



Cllr Nigel Barker
Leader of the Council
North East Derbyshire District Council
Mill Lane, Wingerworth
Chesterfield, S42 6NG

23rd May 2023

Dear Cllr Barker

Congratulations on becoming the new Leader of North East Derbyshire District Council. It has been a pleasure to lead the District Council over the last few years through both challenging and positive times, from leading on the Council's response to the pandemic and cost of living challenges to proactively progressing town centre regeneration and leisure centre projects as well as getting a Local Plan in place for our District. Right across the Council, from Streetscene to Leisure to our Office-based staff, we have a fantastic and dedicated workforce, and we hope you'll continue to support them to keep striving to make life better for North East Derbyshire residents.

We're writing this open letter focused though on the future of planning in North East Derbyshire and with a desire to continue to protect our District's beautiful rural character.

Our Group, and many residents across our District, note with alarm your national Labour Party Leader's deeply concerning recent statements in relation to housebuilding. In particular, in an interview with Times Radio reported on the 17th May, Sir Keir Starmer outlined his pledge *'to make Labour the party of housebuilding by relaxing planning restrictions and allowing more housebuilding on our Green Belt.'*

This statement followed on from his recent commitment to reintroduce mandatory, nationally-set housebuilding targets for local authorities, which the Conservative Government successfully scrapped in 2011 and which your own recent local campaign literature went to great lengths to suggest you were opposed to.

Of equal concern is that these frightening pledges appear to be supported across the Labour Party, with your National Campaign Coordinator recently publicly supporting binding local housing targets and stating that, *'We've got to stop having a system where...effectively people can block housing in their area.'*

We fully appreciate that new homes are needed for local families, but these absolutely must be in the right places. Given that North East Derbyshire as a district is almost two thirds Green Belt and that the previous decade has seen more than one thousand extra speculative new homes on our green fields than we needed, we strongly object to Labour's emerging new national policies on planning. It is our very strongly held view that local residents should get to influence what happens in their neighbourhoods and that our local planning system should work to preserve the beautiful rural character of our District.



We therefore urge you to join us in condemning your Party Leader's recent statements in relation to the Green Belt and housing targets and provide reassurance to our residents that you will commit to working with us on:

1. prioritising maintaining up to date planning protections to prevent speculative development
2. protecting our green areas from inappropriate development;
3. supporting the delivery of the infrastructure improvements our District so desperately needs, having previously faced a decade of a disastrous roulette of unplanned housing development without a Local Plan under your Party's watch.

In addition, we would also welcome an urgent update from you on the news reports of the 9th May 2023 that new local Labour council leaders would be meeting with Sir Keir and were being tasked with '*reviewing local housing and development plans*', with a view to providing even more housing.

How exactly do you intend to "review" our Local Plan and planning policies? What planning protections will be in place while you carry out this review? And where will you seek to meet your Leader's demands for new housing?

Our residents absolutely have a right to answers to these questions which very naturally emanate from deeply out of touch policy announcements by your Party's leadership. We would therefore appreciate a swift response to enable us to reassure residents and prevent a prolonged period of uncertainty.

We look forward to your reply and support of our work to protect our Green Belt and green fields across North East Derbyshire.

Yours sincerely,

Cllrs Alex Dale & Charlotte Cupit
Leader and Deputy Leader of the NEDDC Conservative Group