

**LEE ROWLEY MP**  
North East Derbyshire



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP  
Minister of State for Housing  
Ministry for Housing, Communities & Local Government  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

29<sup>th</sup> July 2021

*Dear Chris,*

**North East Derbyshire Draft Local Plan 2014 – 2034**

I hope you are well.

North East Derbyshire's draft Local Plan has been substantially improved in recent years but, in truth, is still not the document that our local communities can be fully supportive of.

After the recent disappointing news that the Planning Inspector is not proposing any further material changes to the Green Belt element of the document, I write to formally request that you consider modifying the document directly through the removal of the remaining four Green Belt sites. I make this request for the following reasons:

- That there remains no clear justification for the inclusion of these sites within the document given that the housing targets are highly likely to be met without them;
- That the Inspectorate themselves, back in 2019, has already removed some Green Belt sites from the Plan given that the District's housing target was likely to be met without them – but have not extended their logic in the most recent (and final stage) of the consultation when the situation has improved even further, and;
- That North East Derbyshire, as a District whose previous leadership did not take the right decisions at the right time on planning, has made substantial efforts since 2019 to improve from that sorry position – and should not be penalised for earlier poor drafting.

Planning is an extraordinarily difficult subject and I recognise that, as Minister, you have a hugely challenging job in ensuring we protect and enhance local environments whilst also ensuring that the next generation can get on the housing ladder and enjoy the safety and security of home ownership. There are no easy answers that everyone can agree with and we know that there are debates raging at the current time about future reforms.

Yet, from the perspective of North East Derbyshire, my request for your intervention is a much simpler one – that a District, which was called out for its deficient approach to planning back in 2017, can finally adopt a Plan which reduces speculative development but, in doing so, does not have to unnecessarily sacrifice Green Belt because of failures based on the decisions of local politicians many years ago who have been removed from their posts by the electorate.

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I realise that it is somewhat unconventional to request a change at this late stage of the plan and civil servant experts are likely to tell you that requests such as this should have been dealt with at an earlier stage of development. They would be right. As someone involved in local politics for a considerable time and, as the MP since 2017, I pushed for the old administration at the District Council to progress the plan, to engage with the community and to ensure it had public confidence many years ago. That old Council leadership chose not to do that and, instead, to present a draft plan which had the double negative of proposing extraordinarily large – and unnecessary – development in the Green Belt and one which came so late that it also permitted a substantial amount of speculative development in the interim, including over 1,000 houses in the south of the District. It was a complete abdication of responsibility from the old administration and one which has left a negative legacy which will last for many years – and one that the new local Council, elected in 2019, are trying to clean up where they can.

And that is the root of the problem here. Effectively, North East Derbyshire is between the proverbial rock and hard place on this draft Local Plan. The Plan itself remains sub-optimal – most materially through the continuing inclusion of these four Green Belt sites which are not needed in order to hit the housebuilding numbers for 2034. Yet starting again was not an option for the new District Council when they took over in 2019; the Department for Communities had already warned the Council that it was failing in terms of its Local Plan progress and, more obviously, if a restart was attempted, it would likely leave open the District to further speculative development – and, most likely, see these Green Belt sites built on in any case.

The ludicrousness of the situation was clear at an earlier stage in the Local Plan process in 2019 when, after a sustained campaign by thousands of local residents and Councillors, the Inspector told the old administration that they were seeking to build on too many Green Belt sites. That relatively unprecedented move meant that sites covering around 700 potential houses were removed by the Inspector. As the MP, I was delighted by that move at the time and am very grateful to the Inspector that she listened to views of local communities and improved the Plan substantially at that stage of examination.

We were hopeful, therefore, that two years further down the line and in the final examination prior to a decision about whether to adopt, that the Inspector might have applied her logic one further time and remove the remaining sites, too. In the period since 2019, there has been a further substantial improvement in the housing position in North East Derbyshire with the likelihood that even the stretch target loaded by the previous Council will be significantly over-shot. As a result, it is our view that the “*exceptional circumstances*” test for Green Belt removal is no longer met and the remaining four Green Belt sites should be removed. Thus, whilst we were grateful that the Inspector’s Main Modification proposals, dated 19th July, did re-confirm her 2019 intent to remove some Green Belt sites, we were disappointed that she did not go further and remove the remainder (nor, I’m afraid, did she provide any further commentary which would help us understand why).

Consequently, my request, on behalf of many thousands of residents in North East Derbyshire and local Councillors who have fought so hard to protect their communities, is a simple one: that you undertake one final modification to the document and remove the final four Green Belt sites prior to allowing North East Derbyshire to adopt it. Whilst the document is certainly better than it was, taking this final step would be hugely welcomed by a District which has been so badly hit

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by poor decision-making for so long and which, finally, we are so close to starting to resolve this element of the long-standing mess.

We know that, as Minister, you will have regular conversations about the Local Plan process and you will be often contacted by local areas who want you to intervene in their area to try to fix issues which should have been solved locally. We also understand that you must have broader regard to considerations of precedence and the very late nature of this request. We also know it is extremely unusual for a Minister to intervene in the way we are asking. Yet, I hope you can see that this request comes from a District that does want to do the right thing, which does want to sort out the problems it has been left by others and which could not easily solve these issues at an earlier stage given these poor initial decisions were made by politicians no longer in post. We understand that the request we are making is unusual, and may not be possible, but would be grateful if you would make this final intervention to improve the draft Plan in a way which would help residents more easily support it.

I hope you will look favourably upon our request and I am happy to meet to discuss, or provide further information, should it be helpful in your deliberations. To provide further detail, I also have enclosed a copy of the submission provided to the Planning Inspector as part of the Main Modification consultation which outlines the technicalities of the final modification which we are seeking.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lee Rowley'.

Lee Rowley  
Member of Parliament for North East Derbyshire