Dr Al Pinkerton MP
Member of Parliament for Surrey Heath
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

24 September 2026

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: Greybelt designation and West Surrey

We, the Liberal Democrat MPs representing West Surrey, are writing to raise concerns about the unintended consequences of the Government's greybelt policy for our constituencies and the future planning of West Surrey.

We strongly support building the homes our communities need, particularly genuinely affordable and social homes, and recognise that this will require difficult decisions about land use. However, those homes must be delivered in the right places, supported by the necessary infrastructure, and without unnecessarily sacrificing the separation and distinct identities of established communities.

The new West Surrey Council, comprising Guildford, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Woking and Waverley, will assume responsibility for the area from its constituent councils on 1 April 2027. Planning decisions and greenbelt assessments being undertaken now will therefore have consequences for a much wider area that will shortly be planned and governed by a single authority. It is important that their cumulative impact is considered accordingly.

Greenbelt land plays an important strategic role in preventing urban sprawl and maintaining separation between the closely connected network of towns, villages and smaller settlements that characterises West Surrey. Local planning authorities across the area are currently undertaking greenbelt and grey belt assessments under the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

We are particularly concerned that the current framework does not adequately reflect the settlement geography of areas such as West Surrey. One of the established purposes of the greenbelt is to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another, but many of the communities at greatest risk of coalescence in our area are villages and smaller settlements separated by relatively narrow areas of undeveloped land.

The incremental loss of those gaps could fundamentally alter the character and identity of individual communities, even where individual developments appear modest when considered in isolation. There is therefore a risk that sites assessed individually as making only a limited contribution to greenbelt purposes could, cumulatively, result in precisely the urban sprawl and settlement coalescence that greenbelt policy was established to prevent.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any assistance
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We are also concerned about the incentives created by the present framework. Undeveloped grey belt sites may in some circumstances be easier and more commercially attractive for developers to bring forward than complex brownfield or urban regeneration sites. While the NPPF seeks to make effective use of previously developed land, the framework must not inadvertently create an incentive to pursue easier undeveloped sites while more challenging brownfield opportunities remain unrealised.

This is particularly important in West Surrey, where development cannot sensibly be considered separately from the capacity of our roads, public transport, schools, healthcare, water and sewerage systems, and other essential infrastructure. New homes must be accompanied by infrastructure that is both funded and realistically deliverable.

We therefore ask the Government to amend or clarify the NPPF and associated guidance to:

- ensure that grey belt assessments properly recognise the importance of maintaining separation between villages and smaller settlements, as well as between towns
- require proper consideration of the cumulative impact of multiple site releases and developments on settlement coalescence
- strengthen safeguards against incremental urban sprawl and ribbon development
- ensure that undeveloped grey belt land does not become a commercially easier alternative to brownfield development and urban regeneration
- ensure that the existing and deliverable capacity of transport, health, education, utilities and other essential infrastructure is properly considered when determining where substantial development should take place.

We would also ask you to commission officials to examine specifically how the greybelt definition is operating in areas characterised by closely spaced villages and smaller settlements, including West Surrey, and whether further amendment or guidance is required to prevent unintended settlement coalescence.

Residents across West Surrey understand that more homes are needed. The choice is not between building homes and protecting our communities. The challenge is to deliver the homes we need while making the best possible use of previously developed land, providing the infrastructure to support growth, protecting our countryside and ensuring that distinct communities do not gradually merge into one another through piecemeal development.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you, or the Minister for Planning, to discuss these concerns before the relevant assessments across West Surrey are finalised.

Yours sincerely,

Zöe Franklin MP
Guildford

Will Forster MP
Woking

Dr Al Pinkerton MP
Surrey Heath

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