



**Ministry of Housing,
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Thank you for raising the role of Planning Inspectors with me, in relation to your inquiry as to whether Green Belt releases could be imposed on a Local Plan against the wishes of a local authority. I do apologise for the delay in my reply.

The existing National Planning Policy Framework says that Green Belt boundaries should be altered only in exceptional circumstances, through the plan-making process. Our draft revisions to the Framework strengthen this expectation. Where there is a shortage of land for meeting housing needs, local planning authorities will be expected to use minimum density standards to make the most of the land available, and to make full use of under-utilised sites that could provide homes (such as service yards, railway land and using 'airspace' above existing properties to build upwards). They will also need to show that they have examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting their development needs, before concluding that any Green Belt land has to be released.

Planning Inspectors cannot force Green Belt releases onto authorities. What they will do is look thoroughly at the justification for any Green Belt releases proposed by authorities in their draft plans (or, subsequently, suggested by them as modifications during the plan examination). Inspectors can only recommend changes to plans that have been submitted for examination where the plan would otherwise be found 'unsound', and if requested to do so by the authority. Ultimately, the decision about whether to adopt a local plan also rests with the local planning authority itself.

RT HON SAJID JAVID MP