



STOCKPORT
METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillor Mark Roberts

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Matthew Pennycook MP
Minister of State for Housing and Planning
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
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24th September 2025

Dear Minister,

I note your letter dated 16 September 2025, regarding the progression of Stockport Council's Local Plan and your decision to issue a formal direction under Section 15(4) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

It is unfortunate that your department did not look a little more closely at the situation in Stockport before singling us out for intervention.

It is not the case that we have been failing to make progress with a Local Plan. This administration committed to delivering a Local Plan that delivered the right homes in the right places, but by protecting the precious Green Belt that is so valued by our residents. Indeed, a draft Local Plan was published ready for Regulation 18 consultation on 19th July 2024.

That draft Local Plan delivered a true "brownfield first" regeneration of our borough, providing 85% of the housing need as assessed by the previous government, without the need to release Green Belt. This was the only way of ensuring our brownfield sites would truly be used first. The papers for this are in the public domain.

We were prevented from publishing this draft Plan earlier by the pre-election periods for the Local Elections and then General Election held last year. The delay meant scheduling our consultation for last autumn, after the summer holiday period, to ensure our residents had the best chance of engaging with it. Your government then gave notice that the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was to be amended yet again, and imposed much higher housing targets.

The transitional arrangements prevented us continuing to Regulation 18 consultation and the new housing targets represent an almost doubling of the number of houses your government now insist be built in Stockport - a number that can only be achieved by concreting over vast swathes of the Green Belt.

The revised NPPF was not published until December 2024. The guidance on Green Belt Assessments – crucial for boroughs like Stockport who will now be forced to build on sites that are precious to our communities – did not appear until February of this year, much later than your department promised. This delay once again meant we could not go out to consultation as planned this May.

Cllr Mark Roberts
Leader of the Council
Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group



Consultants, paid for by the grant from your department, have been working diligently throughout, trying to anticipate the changes that would be coming and then acting on the actual guidance when it was received. Those grant funds were used to carry out the review of Green Belt your government has demanded, using your criteria to identify the land you do not value highly enough to be protected from development any longer. Despite our fundamental disagreement with this approach, we are following your rules and that work is very near completion.

Given the delays faced, we updated our plans for consultation at our cross-party Development Plan Working Group in July. These were already broadly in line with the timetable now imposed by your formal direction. We have already signed-off the Executive Decision for a new Local Development Scheme that aligns with your direction which will be formally issued once the standard call-in period for Executive Decisions has passed.

You mention in your letter that we last adopted a Local Plan in 2011 (under a Liberal Democrat administration) and that it is over four years since the Council voted to withdraw from the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (under a Conservative-backed Labour administration, in place until May 2022). We have been playing catch-up since then and had to ride the storm of the chaotic Conservative government that preceded you.

As I say, it is disappointing that your department did not fully appraise you of our situation in Stockport. It is also disappointing that they did not reach out to our officers until some moments before your letter was issued. It does rather feel that we have been unfairly singled out to be made an example of.

Whilst we accept your authority to direct us to progress with the Local Plan that your government want for Stockport, I must put on record that this is not the Plan that we want to deliver.

We wanted to ensure that our brownfield sites could be developed first, rather than giving large developers a charter to concrete over swathes of our Green Belt regardless of the views of local residents or their democratically elected representatives. Yes, your government do have a mandate to build 1.5 million homes. As local councillors, all elected on a manifesto to protect our Green Belt, sustainably develop in our urban core and on brownfield sites, we Liberal Democrats also have a mandate.

You are making it clear to our residents that your government do not respect this or the views of local councillors and local people. We will ensure our residents know that this is the Local Plan your government want for Stockport, not what the council or indeed the Liberal Democrats want, and that we are forced to follow your new planning rules.



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My officers have asked me to seek clarification over one issue about your directive.

The national deadline for submission of Local Plans for inspection under the current arrangements was extended by the former Secretary of State to 31st December 2026.

We are being directed to submit by 30th November 2026.

Is this an error or is there a reason why Stockport is being singled out and required to meet an even tighter deadline than other local planning authorities?

I look forward to hearing back from you on this point – I hope you will be able to confirm that this is indeed an error, that the national deadline will also apply to Stockport and that you will be able to update your directive accordingly.

We will, of course, make progress towards the delivery of a Local Plan as you have directed.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Mark Roberts
Leader, Stockport Council

**Cllr Mark Roberts
Leader of the Council
Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group**