

DEAN RUSSELL MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Watford Borough Council
Town Hall
Hempstead Road
WD17 3EX

19th July 2021

To all Watford Borough Councillors,

I am writing ahead of this evening's meeting of the full council and the vote on the final draft Local Plan to be submitted to the National Inspectorate.

Since being elected I have regularly raised concerns with the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government about the risk of overdevelopment of the town, housing needs targets and the height of the tall towers, which Watford Borough Council has approved. These have included private letters, meetings, and other engagements.

As you will be aware, as a Member of Parliament I have no powers over local planning decisions nor any official remit to input into the Local Plan. However, following recent correspondence with the Housing Minister, including my question in Parliament today, I wanted to raise a point of information for consideration ahead of your vote.

In a recent letter, which I followed up on today in Parliament, it was confirmed that 'the standard method is **only the starting point** for local authorities in identifying housing need in a local area' and specifically states '...that not everywhere will be able to meet their full housing need and depends on local individual circumstances.' In other words, the numbers generated for an area's housing need **will not necessarily be the same as the ultimate target**.

This is because the Local Plan can be used by a local authority to show why the target (set using an algorithm which is applied nationally) is either too high, too low, or acceptable.

In other words, the **Local Plan is an opportunity to present a reasonable and credible alternative option**, which uses local knowledge and expertise to consider local limitations such as land supply and environmental constraints.

Other routes such writing to the Minister, the press, or the local MP are not official routes to challenge the numbers, this should be done within the Local Plan. I raised this directly in Commons today and as you can view online, the Minister clarified that the Housing Needs targets "are only a starting point, all local plans are subject to an independent examination."

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Having read Watford's Local Plan there do not appear to be any explicit wording to challenge the Housing Needs target or to raise concerns more generally. Based on this information, I wanted to raise the following point for consideration - given the fact voting to submit the Local Plan tonight risks 'locking-in' the current housing targets as per the document.

By voting to formally adopt the Local Plan, Councillors are either in agreement that the target is credible, deliverable and fulfils the remit to "make good use of land and result in well-designed and attractive places to live" and does not need challenging, or they disagree with the target - but approve of submitting the Local Plan to the National Inspectorate without a section outlining concerns or proposing a credible alternative within the document.

I appreciate that Watford's existing Local Plan is out of date, having last been published by the council in 2013, so it is important a plan is in place as soon as possible. However, given I have no sway over the contents of the Local Plan as the town's MP, I felt it important to bring this information to your attention ahead of your meeting.

I hope this information helps to clarify what the vote means for our town and I would politely urge you to consider the contents of this letter when voting this evening.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dean Russell'.

Dean Russell
Member of Parliament for Watford