



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

Councillor Stuart Selleck  
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**Lord Greenhalgh**  
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**Ministry of Housing, Communities and  
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1 September 2020

Dear Councillor Selleck,

Thank you for your letter of 27 January about the impact of the standard method for calculating local housing need in Elmbridge, with particular reference to development in the Green Belt and the capacity of local authorities to take on the housing needs of neighbouring areas. I sincerely apologise for the long delay in replying.

To get enough homes built in the places where people and communities need them, a crucial first step is to plan for the right number of homes. The standard method was originally introduced to make the process of identifying the number of homes needed in an area simple, quick and transparent. It provides a minimum number of homes, not a maximum, and does not provide a target. Local authorities should make a realistic assessment of the number of homes their communities need, using the standard method as the starting point in the process. Once this has been established, planning to meet that need will require consideration of land availability, relevant constraints such as Green Belt, and whether the need is more appropriately met in neighbouring areas.

In February 2019, short-term changes were made to the standard method, with planning practice guidance being changed to specify that the 2014-based household projections were to be used within the standard method. This short-term change was proposed to offer stability at the same time as ensuring the standard method remained consistent with our supply aspirations. When the short-term change was implemented, we committed to undertake a review and bring forward longer term options.

I am pleased to confirm that review has been undertaken and we are currently consulting on a new proposed standard method in our consultation, *Changes to the current planning system*. We would welcome your views as part of this consultation which is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-current-planning-system>.

We expect local authorities to work together to plan for and deliver the housing and infrastructure our communities need. The duty to co-operate is a statutory requirement on councils and other public bodies to work together constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis in relation to planning for strategic cross boundary matters during plan preparation. I would emphasise that the

duty to co-operate is not a duty to agree. Any re-distribution of housing need from one authority to another must be agreed upon by the authorities directly affected and must be deliverable. In our White Paper, *Planning for the future*, we are consulting on wider reforms to the planning system which will streamline and modernise the planning process, bring a new focus to design and sustainability, improve the system of developer contributions to infrastructure, and ensure more land is available for development where it is needed. One of the key proposals is that development plans will, for the first time, put all land into one of three categories: areas for growth, for renewal or for protection. The protected areas are those where recognised constraints exist such as the Green Belt, as well as open countryside which lies outside the other two categories. The White Paper is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future> .

Again, we would welcome your views as part of this consultation.

Thank you for writing in on these important matters.

Two handwritten signatures in black ink, one on the left and one on the right, both appearing to be cursive and somewhat stylized.

**LORD GREENHALGH**