



Department for Communities and Local Government

Anne Milton MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Nick Boles MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Planning)

**Department for Communities and Local
Government**
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Tel: 0303 444 3459
Fax: 020 7821 0635
E-Mail: nick.boles@communities.gsi.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/dclg

I am writing in response to your additional queries following my letter of 28 November and our subsequent meeting on 15 January, I hope you find the following answers helpful.

Can student housing be included in a local authority's Local Plan housing numbers?

Yes. Student housing makes a significant contribution towards housing supply by taking pressure off demands on housing stock. This Government has clarified guidelines to make it clear that local authorities can include student housing in the calculation of, and the monitoring against, local housing needs regardless of whether they are communal or sited on a university campus.

The definitions page on our website has been amended to make clear that all student accommodation, whether it consists of communal halls of residence or contained dwellings, and whether or not it is on campus, can be included towards the housing provision in local development plans. Further information is available on the housing statistics definitions page of the Department's website at: <https://www.gov.uk/definitions-of-general-housing-terms>

Student housing will also be eligible for the New Homes Bonus. Over time, councils are also compensated through the local government finance system for the revenue shortfall from the long-standing student council tax exemption.

Meeting housing need

This Government does not impose top-down housing targets on local authorities, or ask councils to build more homes than are needed. We have abolished the last Administration's Regional Strategies. The Localism Act also gives councils more discretion to draw up Local Plans, and the National Planning Policy Framework puts Local Plans in the pole position to determine where development should and should not go.

Localism cuts both ways: it also means that councillors need to take (sometimes difficult and challenging) decisions on how and where to provide the housing that our country needs. The National Planning Policy Framework, therefore, asks councils to ensure that their Local Plans meet the full, objectively assessed needs for all types of housing in their areas. The draft National Planning Practice Guidance on the assessment of housing and economic development needs is available at: <http://tinyurl.com/phvqrqu>

Green Belt protection

My letter to you emphasised the importance we continue to attach to Green Belt as a way to prevent sprawl and encroachment on open countryside. The National Planning Policy Framework provides strong protection: it states that permanence is an essential characteristic of Green Belt, that inappropriate development in Green Belt should not be approved except in

very special circumstances, and that a Green Belt boundary may be adjusted only in exceptional circumstances, using the Local Plan process of consultation followed by independent examination.

The Framework also requires planners to recognise the character and beauty of the countryside, to protect other designated land such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, to take into account all the benefits of the best and most versatile farmland, and to encourage re-use of brownfield land if not of high environmental value.

Furthermore, our *Planning Policy for Traveller Sites* which is designed to be read in conjunction with the Framework, makes clear that traveller sites are inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The Written Ministerial Statement of 1 July 2013 set out the Government's concern that some recent planning decisions have not accorded the Green Belt the level of protection that was the explicit policy intent of Ministers. It made clear that the single issue of unmet need - whether for conventional housing or for traveller sites - is unlikely to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and other harm to constitute the 'very special circumstances' justifying inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It revised the appeals recovery criteria issued in 2008 to enable the Secretary of State to recover for closer consideration traveller sites in the Green Belt.

A local authority must have regard to these and all other relevant national planning policies when drafting its Local Plan and when deciding planning proposals that affect Green Belt land. Even where there is no up-to-date Local Plan, the policies protecting areas such as Green Belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty remain in force. This is made clear on page 4 of the National Planning Policy Framework, in relation to plan-making and to individual decisions.

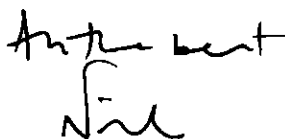
Local authorities – after discussion with the local community and neighbouring authorities - are best placed to determine the right locations for essential development, having regard to national planning policy as appropriate. Our abolition of Regional Strategies removed the top-down pressure on them to review Green Belt boundaries, and central government does not dictate housing numbers. Indeed, whilst Guildford Borough successfully challenged the last Government on the matter, I note that the South East Plan had sought to remove Green Belt protection across Guildford and Woking.

Protection of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Government does not want to see any more open land developed than is absolutely necessary. We have made it quite clear through the National Planning Policy Framework that we are committed to conserving and enhancing the natural environment. For example, the Framework makes clear that Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, together with National Parks and the Broads, enjoy the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.

Paragraph 116 of the Framework explains that planning permission should be refused for major developments in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. We have not defined 'major development' as this will be a matter for the relevant decision maker, taking into account the proposal in question and the local context. I hope this assures you that there is robust protection in place for the Surrey Hills, in addition to the Green Belt.

I hope this letter is of assistance, and please feel free to pass it on to any local residents who may find it of interest.



NICK BOLES MP