



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Correspondence

Three Rivers District Council: Local Plan Holding Direction letter

Updated 18 March 2026

Applies to England



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To: Cllr Stephen Giles-Medhurst OBE
Leader of Three Rivers District Council, Three Rivers House, Northway,
Rickmansworth, WD3 1RL

Date: 5 February 2026

Dear Cllr Giles-Medhurst,

I am writing to you in advance of the commencement of the Three Rivers local plan Regulation 19 consultation scheduled for 6 February.

As I set out in my letter to you of 14 November, I expect Three Rivers to bring forward a plan that meets identified need as far as possible; that reflects national policy, including in relation to Green Belt release; and that is capable of being found sound at examination.

As it stands, your emerging plan proposes to meet only 56 per cent of the local housing needs identified by the standard method, leaving a shortfall of over 5,000 dwellings, with little explanation publicly available to justify this approach.

Section 20 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (the 2004 Act) requires local planning authorities to only submit a plan when they think it is ready for an independent examination. Your own committee report highlights a high risk that the plan may fail at examination due to the scale of the shortfall in meeting housing need. As a result, I have little confidence that your emerging plan is satisfactory and capable of being found sound or legally compliant at examination.

In light of this I have decided to exercise the Secretary of State's powers under section 21A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (the 2004 Act) (inserted by section 145(5) of the Housing and Planning Act 2016), to direct Three Rivers not to take any step in connection with the adoption of the Plan, while I consider whether to give a direction in relation to the Plan under section 21 of the 2004 Act. This direction will remain in force until I withdraw it or give a direction under section 21 of the 2004 Act in relation to the Plan. I will also be considering directions under section 27 of the 2004 Act should this be necessary to drive the delivery of a sound plan.

To support me in deciding whether to withdraw the holding direction or take further action, I request that you provide me with the full documentation you intend to publish for the Regulation 19 consultation. This should include, but not be limited to, the evidence base listed in paragraph 1.9 of your draft Regulation 19 Part 1 document. I would be grateful if you could provide this documentation by 19 February 2026.

I hope that you will engage constructively with my officials who will be in touch with your officers to take this work forward.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew Pennycook MP
Minister of State for Housing and Planning



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