



**Department for
Communities and
Local Government**

Councillor Michael Sydney

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Dear Mr Sydney

1 2 JAN 2015

Thank you for your letter of 12 December about Government policy towards the Green Belt. The General Election provided an opportunity for us to reiterate the importance of Green Belt and our policies for its protection, set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. May I reassure you that we have not altered our approach to the Green Belt since my previous reply - ref: 837114, 20 April 2015 - which explained the relationship between the requirement to plan to meet local housing needs and the protection of Green Belt from inappropriate development. It remains a requirement that, in planning to meet the objectively assessed housing needs of its area, a local authority will have due regard to national policies such as Green Belt policy in the Framework which indicate that development should be restricted and which may restrain the ability of an authority to meet its need.

Policy is clear that a Green Belt boundary may be altered only in exceptional circumstances through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. However, if there is a substantial need for housing, say, that cannot be fully met within existing settlement boundaries, and other options have been considered, the local authority may choose to review its Green Belt to re-examine the degree to which it continues to meet the purposes for which it was created. A review does not necessarily mean release of Green Belt, but would establish whether all areas of Green Belt continue to serve a purpose and whether any should make some contribution to meeting housing need. There may be situations where a local authority decides that exceptional circumstances exist that outweigh the degree to which some land contributes to Green Belt objectives, and therefore seeks to remove it from the Green Belt.

We do not define 'exceptional circumstances', but it is a high test, and unlikely to be met unless the circumstances necessitate revision of the Green Belt boundary. For instance, it might be shown that assumptions on which the boundary was based were unfounded, or that some major change has occurred that justifies redefinition of the boundary. Any such arguments and evidence would be carefully scrutinised at examination by an independent Planning Inspector. Whether particular circumstances are exceptional is a matter of planning judgment. You may also find it helpful to look at the supporting planning guidance at: http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk/blog/guidance/housing-and-economic-land-availability-assessment/stage-5-final-evidence-base/#paragraph_044

BRANDON LEWIS MP

pp

SIGNED ON BEHALF
OF MINISTER IN
HIS/HER
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