

Nick Boles MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU

26th March 2013

Dear Nick,

As we approach the first anniversary of the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) I thought it would be useful to provide an assessment from the LGA on its impact to date to feed into the review you are undertaking within the department.

We believe that the NPPF and the proposals within Lord Taylor's review of planning practice guidance are fundamental reforms that have established a localised, democratically-driven system that gives councils a strong incentive to promote and plan for growth. It will provide them with the tools they need to plan effectively for their place and allows democratic decision making and the housing market to bring forward development locally.

The NPPF is, of course, one part of a wider system to support development. That system is less than a year old and is already having a positive impact, as can be seen in the record number of planning approvals and significant progress with plan preparation. The system places sustainable development at its core and it is crucial that councils retain access to the tools and funding through the planning system to ensure adequate and appropriate infrastructure provision to support development.

Councils have responded positively to the NPPF. Planning approvals hit a decade high last year, again indicating that councils are taking a pro-growth approach and using planning as a mechanism to achieve their wider growth aspirations. Almost all councils are on course to have published their plans by the end of this calendar year and the priority for councils has been to develop thorough, well evidenced local plans which lead to new development that improves people's quality of life, guards against speculative development, helps business, protects areas not ripe for development and enhances areas which are. With this in mind we feel it would be helpful to extend the transition period to provide local authorities with the maximum opportunity to get plans in place.

The new system of neighbourhood planning is operating alongside councils' on-going work to engage local people in planning and I know government are monitoring its implementation. Genuine community engagement takes time and considerable effort from all involved. It is important that developers are encouraged strongly to engage with the community appropriately at an early stage. This is the most effective way of garnering community support for growth and mitigating disputes and challenge within the planning process which risk both undermining government policy and resulting in poor outcomes for communities.

Sector led support continues to have an important role to play to support local plan preparation and to drive wider improvements in planning services. The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) has worked closely with councils to support them to respond to the NPPF and progress their local plans. We have agreed to a changed governance model which I confident will invigorate the programme going forward and ensure that PAS support is credible and led by the needs of the sector. I am pleased that progress has been made to establish and agree this new framework. There are of course challenges. The government decision to abolish Regional Spatial Strategies and the delay in implementing this policy has led in some cases to confusion, uncertainty and delay in setting housing numbers at the local level. I understand that the department are working to secure their abolition expediently however this has in some cases delayed the delivery of the local plan.

There are technical reforms that could remove cost, bureaucracy and burden within the planning system. The red tape challenge into planning administration is well timed and I have appended the LGA's response which sets out changes which would localise permitted development rights, planning fees and improve the tools at authorities' disposal to enable the planning system to deliver efficiently and effectively.

However, further significant reforms to the planning system would be unhelpful; and would undoubtedly lead to delay and pressure on resources at the local level. You will be aware, for example, of our concerns regarding a number of clauses within the Growth and Infrastructure Bill including our concerns regarding proposals to allow the Inspectorate to renegotiate the affordable housing provision within Section 106 agreements, the extension of permitted development rights and expansion of the role of the Planning Inspectorate. Certainty must be the aim going forward and is necessary to embed the positive reform that has taken place and I would urge you to make this case to your colleagues across government.

I hope this is a helpful summary and LGA officers would be happy to provide further details on any of the issues raised above.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Jones', followed by a horizontal dashed line extending to the right.

Councillor Mike Jones
Chairman, LGA Environment and Housing Board