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FAO Joanne Key
Director General, Regeneration, Housing and Planning
Will Garton
Director General for Local Government at the UK's Ministry of Housing, Communities
and Local Government (MHCLG)

Friday 5th June 2026

Dear Joanne / Will,

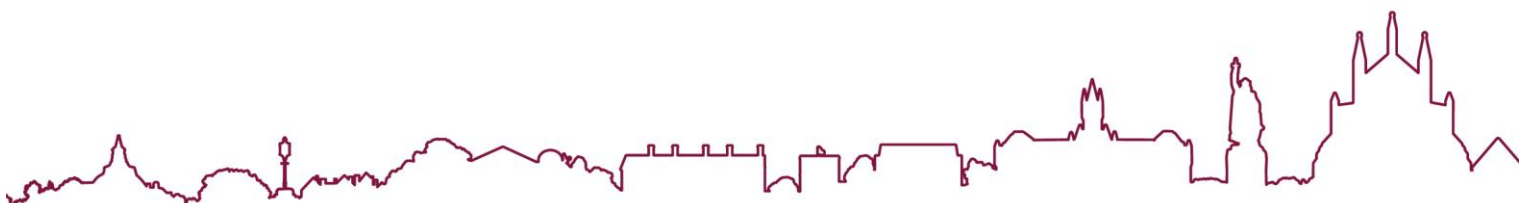
Urgent Request for Clarification on Local Plan Preparation in the Context of Hampshire Local Government Reorganisation

I am writing on behalf of Winchester City Council to seek urgent clarification on the Government's expectations regarding plan-making in the context of the new local plan system and proposed local government reorganisation in Hampshire.

Winchester City Council adopted its Local Plan 2040 on 24 March 2026 under the provisions of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. In line with the new guidance issued in March 2026, the Council is now required to commence preparation of a new-style Local Plan, including issuing a Notice of Intention by 30 June 2026 and publishing its Gateway 1 self-assessment by 31 October 2026.

At the same time, proposals for local government reorganisation published in March 2026 would see the current Winchester City Council area divided between two new unitary authorities. The majority of the district would form part of a new Mid-Hampshire unitary authority alongside parts of Test Valley, East Hampshire and New Forest Councils, whilst the parish of Newlands would transfer to a separate South East Hampshire authority.

In addition, the successor authorities will be required to prepare a Minerals and Waste Plan and establish their wider planning policy framework following reorganisation. Shadow authorities are expected to be established in 2027, ahead of vesting day on 1 April 2028.



This creates significant uncertainty regarding the appropriate geography, scope and timing of plan-making. In particular, the Council is being required to commence a statutory plan-making process for a planning authority that will cease to exist before that plan reaches examination or adoption. There is therefore a material risk that work undertaken now on a Winchester only Local Plan may not align with the priorities, geography or development strategy of the future Mid-Hampshire authority, leading to abortive work and inefficient use of public resources.

Given the statutory deadlines and the potential implications for plan soundness, delivery and value for money, we would be grateful for clear Government direction on the following matters:

1. Duty to continue plan-making

Does Government expect Winchester City Council to continue preparing a new Local Plan prior to local government reorganisation, notwithstanding the establishment of the Mid-Hampshire shadow authority in 2027 and the creation of the new Mid-Hampshire Council on 1 April 2028?

In particular, can Government confirm that this remains the required approach given the substantial public resources that would need to be committed to preparing a Local Plan which may ultimately not align with the geography, priorities or planning framework of the successor authority?

2. Geography and Newlands

What does Government expect Winchester City Council to do in relation to the geography of any new Local Plan process commenced before reorganisation?

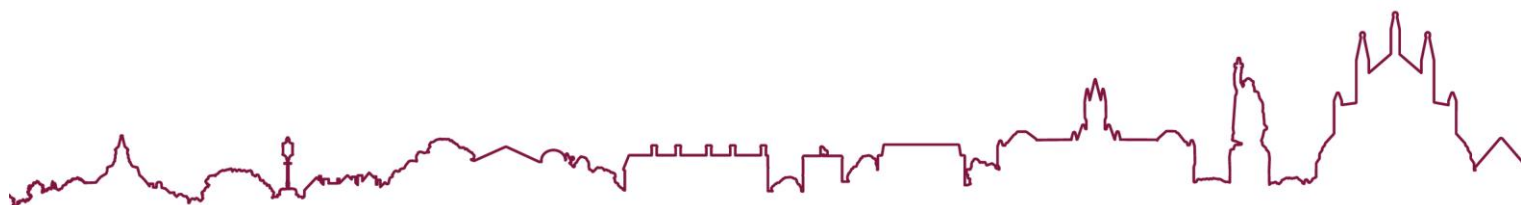
Should Winchester continue to prepare a plan based on its existing administrative boundary, notwithstanding that the parish of Newlands is proposed to transfer to a different successor authority and Winchester will not be the Local Planning Authority for that area at the point of adoption?

If Government does not expect Winchester to prepare a plan covering the parish of Newlands, what arrangements should be made to ensure that area is appropriately planned for during the transition to the successor authority structure?

3. Successor authority responsibilities

Can a successor authority be required to continue preparation of a Local Plan commenced by a predecessor authority?

If so, what weight should be given to decisions, evidence bases and strategic choices made by the predecessor authority during the transition period?



4. Transitional arrangements

Does Government intend to provide any transitional flexibilities, exemptions or modified Gateway requirements for authorities affected by local government reorganisation?

In particular, would Government support alternative approaches to plan-making during the transition period, such as joint preparation of a Local Plan by the constituent authorities of the proposed Mid-Hampshire Council, coordinated plan-making arrangements across those authorities, or the preparation of a shared evidence base capable of being taken forward and completed by the new Mid-Hampshire Council following vesting?

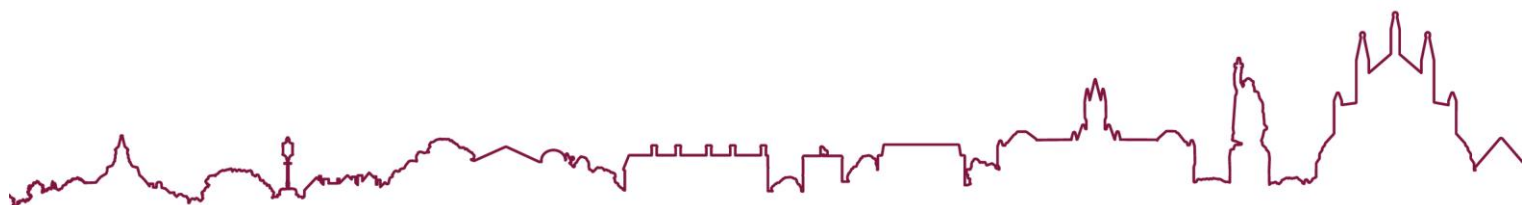
Given the exceptional circumstances, clarity on any such arrangements would be helpful in ensuring resources are focused proportionately and effectively.

The Council remains committed to progressing plan-making in accordance with national policy. However, proceeding without clarity risks:

- Abortive expenditure on evidence that may not be transferable to the new authority;
- Misalignment with future strategic priorities established by the shadow authority and successor council;
- Duplication of work and unnecessary cost to the public purse;
- Preparation of a Winchester-only Local Plan that would not provide a comprehensive planning framework for the future Mid-Hampshire authority area.

The position is further complicated by the proposed Mayoral Combined Authority and future Spatial Development Strategy (SDS). It remains unclear how a future SDS would relate to local plans in areas undergoing both local government reorganisation and devolution, particularly in respect of conformity requirements, sequencing, policy weight and the extent to which local plans prepared now may need to be revisited once mayoral arrangements are established.

There is a risk that plans prepared at district level could subsequently require significant revision to align with emerging strategic frameworks, resulting in duplication, delay and inefficient use of resources. Clarity is therefore needed on how local plans should align with future mayoral strategic planning arrangements in areas experiencing both structural reorganisation and devolution.

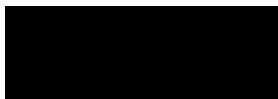


Need for Urgent Clarification

Given the requirement to publish a Notice of Intention by 30 June 2026 (along with our local development scheme) and a Gateway 1 self-assessment by 31 October 2026, urgent clarification is essential to ensure the Council proceeds on a legally robust basis that is aligned with Government policy, delivers value for money and supports the transition to the future unitary authority.

In the absence of clear direction, Winchester City Council is being required to make significant strategic and financial commitments in respect of a planning authority that will cease to exist during the plan preparation period. We would therefore welcome urgent written clarification on the matters raised above, including the Government's expectations regarding plan geography, governance, transitional arrangements and the relationship between local plan preparation, local government reorganisation and emerging devolution arrangements.

Yours sincerely



Cheryl Headon
Strategic Director

