



CAPEL PARISH COUNCIL

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

20th November 2021

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Dear Mr Gove,

The elected members of Capel Parish Council have asked me to write to you asking that you pause Borough and District Local Plans in advance of the publication of HM Government's forthcoming bill on the reform of the planning system and of any forthcoming revisions to the NPPF. Recent statements from your department and from the Prime Minister have indicated a wish by the Government to protect the Green Belt, maximise building on brownfield sites, change the existing housing target for local authorities based on 2014 data, and refocus the government's target of building 300 000 new homes towards the Midlands and North of England in line with the government's 'Levelling Up' Agenda. There are also indications that you wish local communities to have much more say in whether or not strategic housing allocations are built in their area.

While there are a number of authorities that have paused their Local Plans, our LPA, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, sent their Local Plan to the Inspectorate on November 1st, 2021, with the expectation that public hearings will be held in the early spring. This plan proposes among other things to release c.400 ha from the Green Belt to build 6000 houses in our parish and its immediate neighbour. TWBC ignored widespread local opposition to this Plan expressed both at Regulation 18 and 19 particularly as it related to the two new settlements which are proposed for our parish. One of these would have a serious impact on neighbouring Tonbridge (which comes under a different authority), and both would pose serious infrastructure and flooding problems and have a devastating impact on the landscape.

While we believe we have a strong arguable case before an inspector for the rejection of these plans on the above grounds, we would hope that any Inspector would be able to consider new Government policies and advice that may be forthcoming from your department over the next weeks or months in making their judgement on the soundness or otherwise of the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan. At present this does not seem to be the case, so it would seem a matter of natural justice that until such new policies are in the public realm, you pause the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan along with others in the pipeline until future government policies around the making of local plans are clear.

Yours sincerely,

Hugh Patterson, Chairman Capel Parish Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councillor for Capel Ward

Cc: Rt Hon Greg Clark MP; Tom Tugendhat MP; Cllr Tom Dawlings TWBC; Louise Goldsmith Parish Manager & Clerk CPC (by email)