Inquiry into the recommendations of the Local Plans Expert Group

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister of State for Housing and Planning. We look forward to working constructively with you on this important area of the Department’s work.

We have recently held a short inquiry into the recommendations made by the Local Plans Expert Group (LPEG), established by your predecessor, to streamline the Local Plan-making process.

On Monday 18 July we held an evidence session with John Rhodes OBE, the LPEG Chair, and Matthew Spry, special adviser to the LPEG. The transcript of that session has been published on our website, together with almost fifty written submissions we received from individuals and organisations setting out their views on the LPEG’s recommendations.

During the evidence session we asked Mr Rhodes and Mr Spry about:

- progress made by local authorities to prepare and adopt Local Plans;
- the impact of the LPEG’s recommendations on local authority resources;
- the LPEG’s recommendation that a statutory duty should be put on local authorities to prepare and maintain up to date Local Plans;
- the ongoing role of Local Plans within planning policy, including the balance between localism and centralism and the role of Neighbourhood Plans;
- the LPEG’s recommendation that where local authorities have not submitted a post-National Planning Policy Framework Local Plan by March 2018, their existing relevant development plan policies for housing supply should be considered out of date;
- the Duty to Cooperate;
- the emphasis on housing in the LPEG’s report and recommendations;
- the assessment of housing need;
- public involvement in the Local Plan-making process;
- the next steps for the LPEG’s recommendations.

We would welcome your views on these matters. We also have a number of specific questions, and I would be grateful if you could let us have your answers in due course:

- When do you expect to respond formally to the LPEG’s recommendations?
• The Local Plan-making process is currently complex and burdensome for local authorities. What measures will you put in place to simplify the process?

• Is the Neighbourhood Planning system working effectively? Is there sufficient clarity about the roles of Local and Neighbourhood Plans, in particular where Neighbourhood Plans are adopted by areas for which no Local Plan is in place?

• Will you use the Neighbourhood Planning and Infrastructure Bill announced in the Queen’s Speech to implement the LPEG’s recommendations? Will you clarify the intended timescales for the Bill’s introduction, in particular whether you intend to publish a draft Bill before it is formally introduced?

• Do you intend to follow your predecessor’s intention to intervene in the production of Local Plans where local authorities do not have them in place by March 2017? If so, how many local authorities do you anticipate might need such intervention, and what form might it take?

• In the longer term, if you do not accept and implement the LPEG’s recommendation for a statutory duty to prepare and maintain Local Plans, how will you ensure that local authorities keep their Local Plans up to date?

• Will you amend the National Planning Policy Guidance to include a standard methodology for objectively assessing housing need?

• The LPEG concluded on the basis of the evidence it received that the Duty to Cooperate is not working effectively. What measures will you put in place to ensure that local authorities cooperate effectively when preparing their Local Plans?

We look forward to hearing your views on the matters discussed during our evidence session on 18 July, and on the additional questions we have raised. I am copying this letter to Mr Rhodes and Mr Spry.

Clive Betts MP
Chair, Communities and Local Government Committee