

Julie James AC/AM
Y Gweinidog Tai a Llywodraeth Leol
Minister for Housing and Local Government



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref PAF/DB/LG
Ein cyf/Our ref JJ/06492/19

County Councillor Peter Fox OBE & County Councillor Dimitri Batrouni
Leader of the Council & Leader of the Labour Group
Monmouthshire County Council
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11 October 2019

Dear County Councillor Peter Fox OBE & County Councillor Dimitri Batrouni,

Thank you for your letter of 4th September 2019. I welcome your early engagement on the draft National Development Framework (NDF).

Monmouthshire is an important part of the South East Wales region. I wish to see Monmouthshire plan for both the needs of its residents and together with the nine other Local Authorities in South East Wales, develop a robust planning framework for the whole region. The draft NDF identifies the scope for regional planning and sets out key policies for the South East Wales Region. Together with Planning Policy Wales, the NDF requires local authorities to shape the future of the region and take strategic decisions on the location of new houses, jobs and key services, reduce the need to travel by private vehicles and identify appropriate green belts. I do not believe that local authorities working in isolation can address the biggest issues faced by our regions.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

I support the positive steps towards the preparation of a Strategic Development Plan for South East Wales. I would stress the importance of building on this momentum and commencing preparation at the earliest opportunity. It is important that Local Development Plans are not frustrated or delayed by the absence of regional planning and an understanding of how local authorities are working together to plan for their region. I intend to strengthen and simplify the governance arrangements for SDPs by identifying strategic planning as a policy area which will be the responsibility of Corporate Joint Committees in the future. I intend to include the necessary legislation in the forthcoming Local Government and Elections Bill.

To ensure that we can achieve the best possible planning outcomes for individual communities and the country as a whole I have identified a very limited number of policy areas which can only be taken forward at the regional or national level, rather than locally through individual Local Development Plans. The designation of green belts and new settlements are two such policy areas. In both cases, it is necessary for wider than local impacts to be taken into account to maximise regeneration opportunities across the region and reduce the loss of green field land to development. In this way we can share the benefits which arise from development more equally.

The purpose of Green Belts is to:

- prevent the coalescence of large towns and cities with other settlements;
- manage urban form through controlled expansion of urban areas;
- assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- protect the setting of an urban area; and
- assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

With regard to the purpose of green belts, the draft NDF proposes green belts in South East and North East Wales, reflecting the existing designations in adjacent areas of England. In South Wales, the designation of a green belt will retain the visual openness and sense of place of the M4 corridor as you travel between Wales and England. This will complement the openness of the landscape already provided by the long established Bristol and Bath green belt and Severn Estuary. The draft NDF provides spatial representation of the possible extent of the South East Wales green belt. The green belt is unlikely to be a contiguous area as shown in the NDF. The precise boundaries will need to be carefully defined at the regional level through the Strategic Development Plan to exclude existing major settlements such as Chepstow and Caldicot. This will allow existing major settlements to grow in a sustainable way, taking into account all relevant planning considerations. For a large part of the area, the M4 and M48 provides a logical, robust and defensible boundary for the green belt which will not require local refinement. It may be that in the SE Monmouthshire the M48 is the appropriate southern boundary for the green belt. This will be confirmed by the detailed work to precisely define the green belt boundary when the South East Wales Strategic Development Plan is prepared.

I note your ambition to build 10,000 homes. This figure is significantly higher than either the current principal household projections for Monmouthshire (1,800 homes 2017-2032) or average housing completions over the last 10 years (4,200 homes 2017-2032) and will need to be fully justified during the LDP review and independent examination. You will also need to consider how this level of growth fits with the regional approach set out in the draft NDF and explain how you have arrived at it in the context of the future levels of growth planned across the region as a whole.

Finally, to help to move towards a more stable and balanced housing market I support your commitment to deliver at least 50% social housing on public sites and retain ownership of local authority land where housing development takes place. I would also encourage Monmouthshire to maximise the requirements for social housing on private land and embrace the opportunity to build council homes once again.

I look forward to receiving the formal response to the consultation from Monmouthshire County Council which I will consider alongside all the representations submitted to me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julie James". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julie James AC/AM

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