Dear Clive,

Communities and Local Government Select Committee session on Performance of the Department – Tuesday 3 February

I am writing to provide a follow-up answer to questions from Simon Danczuk MP (numbered Q102-106 in the transcript). The questions were about whether the Department has data on out-of-town developments and our response to data published by the Association of Convenience Stores.

The department’s Land Use Change Statistics monitor the location of development. These statistics record the amount of land changes to developed use by Local Planning Authorities. This includes land use categorised as ‘retailing’.

Recently the department let a tender which secured the future of these statistics at a 30 per cent reduction in cost, utilising an innovative new methodology which promises more detailed statistics. The first publication of these new statistics will cover the year 2013-14 and has been provisionally announced for June/July 2015.


I can clarify that the department ceased publishing the previous ‘town centre statistics’ in 2009. These were figures on the proportion of all retail development in town centres. Specifically we ceased publishing the figures, and associated town centre boundaries, following consultation on DCLG’s draft statistics plan, because of the high cost and significant resource implications in using Valuation Office Agency data.

As part of the town centre statistics the Department created ‘statistical’ boundaries based on the underlying economic activity; these boundaries were last updated in 2004. Future analysis of the amount of development in and outside town centres would require an update of the boundaries in conjunction with new data on development. Updating these boundaries is a complex process and would require significant departmental resource.
We examined the potential of other external data to produce our own statistics on town centre development, but it was not possible to produce statistics on a comparable basis. Moreover, updating the town centre boundaries would have been prohibitively expensive.

The research carried out by the Association of Convenience Stores only considered a small sample of 50 major retail developments. Minor retail developments were excluded entirely, and so the results were likely to be biased towards out-of-town development. The report was not clear which boundaries had been used to define whether development was in or out of town. This was insufficient to be confident that more retail development was occurring outside of town centres – rather it showed that in this study larger retail development was more likely to be developed out-of-town. However, that in itself cannot be taken as an indicator that town centres were failing.

The NPPF sets a very clear town-centre-first policy. It is up to local authorities to apply the policy.

Yours sincerely,

SIR BOB KERSLAKE