



**Department for Levelling Up,  
Housing & Communities**

**Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP**  
*Minister of State for Housing*


***Department for Levelling up, Housing and  
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Councillor Alex Rennie  
Leader  
Havant Borough Council  
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Thank you for your letter of 8 December addressed to both Rt Hon Michael Gove MP and myself about the Havant Local Plan. I am replying as Minister of State for Housing.

I note that the Local Plan remains at examination. I am unable to comment.

The Government's priority for getting plans in place by 2023 has not changed. After the consultation on the White Paper last year, I reiterated the importance of having up to date plans in place in my Written Ministerial Statement of 19 January 2021. Plan makers should continue to prioritise getting up to date plans in place under the relevant National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) by this date. Having an effective, up to date plan in place is essential to planning for and meeting housing requirements; in ways that make good use of land and result in well-designed and attractive places to live. The Government expects local authorities to work together to plan for and deliver the housing and infrastructure our communities need.

I am aware the Inspectors' Interim Findings Report concluded that withdrawal of the plan and a return to the regulation 19 stage 'would be the most efficient, cost effective and likely quickest route to the adoption of a sound and legally compliant plan'. I do accept that you are disappointed by the conclusions in this report but, for the reasons I have stated above, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on that. The independent Inspectors play an important role in examining plans impartially to ensure that they are legally compliant, and sound and it is for your Council to respond to the Inspectors' letter as you see fit.

I recognise the challenges that this poses to local planning authorities and the effects of this for development and the local economy. Together with DEFRA, my department has set up a monthly cross-Government task force to ensure a clear action plan is in place, focusing on solutions for permitting housebuilding to resume without compromising the condition of Protected Sites. I chair this alongside Minister Pow, and draw on input from across Government, including Natural England and the Environment Agency. Through this, we are exploring the range of short-, medium-, and longer-term options, from practical support and guidance for LPAs, through to considering the role of wastewater treatment and the water industry, through to regulation of agricultural practices. Alongside this, we are continuing to support Local Planning Authorities through the work of the Planning Advisory Service.

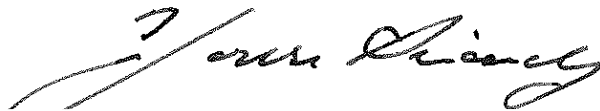
I appreciate that the rapid changes in advice from Natural England are unhelpful for you as the Local Planning Authority. Due to the requirement to act in a precautionary manner, if there are any indications of adverse effects in the Habitat Regulations, Natural England cannot forewarn of forthcoming issues. As competent authority, you would be required to factor in the harm to the site

as soon as you were notified of any potential for development to do harm, which would include such a warning. I understand Minister Pow is writing to you separately in more detail on this matter and am reassured by NE that there are workable solutions available to mitigate any potential effects and that these mechanisms are comparatively well-established in other parts of the country facing similar pressure (for example, around the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area).

I note your concerns about meeting the requirements of the 5-year land supply and the Housing Delivery Test under current circumstances. However, it is important to keep the planning system moving to enable it to play its full part in the economic recovery to come. As you note, we have made an adjustment to reflect the effects of COVID-19 on housebuilding and we will continue to monitor the situation by engaging with those local authorities who are facing challenges. Where the presumption in favour of sustainable development is applied, this will not be at the expense of important protected areas, such as the Green Belt, Ancient Woodland, and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. They will continue to be protected through policies in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Finally, should you decide - in line with the Inspectors' recommendation – to withdraw the Local Plan and return to the Regulation 19 stage of the process, I will ask my officials to contact your planning team to see how we can best offer to support you, for example through utilising the Planning Advisory Service.

Thank you again for your letter. I hope you find this information helpful.



**RT HON CHRISTOPHER PINCHER MP**