

Alison McGovern MP
Sent via Email only

Enquiries to: Cllr. Richard Millard
Email: Richard.Millard@easthants.gov.uk
Date: 9th July 2026

Dear Alison McGovern MP

Urgent Request for Clarification on Local Plan Preparation in the Context of Hampshire Local Government Reorganisation

East Hampshire District Council has consistently acted in good faith to implement successive Government planning reforms, despite the rules changing repeatedly throughout the process.

When the Government substantially increased our housing requirement, we did not seek to delay or avoid difficult decisions. Instead, we continued preparing our Local Plan for Regulation 19 consultation, intending to submit it before the end of the year. We recognised the significant implications for our communities but accepted our responsibility to deliver an up-to-date Local Plan.

However, the cumulative effect of Government policy changes—including revisions to national planning policy, the introduction of a new plan-making system and the simultaneous implementation of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)—has fundamentally changed the planning landscape. Rather than creating certainty and accelerating housing delivery, the Government's overlapping reforms have created confusion, duplication and imposed unnecessary cost for local authorities and the taxpayer.

The Government has repeatedly stated that its priorities are economic growth, universal Local Plan coverage and the delivery of 1.5 million homes during this Parliament. Yet it's the way these reforms have been introduced has made achieving those objectives considerably more difficult and risks frustrating the very outcomes ministers say they wish to achieve. Councils are expected to continue delivering ambitious planning programmes while simultaneously restructuring local government, adapting to new legislation, preparing for new plan-making procedures and awaiting guidance that has yet to materialise.

As Leader of the Council, I concluded that continuing under the previous timetable was no longer a responsible use of public resources. Instead, our planning officers are now

working towards commencing plan-making under the new system, with the intention of publishing our notice to commence before the end of the year.

That decision has been forced not by any lack of commitment from this Council, its officers of local communities, but by the uncertainty arising directly from the Government's own programme of overlapping and incomplete reforms.

Duty to continue plan-making

Does the Government expect East Hampshire District Council to continue preparing a new Local Plan before local government reorganisation, notwithstanding the establishment of shadow authorities in 2027 and the creation of Mid Hampshire Council and South East Hampshire Council on 1 April 2028?

If so, how does the Government justify requiring councils to commit substantial sums of taxpayers' money to preparing a Local Plan for an authority that will cease to exist before the plan is completed? How can this reasonably be regarded as sound public administration, effective stewardship of public funds or value for money for taxpayers?

Geography

How does the Government expect councils to prepare Local Plans where an existing planning authority will be divided between two successor authorities?

In East Hampshire's case, how should a Local Plan be prepared when the district will be split between Mid Hampshire Council and South East Hampshire Council? Without clear transitional arrangements, there is a real risk that progress towards up-to-date Local Plans will stall, contrary to the Government's stated objectives.

Transitional arrangements

I understand that the Government is preparing transitional guidance to address these issues. On 23 June, Ministers indicated that such guidance would be available shortly. The guidance published on 6 July 2026 simply states that further advice will be issued "*in due course*".

That is no longer sufficient. Councils cannot continue to operate on the basis of assurances that guidance will appear at some unspecified point in the future. Councils are making decisions now on staffing, procurement, evidence gathering, budgets and programme management. Those decisions cannot sensibly be deferred while Government continues to develop its own policy.

The absence of clear transitional arrangements has left councils navigating uncertainty created entirely by Government. Authorities are being asked to commit significant public expenditure, make long-term strategic decisions and maintain delivery against Government targets without knowing the framework within which they are expected to operate.

The position has been made still more uncertain by the decision to delay mayoral elections, which has inevitably delayed the preparation of the Spatial Development Strategy and postponed clarity about the strategic planning framework that new unitary authorities will ultimately be expected to follow.

East Hampshire District Council remains committed to delivering housing growth, supporting economic development and maintaining an up-to-date planning framework. We will continue to play our full part.

However, Government must also play its part by providing the certainty, direction and timely guidance that councils require to deliver the national objectives ministers have set.

If ministers expect councils to deliver their ambitious planning agenda, they must provide the certainty, transitional arrangements and policy clarity needed to do so.

I therefore ask that you respond to the questions above as a matter of urgency and confirm when the Government will publish comprehensive transitional guidance. Every week of continued uncertainty makes effective plan-making more difficult, increases costs to the public purse and undermines the very objectives the Government says it wishes to achieve.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Millard', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Richard Millard
Leader of the Council