

Mr D Goodman
 Team Leader – Strategic Planning
 Rochford District Council
 Council Offices
 South Street
 Rochford, Essex, SS4 1BW

MALDON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Princes Road
 Maldon
 Essex CM9 5DL

www.maldon.gov.uk



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Date: 16 September 2021

Dear Mr Goodman,

Thank you for your letter dated 9 August 2021 concerning the “Capacity for Accommodating Development Needs – Rochford New Local Plan”. Maldon District Council’s Strategy and Resources Committee carefully considered your request at its meeting on 16 September 2021 and approved the following response.

Committee Response

Maldon District Council recognises the challenge faced by Rochford District Council, as an adjoining local planning authority, in accommodating its development needs over the next 20 years; particularly housing growth given its Metropolitan Green Belt constraints. It is acknowledged that the Rochford District is at an early stage of preparing the Rochford New Local Plan and that work remains underway on its evidence base and policy development and that a decision on which Spatial Option is preferred by the Council is yet to be made.

Maldon District Council understands the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) gives Green Belts policy protection and strictly controls the review of Green Belts. It understands that Rochford District Council has a few steps to consider before it can conclude whether ‘exceptional circumstances’ exist to justify the review of its Green Belt boundaries and the subsequent release of Green Belt land for development purposes. It is accepted that the letter dated 9 August 2021 is part of the necessary engagement with neighbouring authorities to determine whether some of the Rochford District identified need could be accommodated in anywhere outside the Rochford District and therefore reduce the pressure on the Metropolitan Green Belt protected by the NPPF.

Whilst none of Maldon District’s land is within the policy constraint of Metropolitan Green Belt, the Committee feels it must point out that the District is nevertheless subject to international, European, national and local environmental designations which seek to protect its coastline and areas of countryside due to their value to science, biodiversity and flood risk, which are also valued locally for their additional contributions to recreation, landscapes and health. These are matters, which are also being considered as part of the Maldon District Local Development Plan Review 2021-2023, particularly in respects of how they could affect Maldon District Council’s own ability to accommodate development needs. It also notes that the common boundary between the two Districts is a marine boundary, with no physical crossing points.

The Committee has considered the Maldon District Council’s legal obligations under the Duty to Co-operate and accepts that housing can be a strategic, cross boundary matter between local planning authorities. Having considered the Maldon District Local Housing Needs Assessment published in July 2021, which reviewed the appropriateness of the functional Housing Market Area for Maldon District, the Committee is concerned that there is not a particularly strong relationship between Rochford District and Maldon District. It is concerned that were there to be any growth needs transferred between the two Districts in the future, it

would serve a quantitative purpose only and not support the delivery of qualitative housing needs in Rochford District where the needs have originated.

The Committee also understands there is already an agreed mechanism in place across all Essex authorities, via the Essex Planning Officers' Association (EPOA), for considering how unmet housing needs should be dealt with, where they arise. In addition, the Committee has noted that plans are already underway by the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA) to prepare a South Essex Joint Strategic Plan to consider, amongst other things, how unmet needs could be distributed across the housing market area.

To conclude, the Committee have concluded that at this present time, given the very early stage Maldon District Council is at with its own LDP Review, it cannot categorically confirm whether it is able, or not, to assist Rochford District Council in accommodating its housing needs. However, given the boundary between the two District's is a body of water, with no shared crossing points and recent housing market area analysis does not demonstrate a strong inter-dependant relationship between the two Districts, it is recommended that Rochford District Council exhaust and evidence to Maldon District Council that the EPOA Mechanism on Unmet Housing Need be fully complied with, prior to Maldon District Council being able to make any further comment, or any agreement with Rochford District Council on this matter under the Duty to Co-Operate.

The Committee trusts that this response is helpful to Rochford District Council and suggests that further engagement with officers and members takes place, as necessary, in line with the Maldon District Duty to Co-Operate Strategy 2021.

Yours faithfully