

Contact:

Councillor Robert Salisbury Tel: 07831 599 960
email: robert.salisbury@midsussex.gov.uk

Date: 2nd March 2023

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Secretary of State,

Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: Reforms to National Planning Policy - Consultation

The Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: Reforms to National Planning Policy consultation. Mid Sussex District Council has carefully considered the content and a full response is attached.

We are pleased that many of the changes this Council has long been campaigning for are included in the Government's proposals. These will make a significant difference to the communities' support for plan making. In particular, we **support the proposal to remove the requirement for a 5-year housing land supply** which currently increases the risk of speculative, unplanned development.

This Council takes a positive and plan led approach to delivering development to meet local needs. We adopted the District Plan in 2018 which meets the district's housing need, as well as contributing towards unmet needs in neighbouring authorities. In addition, a Site Allocations Development Plan Document was adopted in 2022 which allocates sites up to 2031. Finally, to maintain an up-to-date Plan and resist unplanned, speculative development, the Council is currently reviewing the District Plan. A draft was subject to Regulation 18 consultation in November 2022 and it is anticipated this will be submitted for examination this year.

The Council therefore supports proposed amendments to the planning system which will help accelerate plan-making, provide certainty for communities, and better reflect local characteristics. The attached response provides technical detail on the consultation proposals. However, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the key additional changes this Council would urge the Government to make.

Working together for a better Mid Sussex

Local Characteristics that should be considered as exceptional circumstances

The Council considers that there are several key local characteristics which should be considered as exceptional circumstances when assessing local housing needs:

- **Demographic Characteristics – household projections.** Due to specific local demographic circumstances which impact on the household projections used to identify housing need, the Council should be supported to use the most recent household projections which more appropriately reflect local needs. Currently, Councils must use outdated 2014-based household projections, which do not reflect the current need despite more recent projections being available.
- **Economic Characteristics – adjustment for affordability.** The adjustment for affordability requires Councils to use workplace affordability ratios. Evidence shows that residence-based affordability ratios, which account for earnings potential from those that out-commute, is a more accurate way of reflecting affordability in our district. This is because 44 per cent of our residents out commute and can secure higher income levels.
- **Environmental Characteristics** such as the presence of designated landscapes. Mid Sussex is 50% Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, only 12% within a designated built-up area with the remainder set in countryside.
- **Prevailing Rural Character.** The district is characterised by villages and market towns, therefore landscape sensitivity and implications for heights and density should be a consideration.

We believe these refinements of the proposals would better reflect local housing need, respond to local characteristics, and will therefore be more acceptable to the community. This in turn could reduce the risk of delay in plan-making and speed-up delivery of much needed new homes.

Duty to Co-Operate

The transitional proposals relating to the Duty to Co-Operate are unclear, the current inconsistencies must be addressed.

The Council awaits further details regarding the proposed alignment test and recognises that the Duty to Co-Operate will not be removed until legislation has been amended (proposed for late 2024). However, the Council has concerns that there are inconsistencies between the proposed amendments and the transitional arrangements for Local Plans currently in progress. These inconsistencies will need further clarification to ensure Local Plans have the best chance of succeeding at examination.

Transitional Arrangements

The transitional arrangements are too long and disadvantage Councils who want their plans to be examined under the proposed new system.

The Council wants to progress its plan making by ensuring an up-to-date plan is in place to avoid speculative unplanned development. Therefore, the Council would like to take advantage of the positive changes proposed as soon as the new proposals are implemented thereby avoiding a delay to the review of our plan. The current transitional arrangements are too long to support Councils such as Mid Sussex whose plan making is 'in flight'. We would urge the Government to revisit the transitional arrangements to introduce an earlier date when Councils can be examined under the new system.

I trust that you will carefully consider the Council's detailed response which is attached.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Salisbury', with a large, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Councillor Robert Salisbury
Cabinet Member for Planning