The Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP
Secretary of State for Housing,
Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
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Test Valley Borough Council

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30th October 2026

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: Introduction of the National Scheme of Delegation from 31st October 2026. Council resolution 14th October 2026.

As Leader, Leader of the Opposition and Planning Portfolio Holder for Test Valley Borough Council we are sending this cross-party supported letter which includes signatures from all councillors when the above subject was considered at a meeting of the Council on the 14th of October 2026. We write to express our deep concern and dissatisfaction with the proposals required by Government to implement the National Scheme of Delegation (NSD) and particularly its impact on the ability of councillors, at all levels of Local Government, to undertake their democratic duty to scrutinise planning proposals.

The effect of the new regulations will essentially prevent any councillor from being able to request that particular applications be brought before our Southern and Northern Area Planning Committees. The council's existing scheme of delegation has worked well for many years and has enabled proposals which are important for a variety of reasons, including where they have attracted considerable and legitimate local interest from members of the public and Parish and Town Councils, to be decided at committee. This ensured that high profile or contentious applications were decided at meetings where everyone could attend and participate in proceedings. This has been invaluable in making sure decisions were open and transparent. Removing this will serve to undermine confidence in local democracy and decision making.

Whilst we appreciate that the NSD will still allow certain applications to be taken to committee, it further restricts which types of development can be decided in this way and means that more applications will have to be determined by our officers using delegated powers. Unless the application falls into Schedule 2 of the regulations, and meets at least one of the relevant gateway tests, there is no possibility that it can be referred to committee. Under the council's current delegation arrangements there have often been applications which will now fall into Schedule 1, that have received many representations from interested parties and raised significant planning issues. These applications have quite rightly been considered by committee. This will now be impossible, unless there is an interest issue, and this limitation clearly further undermines local democracy.

In Test Valley, members of our planning committees do not take their responsibilities lightly. They are dedicated, well trained, and careful in their deliberations. Only refusing applications where there is a material planning reason to do so. We know the government's ambition is to deliver 1.5m new homes in England by the end of this Parliament. However, we firmly believe that the delivery of more homes is not down to the lack of permissions, but wider problems in the housing sector. For example, there is a site in the centre of Romsey in Test Valley, which was given permission in 2006 for 211 houses. Apart from a very small number of completions, that site still hasn't been built out. Democracy shouldn't be denigrated because of fundamental problems in the development industry.

Moreover, we pride ourselves on the fact that many of our Parish and Town Councils have spent considerable time and effort bringing forward Neighbourhood Development Plans or have now embarked on that journey. These plans are at the heart of local decision making on planning applications. Under the NSD it would not be possible for a Schedule 1 application to be considered by committee even where it conflicts with policies in an adopted Neighbourhood Plan. This again will harm faith in the system as members of those communities will not have the opportunity to attend or speak at committee and to see the decision being made. We urge you to review this matter without delay, and amend the NSD, so that any application which conflicts with a Neighbourhood Development Plan will automatically fall into Schedule 2 and able to be considered for committee referral.

Finally, we appreciate that you have committed to review how the NSD is working in 2 years' time, but considering the serious concerns we are raising, we would ask that you look again now at the regulations and make changes to address these matters.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Phil North, Leader of the Council
Cllr Neil Gwynne, Leader of the Opposition
Cllr Phil Bundy, Cabinet Member for Planning
Cllr Jan Budzynski, Chair of Northern Area Planning Committee
Cllr Zilliah Brooks, Vice-Chair of Northern Area Planning Committee
Cllr Mark Cooper, Chair of Southern Area Planning Committee
Cllr Alan Dowden, Vice-Chair of Southern Area Planning Committee
Cllr Nick Adams-King
Cllr Iris Andersen
Cllr Gordon Bailey
Cllr Carl Borg-Neal
Cllr Debbie Cattell
Cllr Geoff Cooper
Cllr Chris Donnelly
Cllr Celia Dowden
Cllr David Drew
Cllr Karen Dunleavey
Cllr Maureen Flood
Cllr Alex Gillies
Cllr Sandra Gidley
Cllr Luigi Gregori
Cllr Susanne Hasselmann
Cllr Ian Jeffrey
Cllr Alison Johnston
Cllr Linda Lashbrook
Cllr Phil Lashbrook
Cllr Mark Leech
Cllr Nicolas Lodge
Cllr Stewart MacDonald
Cllr Lisa Matthews
Cllr Jim Neal
Cllr Kirsty North
Cllr John Parker
Cllr Terese Swain
Cllr Alan Warnes
Cllr Sally Yalden