

Alison McGovern MP
Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness
Department of Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Minister,

I am writing to raise concerns on behalf of Ascot and Sunninghill Parish Council regarding the current and future status of Neighbourhood Plans (NPs), how they should be applied at present and how the Government intends to proceed as part of its reorganisation of local government.

This has come to my attention on account of a major development project which the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council seems to be pushing ahead with, despite its seeming failure to meet criteria in the local Neighbourhood Plan as well as the relevant Supplementary Planning Document. As such, I am hoping you will be able to clarify several questions that the parish have raised.

In particular, I would appreciate some clarity on how local plans interact when there is conflict between overlapping parish and borough council plans. In the case of the Windsor constituency, the Borough Local Plan (BLP) was adopted after the Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale Neighbourhood Plan, yet the Borough now treats the Neighbourhood Plan as having been effectively superseded by their own local plan. I would be grateful if you could confirm whether this is a position supported by national policy, and whether it aligns with the legal status of Neighbourhood Plans as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

There are also frequent references to the “tilted balance” in decision-making, particularly where a local authority may lack a five-year housing land supply. Is the tilted balance formally recognised as part of national planning policy, and what guidance has been issued to ensure consistent application by planning authorities and inspectors?

Our parish was one of the first in the country to adopt a Neighbourhood Plan. However, given rapidly changing policies and contexts at both local and national level this plan now requires an update. This work has become more difficult due to the withdrawal of the £10,000 Government support grant that previously helped communities develop and maintain these plans.

I would be grateful for clarification on how local groups are expected to fund the updating of existing Neighbourhood Plans. Specifically, are parish councils permitted to use Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds for this purpose?

More generally, there is also growing uncertainty around the long-term role of Neighbourhood Plans in the wider planning system given the scale of upcoming local

government reforms. The Parish Council and I would welcome reassurance that Neighbourhood Plans remain a valued part of the system, and clarification on whether there are any intentions to reduce or phase out their influence as part of the Government's ongoing planning reform agenda.

I want to ensure that local people retain a meaningful voice in the future planning policy for their area, especially where time and effort has gone into these plans.

Given the that pace at which the local development is advancing, I would appreciate a timely response to these questions.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Jack Rankin MP