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Thank you for your letter of 25 March to the Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP, about demands for housing provision and protection of the Green Belt in the Rushcliffe area. I am replying as national planning policy falls within my ministerial responsibilities. I note the letters you enclose: one from Councillor Neil Clarke, the other from the planning inspector suggesting that the Council either withdraw the submitted draft Plan or seek a temporary suspension of the examination. I look forward to visiting your constituency in due course.

Meeting objectively assessed development needs is a key element of sustainable development alongside conserving and enhancing our natural and historic environment. And given a two million increase in our population over the last ten years and historic under provision of housing, we have to be realistic that not all the housing that we as a country need can be on brownfield land. In some places this may mean building on low-quality, environmentally uninteresting fields; in exceptional circumstances it may involve a Green Belt review. But we are absolutely clear that local councils are in charge of their Green Belts and that planning must recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. I welcome the Council's concern to ensure that local people support its policies, and its willingness to engage in cross-boundary negotiation and evidence-gathering under the Duty to Cooperate.

As examination of draft Local Plans is a formal process I cannot comment on the detail of the situation you describe. However, even where there is not an up-to-date Local Plan in place the presumption in favour of sustainable development would not apply where the impact of granting permission for development would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, or where specific policies in the Framework, such as the Green Belt, indicate that development should be restricted. Policy is therefore clear that neither unmet need nor the presumption in favour of sustainable development automatically override Green Belt protection. Provided a local council has given robust consideration to different approaches, has developed its proposal in accordance with the Duty to Cooperate and its Plan is sound in the terms set out in National Planning Policy it need not necessarily fail examination even if there remains some unmet need.

**NICK BOLES MP**