownfield sites - it may be necessary to build some on greenfield sites. That is for local authorities and communities to decide, and highlights the importance of having an up-to-date Local Plan in place.

If no up-to-date Plan is in place, the presumption in favour of sustainable development would apply. However, the Framework makes clear that this presumption would not apply if specific policies - such as those protecting Green Belt - indicate that development should be restricted. The presumption therefore does not 'trump' Green Belt policy.

All I would add is that a local authority must ensure it considers all options when preparing its Plan, especially where there is large housing need that, as matters stand, will not be met. It is up to the authority to decide what course to take, but it will be expected to balance all relevant considerations, including any compelling case for Green Belt review. It will also need to demonstrate at examination that the Local Plan has been positively prepared, is justified, effective, and consistent with national policy.

Yours,
David

Mr Crispin Blunt MP