



Matthew Pennycook MP
Minister for Housing and Planning
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
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29 April 2025

Dear Minister,

The National Planning Policy Framework and the Grey Belt

Thank you for your letter of 18 March, responding to Lord Moylan's letter marking the conclusion of the Built Environment Committee's inquiry into national planning policy and the grey belt.

The Committee read your letter with interest and was grateful for the response to the extent that it dealt with some of the issues Lord Moylan raised in his letter. However, I am afraid to say we were ultimately left dissatisfied with several of the answers you provided and would like to request further clarification. Indeed, we felt that several questions were entirely overlooked, or the answers provided were brief, opaque or inexplicit, and we would respectfully ask that you address them when responding to this letter.

Interaction with other policy

We welcome the additional funding the Government has provided and will continue to provide to local authorities in support of the preparation of local plans and Green Belt reviews. We also note your commitment to consultation on the implementation of policy, and the publication of your equality analysis examining the impact of your proposed changes to the planning system on those with protected characteristics.

Nonetheless, we remain concerned that the Government has not fully considered the implications of implementing so many intrinsically linked planning policies simultaneously or in quick succession. Besides the additional funding, and the promise of further consultation, there appears to be little in the way of systems and process the Government can draw on to measure the impact of its policies.

Furthermore, we request an explicit answer to the question below, which was not addressed in your initial response:

What resources is the Government drawing on, or seeking to create, to understand and assess the impact and interdependencies of its planning policy developments?

Tracking Progress & Measuring Success

We were disappointed with your response regarding how you plan to track progress and measure the success of these policies. We remain concerned that there are no robust measures in place to assess the specific effects of the Government's policies across different dimensions. While there may be measures to assess the delivery of new homes, and how much Green Belt land has been released, the scope of the changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) are likely to entail consequences that reach significantly further than can be measured by these two metrics alone.

Notably, one of the questions posed by the Committee in its letter was not answered at all in your response. As such, we would request an explicit answer to the following question:

What steps will the Government be able to take in the event that it appears that the 1.5 million homes target will not be reached?

Planning Resourcing

The Committee welcomes many aspects of your response regarding planning resourcing and are pleased to hear that the recruitment target for additional planners is due to be met in 2026. Additional funding and support for local authorities preparing their local plans is a positive step and we welcome measures aimed at creating a pipeline of trained planners.

However, we are not satisfied with your answer to our query regarding the 300 additional planners. We note that this commitment featured in the Labour Party manifesto for the 2024 General Election but there is no indication of how this figure was reached. We would therefore request an explicit answer to the following question:

How did the Government arrive at the figure of 300 additional planners, and what long term benefits do they expect these additional planners to provide for local authorities?

Sustainability

In its letter, the Committee highlighted how what constitutes a 'sustainable location' was not defined in the final NPPF and asked whether this definition could be updated. We were therefore disappointed to read that the definition of 'sustainable' has become, if anything, less precise, and more dependent on factors specific to the site in question, and to the local context.

Conclusion

As Lord Moylan explained in his letter of 5 February, at the start of its inquiry the then Committee was favourably disposed towards the grey belt policy and further encouraged by the alacrity with which many of the changes to the policy that our witnesses requested were implemented prior to the conclusion of our inquiry. This did, however, then give rise to a number of pressing further questions. It was important that these were properly addressed so as to give us, and the wider public, confidence that planning policy was being reformed in a considered, targeted, and strategic manner, and in a way that considered the knock-on impact of each proposed reform on the complex web of planning law and policy. We regret

that your response and, in particular, your failure to address several of our questions and does not give us this confidence and we ask that you address our questions fully.

We look forward to receiving your response within 10 working days of the date of this letter.

Your sincerely,

Lord Gascoigne, Chair of the Built Environment Committee