

Thank you for your email of 3 July on behalf of Westthorpe Parish Council in your constituency, regarding local development over the next 20 years. I have been asked to reply.

I am afraid that due to the Secretary of State's quasi-judicial role in the planning system, I cannot comment on the details of specific development plans or specific site allocations. However, I can provide the following general comments.

This Government believes in a plan-led system. It is through local development plans that communities shape decisions about how to deliver the housing and wider development that their area needs.

Local authorities must prepare a local plan as the primary basis for identifying what development is needed in an area, deciding where it should go and dealing with planning applications. By identifying sites in its plan, the local authority can guide development to the most suitable locations, supported by the right infrastructure.

The Government expects that every local planning authority will make every effort to get up-to-date plans in place as soon as possible. The existing joint Babergh and Mid Suffolk Local Plan was adopted in November 2023. From their website, I understand that the Councils are expecting to start a review of the adopted joint plan in March 2026. The most recent timetable for plan preparation (the Local Development Scheme) is available on the local authority's website. I would encourage your constituents to take part in any forthcoming consultations and make their views known directly to the Councils. More information can be found at:

<https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/documents/d/asset-library-54706/babergh-and-mid-suffolk-joint-local-development-scheme-2025-2029>

I note the council's specific concerns regarding food security and the development of solar farms. Boosting the delivery of renewable energy is vital if we are to meet the Government's commitment to reaching zero carbon electricity generation by 2030.

There are established routes in the planning system to consider the impacts of renewable and low carbon energy projects as well as processes to enable communities to engage in the consultation of applications.

This Government places great importance upon our agricultural land and food production. The National Planning Policy Framework sets out how the best and most versatile agricultural land should be reflected in planning policies and decisions. Best and most versatile agricultural land is land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification system.

The Government maintains the existing strong protection for the best and most versatile agricultural land. The Framework is clear that where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality. This will, where relevant, be a material consideration in planning decisions, including those made by the Secretary of State.

Delivering new infrastructure will also require changes to English land use. These are also relatively small overall; the land area taken by all key utilities across England in 2022, including solar and wind farms, power stations, water works, gas works, and refuse disposal places, covered just 0.2% of land.

Thank you for your email on this important policy matter.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Taylor', written in a cursive style.

BARONESS TAYLOR OF STEVENAGE
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing and Local Government