



**Matthew Pennycook MP**

03 February 2026

Minister for Housing and Planning  
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Dear Minister,

**Re: Housing targets and Local Plan challenges in the Cotswold district**

I am writing again on behalf of Cotswold District Council and the communities we serve regarding the government's approach to housing numbers, and the potential for those targets to have significant consequences for our district.

As you may be aware, the government's application of the Standard Method has generated a deeply challenging housing target for the Cotswold district.

In response, the Council is working to update its local plan at pace. At the end of last year, it put a series of development strategy options, including its preferred option, out to consultation with residents and stakeholders. This presented scenarios to achieve the target of 18,650 new homes that we are being asked to plan for over the next 18 years.

The options were the Council's initial and considered response and confirmed our concerns that villages and small towns in the Cotswold district, an area renowned around the world for its outstanding natural beauty – which draws millions of visitors from all over the UK and the world every year – could be overwhelmed by unprecedented levels of new development.

Therefore, in this letter, I am:

- Sharing with you a snapshot of the huge volume of views and concerns we received during that consultation process – to indicate the sense of anger and frustration felt by our communities.
- Requesting, once again, that ministers agree to a meeting, together with our local MPs, to discuss: the target, Ministry of Defence bases in the district and the impact they could have on that target, and generally find a better way forward on this matter – leaving a strong affordable housing legacy for the Cotswold district, while preserving its unique character.
- Seeking assurances from MHCLG that the Planning Inspectorate will have the capacity and capability to examine the plan we are working hard to submit by the December 2026 deadline, to ensure the district is not faced with unsustainable, speculative development.

## **An area of national significance being asked to accommodate disproportionate growth**

Over 80 per cent of our district lies within the Cotswolds National Landscape, severely restricting where the large-scale development required to meet such a high target can occur. As a result, the burden of accommodating these eyewatering housing numbers falls almost entirely on a small number of unprotected towns and villages – many of them historic settlements whose character contributes to the Cotswolds' standing as one of the UK's most recognised cultural and economic assets.

As our recent Regulation 18 consultation set out, the implications are stark:

- Ampney Crucis – a Domesday village – could be required to double in size.
- Driffield – a small rural community – could be far removed from its small village origins if it is overshadowed by a whole new settlement.
- Siddington and Preston, among some of the oldest continuously inhabited settlements – with Siddington closely linked to the area's Roman history – risk losing their unique identity as they could be forced to, in effect, converge with Cirencester.
- Villages which have already seen significant development in recent years, such as Mickleton and Down Ampney, could be forced to take more. Meanwhile Kemble – a small village with a rail station - could almost treble in size up to and beyond 2043.
- And towns such as Moreton-in-Marsh and Fairford, which already struggle with infrastructure pressures, could see major additional growth.

As I expressed in earlier correspondence to both Secretaries of State under this government, this approach is neither proportionate nor sustainable. It risks undermining:

- The character and heritage of a globally recognised landscape, which generates over £400million per year
- The infrastructure resilience of our market towns
- And the confidence of local people – who overwhelmingly want affordable homes that meet local needs, not an arbitrary housing number imposed by an algorithm that is designed to be one-size-fits-all, but which completely ignores the unique character and constraints of different areas across the country.

## **What communities in our district are telling us**

I am enclosing an appendix containing dozens of representations from residents, and town and parish councils across the district. This a small sample of the nearly 2,000 formal responses received during consultation – more than any local plan consultation this council has seen in recent times – and the sorts of remarks we were hearing continuously as we went out into communities to talk about the target and our proposed response to it.

We are sharing these comments with you because residents repeatedly tell us that they feel unheard by central government. It is vital that you and your officials understand the strength of feeling across the district.

People accept the need for new homes – especially affordable homes – but reject a target that threatens to overwhelm communities.

Here is a summary of the points raised in the appendix:

- The target is far too high for a rural, heavily protected district and would massively overexpand small villages.
- Local infrastructure can't cope — roads, schools, healthcare, sewage, water, and public transport are already at capacity.
- The government numbers mean development could be pushed into the wrong places, far from jobs and services, increasing car dependency and contradicting sustainability goals.
- The standard method and resulting housing target does not address the area's affordable housing needs — new homes are likely to be expensive and attractive to second buyers, not local people.
- Landscape, heritage, and tourism would be damaged, threatening the area's character and economy and causing irreversible harm.
- The Government's housing formula is seen as flawed, outdated, and unfair to constrained rural areas:
  - It uses outdated 2014 household projections.
  - The affordability uplift penalises rural areas with high house prices.
  - The formula does not account for protected landscapes or physical constraints.
  - As a result, Cotswold District is being asked to deliver far more homes per capita than major cities.
- Community identity and wellbeing is at risk, with residents expressing anxiety, frustration, sadness and a fear of being unheard.
- There is a strong call for the Council to challenge the targets, using planning policy exemptions or legal routes if needed.

### **We are continuing with the local plan as instructed – but we are concerned the system cannot deliver at the pace required**

In a previous reply around our concerns about the housing target, Baroness Taylor of Stevenage asked the council to progress through the local plan process and present evidence for any alternative figure. We are doing exactly that – at pace – and we are committed to submitting our updated plan towards the end of this year. We are doing this to ensure that any development is plan-led and brings with it the necessary infrastructure, but also to prevent developers delivering unsuitable, speculative development.

However, we must be candid about a major risk that falls outside of our control – and that is a shortage of planning officials, and in particular planning inspectors.

We note that on 11 December 2025, the Planning Inspectorate launched a recruitment drive to hire local plan inspectors. It is also very well documented that there are planning staff shortages across the system. Only one in five planning departments in England is fully staffed, according to FOI data gathered by UNISON.

Without sufficient inspector capacity and capability – given many will be new in role – there is a real risk that our local plan examination will face significant delay – despite our best efforts to progress it quickly.

This matters for the Cotswold district because the imposed housing target is exceptionally high. And because the district is so heavily constrained, any delay to plan adoption greatly increases the risk of speculative development, potentially forcing through the very pattern of unplanned, unsustainable growth that we and our communities fear most.

Given the government has directed us to rely on the local plan process as the route to evidencing a more realistic target, and instructed that we submit it by December 2026, we respectfully request assurances that:

1. The Planning Inspectorate will have sufficient inspectors available in 2026 - 2027 to examine our plan without delay
2. That local plans submitted in heavily constrained areas will be prioritised, to prevent developers exploiting the absence of an up-to-date plan
3. The Department will issue guidance or transitional arrangements, where necessary, to protect councils from punitive consequences arising from national capacity shortages.

### **Joining up on issues through discussion**

This is now the third time we have requested a meeting with a minister within the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. While officers have met with planning leads in the department, to date, no Minister has agreed to sit down with us. That absence of dialogue is felt acutely in the district – and was a source of frustration when we set out to residents the position that the Council is in.

In light of the overwhelming public response, the scale of community concern, and the high national importance of the Cotswolds to the UK's cultural and economic identity, I am again inviting you to meet with me, council colleagues and MPs.

Furthermore, there are other significant matters which require discussion with government.

Given the constraints to development that the National Landscape presents, much of the council's development is proposed to be located in the south of the district. But this area is also home to two significant Ministry of Defence (MOD) bases. One is RAF Fairford, which is the preferred bomber forward operating location in Europe for the US Air Force Global Strike Command. The second is the Duke of Gloucester Barracks near South Cerney. Since we last wrote to your

department, the government has [announced a £300m investment in facilities and accommodation to support the Army's cyber-regiment](#).

Our communities are rightly asking whether the government's housing targets for our district are compatible with the MOD's operations at a critical time geo-politically.

In its own response to the consultation, the MOD has shared concerns about large-scale development around its operations.

We would therefore welcome, alongside the Members of Parliament for the North Cotswolds and South Cotswolds, the opportunity to have discussions that:

- Bring clarity from both MHCLG and MOD about how we propose development to meet housing targets in a sensitive area for military operations.
- Centre around a more realistic and evidence-led housing requirement
- Considers areas like ours can deliver more genuinely affordable homes without large-scale speculative expansion that negatively impacts one of the most beautiful and famous visitor locations in the world.
- Explores how government can support constrained rural districts to deliver high-quality, low-carbon, community-led development
- Gives assurances you can provide regarding local plan examination capacity and timescales.

We want to work with you. We want to solve the affordability crisis in our district. We want young people born here to be able to stay here. And we want to deliver good-quality, low-carbon homes within thriving, well-planned communities.

But the current target – generated by an algorithm and detached from local reality for so many reasons – is not the way to achieve those aims.

I would welcome a meaningful conversation with you and our MPs on these hugely important matters. Our residents deserve it. Our communities need it. And our district cannot afford the consequences of further delay.

I look forward to your response, and I sincerely hope you will agree to meet.



**Cllr Mike Evemy**  
Leader  
Cotswold District Council

CC:

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP, North Cotswolds  
Dr Roz Savage MP, South Cotswolds