



Tom Morrison MP

Member of Parliament for Constituency Name

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Tel: 0161 428 9919

Planning Policy Consultation Team
Planning Directorate – Planning Policy Division
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Floor 3, Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

23 September 2024

RE: Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system

I am writing as the Member of Parliament for Cheadle, to the proposed reforms to the NPPF and other changes to the planning system.

It is frustrating that the Government is seeking to provide further instability with yet another change when the latest guidance was only published in December 2023.

Because of the December “review” Stockport Council was forced to pause its Local Plan process until proper guidance was published. Then, just as the Council was about to publish its draft plan for consultation, the Government’s decision to reconsult on the NPPF has meant further delay.

This uncertainty and lack of coherent thought has meant Stockport has yet again been left without any guidance or clarity, while the Government tinkers with national policy. This has been deeply unhelpful and has left residents, councillors and businesses frustrated.

I respond here to the issues that I believe will most impact my constituents in Cheadle. Where possible I have provided the headlines and titles in the consultation document for ease.

Chapter 2 – Policy objectives

I am pleased to see the Government renew its commitment to Brownfield-first development. Many of my constituents are worried that changes in the NPPF will result in Stockport Council having to open up parts of the Green Belt for development. There are many suitable Brownfield sites across Stockport that could be used to develop the homes we need, and these should be looked at first. I hope that this objective is sincere and not just as stock phrase to cover the Government politically.

I also agree with the Government’s commitment to ensure the biggest increase in social housing in a generation. For too long, the housing market has been dominated by unaffordable homes that cannot be bought by anyone making an average wage in the UK. By boosting social (and truly affordable) house building, the current market could be disrupted and therefore provide my constituents with more housing options. This should be commended.



Tom Morrison MP

Member of Parliament for Constituency Name

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Tel: 0161 428 9919

The Liberal Democrats committed to developing around 150,000 social homes in its manifesto, and I hope the Government would match this ambition going forward.

Chapter 3 – Planning for the homes we need

There is a disconnect between the Government's objectives in this chapter. The removal of alternative approaches to assessing housing need contradicts Policy Objective F - "ensure communities continue to shape housebuilding in their areas".

The proposed changes to the NPPF will ensure that it is harder for any local authority to defend Green Belt development going forward. If the Government truly wants a brownfield-first approach, then more support and backing must be given to local authorities to do this, something that this change will not do.

The housing targets being placed on Stockport will in effect double what was previously being sought. This will leave the local authority with very little option but to look outside the many brownfield sites it has to meet the top-down housing targets.

I would urge the Government to put greater emphasis on securing Green Belt land in this section, by offering further support for those wanting to focus on brownfield first policies and to place greater, more explicit restrictions on Green Belt release.

Further more, I would urge the Government to put a number on the amount of social homes it expects the NPPF to deliver. Housing targets for market release homes will play well for developers, but we need to build the houses that people need – affordable and social housing, by ignoring these in target settings, the Government is failing communities.

Chapter 4 - A new Standard Method for assessing housing needs

These are targets, set by the Government, for local authorities to meet. This is exactly what the Conservative Government did and it is a shame to see the new Government follow suit.

The Liberal Democrats have long campaigned for housebuilding to be driven by communities. We all know houses need to be built, every poll or focus group shows us this, however people are fed up with arbitrary targets being set on them by Westminster.

The new Standard Method is just more of the same.

I have already outlined above that these new targets will in effect double the amount of homes that Stockport Council needs to deliver. I do not believe that this will increase affordability, but will instead play to developers who will only look at maximising profits by developing larger executive homes, with very little thought to the infrastructure and services required to meet the increase in population.



Tom Morrison MP

Member of Parliament for Constituency Name

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Tel: 0161 428 9919

The Government's new category of "Grey Belt" is not defined enough and open to misinterpretation. Whilst I welcome the Government's plans to close the loophole that can see previously developed land allocated as "Green Belt", the lack of definition contained in the new NPPF means that it will likely cause more confusion and frustration when planning applications start to come forward. I would urge the Government to set out a clear, unambiguous definition for Grey Belt.

Finally, I believe the Government's encouragement of neighbouring authorities to work together to meet housing needs is nothing more than a distraction.

The new standard method will see an increase of housing targets across the board, with those authorities neighbouring Stockport facing a huge increase. This means the opportunity to "spread the load" will not work in Greater Manchester, as every authority (except for two) will have to identify further sites for development to meet their own targets.

Greater Manchester has been on a long, and often contentious, journey with its region-wide development framework (known as Places for Everyone). The increase of housing targets now calls into question this policy, which most of the region's authorities participated in – but not Stockport, which preferred a locally-driven, community first approach to housing development.

In conclusion, whilst I understand the Government's plans for economic growth is very much underpinned by the need for growth in housing, the changes to the NPPF are sadly more of the same failed policies.

The changes make the same mistake as the previous government in thinking that housebuilding can only be delivered by Westminster-set targets, whilst the lip service to social and affordable housing is not backed up by any specific policy KPI. The Government has claimed that it encourages a brownfield first approach, but this is not backed up in the detail which will favour developers over communities.

I urge a rethink of these proposals.

Yours,

Tom Morrison
Member of Parliament for Cheadle