



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Sir Michael Pitt
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Nick Boles MP

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Dear Sir Michael Pitt,

Inspectors' Reports on Local Plans

I was very troubled by the media coverage of the recent Inspector's report on the examination into the Reigate and Banstead Local Plan. On reading the report, I was disturbed by the Inspector's use of language, which invited misinterpretation of government policy and misunderstanding about the local authority's role in drawing up all of the policies in the draft plan. I am writing to restate very clearly the Government's view of Green Belt policy and Local Plan examinations.

Fundamental to the National Planning Policy Framework and to this Government's planning reforms is the idea that local authorities, and the communities who elect them, are in charge of planning for their own areas. That is why we abolished the top down regional strategies, why we have emphasised the primacy of the Local Plan and why we gave communities the powers to create neighbourhood plans.

Alongside these reforms we were always very clear that we would maintain key protections for the countryside and, in particular, for the Green Belt. The National Planning Policy Framework met this commitment in full. The Framework makes clear that a Green Belt boundary may be altered only in exceptional circumstances and reiterates the importance and permanence of the Green Belt. The special role of Green Belt is also recognised in the framing of the presumption in favour of sustainable development, which sets out that authorities should meet objectively assessed needs *unless* specific policies in the Framework indicate development should be restricted. Crucially, Green Belt is identified as one such policy.

It has always been the case that a local authority could adjust a Green Belt boundary through a review of the Local Plan. It must however always be transparently clear that it is the local authority itself which has chosen that path – and it is important that this is reflected in the drafting of Inspectors' reports. The Secretary of State will consider exercising his statutory powers of intervention in Local Plans before they are adopted where a planning inspector has recommended a Green Belt review that is not supported by the local planning authority.

I would be grateful if you could circulate a copy of this letter to all Inspectors and ensure that they understand the need to choose their words carefully and reflect government policy very

clearly in all future reports. I am also placing a copy of this letter in the public domain.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nick Boles". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent vertical stroke at the beginning.

NICK BOLES MP