

To Matthew Pennycook MP,
Minister of State for Housing and
Planning

Ministry of Housing, Communities and
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By email only.

Please ask for: Councillor K Grinsell

Date: 21st January 2026

Dear Mr Pennycook

PLAN-MAKING AT SOLIHULL MBC

Thank you for your letter dated 11th December 2025 and facilitating a very helpful visit from the Inspector.

In short, your letter expresses disappointment that you believe the Council is no longer committed to the submission of a local plan under the legacy system by December 2026 and instead may pursue a plan under the new plan-making arrangements.

I would like to take this opportunity to confirm that it remains a priority of the Council to have an appropriate local plan in place, as soon as possible, as this recognises the benefits of having a plan-led system. This will allow the Borough to plan for the growth and housing that its residents need, whilst protecting what makes Solihull special and a 'great place to live, work, invest and enjoy.'

However, no discussion about plan-making in Solihull can take place without reference to the Council's 2020 plan that unfortunately had to be withdrawn from examination in October 2024. Whilst this did follow a protracted examination process, principally caused by frequent changes and intended changes to national planning policy, it did make significant progress and was very close to being adopted. Through the Inspectors letters it was either explicitly expressed, or implied that that following had been achieved:

- That the duty-to-cooperate had been complied with.
- The overall spatial strategy of the Plan was appropriate.
- The housing allocations were, in principle, appropriate (and by implication this supports the site selection methodology).

The plan did not shy away from difficult decisions, for instance it included proposals for the removal of 574ha of land from the Green Belt that would accommodate over 8,000 dwellings, thousands of jobs and the arrival of HS2.

The Council remains of the view that having to withdraw such an advanced plan was a lost opportunity to get a plan in place that would have helped achieve many of the objectives the Government is now seeking. It's a shame that the degree of flexibility you have asked the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) to take via your letter to it on 9th October 2025 (which is welcomed) was not displayed at the time the Solihull plan was nearing the end of its examination. Indeed, it is worth noting that this degree of pragmatism was exactly what the Council requested from the Inspectors throughout the examination in public.

Since the 2020 plan was withdrawn, we have sought to positively consider planning applications submitted in relation to those sites that were proposed for allocation in the 2020 withdrawn plan. This has now resulted in permissions coming forward for over 2,700 dwellings on Green Belt sites. We expect there are more to follow over the course of this year.

Following withdrawal of the 2020 plan, the Council did adopt an ambitious timetable for bringing a new plan forward under the legacy system. When the timetable was adopted (in December 2024), it was acknowledged that it would be subject to external influences.

Changes to national planning policy (particularly relating to Green Belt and how housing need is calculated), together with a significant response to the Council's call for sites exercise, and the emergence of the West Midlands Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) did cause the Council to further review its approach to plan-making. This acknowledged the potential to prepare a new plan in accordance with the new plan-making arrangements and in tandem with the West Midlands SDS. The West Midlands Combined Authority's approach to preparing the SDS is on a 'co-development' basis with participating local authorities, and our officers are supporting the CA in this respect. We see the benefits in this model of production which will help the Government achieve its objective for coverage of strategic plans.

Given the current evolving national position on the introduction of new plan-making arrangements, and the window of opportunity that is left to pursue plan adoption under the legacy system, it does seem that the Council is at a crossroads as to which route it follows. There are advantages and disadvantages to either route.

It was helpful that a PINS advisory visit was able to be arranged before Christmas and we are grateful for the subsequent note that the Inspector, Gareth Fort has provided to us. He has identified that there are *"clear timetabling challenges associated with preparing a plan to meet the December 2026 deadline."*

We share his view, as we too believe there are challenges to meet this deadline. This is principally around the time to complete the evidence base needed to inform preparation of the Regulation 19 version of the plan and have time for the forthcoming Regulation 18 consultation to be used to shape the submission plan. There is also potential for significant levels of representation to be made at either consultation stage that could put a further strain on the timescale for submission.

With the above in mind we do intend to proceed with the forthcoming consultation as this will be a positive step in plan-making and an evolutionary step from the withdrawn Plan. We have therefore reviewed the documentation to make it clearer that it is a Regulation 18 consultation under the legacy system with the intention it will be followed by a Regulation 19 consultation later in the year. This will require updates to both the Council's Local Development Scheme and Statement of Community Involvement, which we are prepared to do.

We will proceed with the forthcoming consultation and make necessary preparations ready to publish a Regulation 19 later in the year, but we do have to recognise that whilst we work towards this aim, we cannot be certain it will be met, despite best efforts.

In this respect, the Council is mindful of the impact of the previous change in direction around local plan examinations to the pragmatism now being applied. We would welcome confirmation from yourself, or directly from the Inspectorate, that such a degree of pragmatism will remain in place for any plan submitted under the legacy system and will not be subject to any form of amended direction at a later date, prior to the completion of respective examination processes.

In a similar vein, we do wish to highlight an issue that could assist this Council, and potentially other Councils in a similar position. The deadline for submission of a plan under the legacy system is 31st December 2026, and we can understand why this has been maintained as a fixed date. However, if there are exceptional circumstances that arise towards the end of the process, it would be helpful to understand if a degree of flexibility could be applied to this date to, for example, allow the compilation of the submission documents and representations to be completed after the Regulation 19 consultation has taken place. Perhaps this may be exercised on a case-by-case basis if you are satisfied that sufficient progress had been made.

Yours sincerely

Handwritten signature of Karen Grinsell in blue ink.

Councillor K Grinsell, Leader of the Council

Handwritten signature of Andy Mackiewicz in black ink.

Councillor A Mackiewicz, Cabinet Portfolio Holder – Climate Change and Planning