Dear Clive,

I am writing in response to your letter of 23 June seeking further details about our initiative to help build more new homes on brownfield land.

I am sure you will agree that working to make best possible use of brownfield land suitable for housing in a way that retains strong safeguards in place to protect our valued countryside is to be welcomed. Similarly I am sure you will support our objective to have planning permissions in place to provide up to 200,000 permissions for new homes on these sites by 2020. This is an exciting challenge to both local authorities and developers to step up to deliver the homes we need within our existing communities. It is something all authorities should be intending to take forward in meeting their local needs.

The initiative is not about painting planning as a barrier to development. Rather it is using the planning tools that are within the gift of local authorities to demonstrate that they are open for business and want new housing development to take place. The target date is 2020 so we want to be quick off the mark in engaging with local authorities. Therefore during the summer we intend to invite local authorities to submit expressions of interest for support from the £5m fund to resource a first tranche of housing led local development orders. The invitation prospectus will set out criteria against which resources allocation will be considered. We have not prejudged how many authorities many receive funding although we will of course seek to secure maximum value for any resources provided.

In addition we will commission the drafting of a local development order template with associated guidance on how to create effective orders. We want to use real life sites in developing the template which will assist local planning authorities in preparing good quality local development orders for their sites. It is likely the template package will be more helpful for smaller sites and it will be available later in the year.

Our ambition for development of brownfield land is informed by returns made by local authorities to the Homes and Communities Agency in 2010 for the National Land Use Database. We are considering how to ensure there is clear and transparent information about the availability of brownfield land for development going forward. Authorities should already
have identified their brownfield sites suitable for housing in their Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. We recognise that some sites may already have or be near to having planning permissions for housing in place.

In inviting local authorities to lead on this challenge we would expect them to deliver housing which is consistent with local plan policy and for which there is commercial demand. We would expect orders to grant permissions that are consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework. Should there be concerns about a particular local development order the Secretary of State retains powers to intervene and if necessary cancel a local development order. While a section 106 agreement cannot be required under a local development order, local authorities can still work with developers to enter into section 106 agreements to mitigate the impacts of development. We do not therefore see any need to change this position as it allows for agreement between the parties of a viable affordable housing contribution.

This is an ambitious initiative which breaks new ground. Enterprise Zones demonstrated the value of local development orders in supporting commercial development. I believe this initiative will highlight the benefits local development orders can provide in unlocking sites for new housing development. We will be working with local authorities, the Local Government Association and house builders over the coming months to further develop this initiative and agree a benchmark against which we will be able to measure success.

NICK BOLES MP