Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Rt Hon Matthew Pennycook MP
Minister of State for Housing and Planning
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Our reference: PO2026/28553

Cllr Fran Belbin
Leader, Sheffield City Council
Town Hall
Sheffield
S1 2HH

19 October 2026

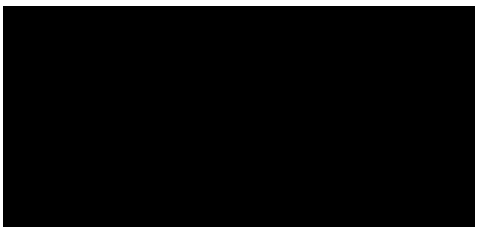
Dear Cllr Fran Belbin,

Thank you for your correspondence of 21 September regarding the Sheffield Local Plan.

I appreciate how important this matter is, and I am grateful to you for taking the time to write. I have asked my officials to address your concerns in the letter appended. Please be assured that I am conscious of the matters you have raised, and I appreciate the insight your correspondence provides.

I hope the attached response suitably addresses your enquiry. If that is not the case, please don't hesitate to let me know.

Best wishes,



RT HON MATTHEW PENNYCOOK MP
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Dear Cllr Fran Belbin,

Thank you for your correspondence to which the Housing Minister has asked me to reply. The Government understands the strength of feeling that many people share about the protection of our countryside and Green Belt land, and we appreciate you taking the time to share your constituents' concerns.

I'm sure you will appreciate that, due to the Secretary of State's quasi-judicial role in the planning system, the Department is unable to comment on the details of a specific local plan. It would also not be possible for the Housing Minister to meet to discuss the Plan. However, I can provide the following general comments that I hope you will find helpful.

The benefits of an up-to-date local plan are significant. They are the best way for communities to shape decisions about how to deliver the housing and wider development their areas need. They enable local areas to set their strategy for future growth and their approach to protecting and enhancing the environment, and they provide the certainty and confidence required to bring development forward across the country.

I understand the emerging Sheffield Local Plan has been at examination since 2023. Subject to the Plan being found sound by the Inspectors, its adoption would provide the best protection against development coming forward on a piecemeal and speculative basis with reduced public engagement and fewer guarantees that it will make the most of an area's potential.

As the Plan is currently under examination, it is for the appointed independent Inspectors to assess whether it is legally compliant and sound. As you outline, through both the plan-making and examination processes, local communities and stakeholders have had the opportunity to submit representations, and they have been given the opportunity to do so again through the ongoing Further Main Modifications consultation. It is therefore for the Inspectors to consider those representations before reaching their conclusions and issuing their final report. Once that report has been published, and if the Plan is found sound, it will be for the Council to consider its adoption.

I recognise your strong drive to account for views expressed by members of your community. The Government is committed to ongoing protection for England's Green Belts, which have served us well over many decades, checking the sprawl of large built-up areas and preventing the unwanted merging of towns. However, it has also not shied away from the need to deliver a more strategic and targeted approach to the Green Belt. The Government knows that in some places brownfield alone will not always be enough to meet development needs, which is local authorities who cannot meet their needs are being asked to review their Green Belt to identify opportunities to create affordable, well-designed development in sustainable locations. The Government still expects local authorities to prioritise the development of brownfield and other low-quality grey belt land.

The Government is ensuring rules that provide a "default yes" to suitable planning applications for development within a reasonable walking distance of well-connected stations, including suitable locations in the Green Belt. Where Green Belt land has to be released for major housing development, the 'golden rules' help to ensure that development delivers higher levels of affordable housing; the provision of new, or improvements to, existing green spaces that are accessible to the public; and the making of necessary improvements to local or national infrastructure.

The new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published on 17 August 2026 and sets out that development plans should safeguard and enhance the natural environment. Development plans should reflect the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services by using Local Nature Recovery Strategies and other relevant evidence to set out areas of importance for their landscape, geodiversity or biodiversity value in the plan area. They should also identify opportunities for the conservation, enhancement and recovery of habitats and species, including through the use of nature based solutions and steering the location of development in ways which utilise the land of least environmental value and avoid the use of higher quality agricultural land, where land of poorer quality is available.

The NPPF introduces a new requirement for development plans to set out standards for green infrastructure provision, defined as a network of multifunctional green and blue spaces, drawing upon Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework. The Green Infrastructure Framework includes a standard on accessible greenspace which sets criteria on size, proximity and quality. Furthermore, national planning policy remains clear that the designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular value to them.

Each local authority determines planning applications in the light of the Local Plan and all other material considerations, including policies in the NPPF. It is for the decision-maker to consider which facts or circumstances are relevant, and how much weight to give them. Where inappropriate development is proposed in Green Belt, it is up to the decision-maker to judge whether very special circumstances outweigh the potential harm to the Green Belt.

Thank you for taking the time to write.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Deputy Principal Private Secretary