



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

**Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local
Government**
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Madeleine Hunt

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Dear Madeleine Hunt,

Thank you for your correspondence to ministers dated 7 June 2025 regarding planning policy, environmental oversight and democratic governance.

The Department welcomes your input on these important matters and your correspondence has been seen by the relevant policy officials. Below I have set out information relating to the work of government in these areas which I hope you find helpful.

On the statutory basis for local government reorganisation, statutory invitations were issued under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 on 5 February to the authorities in the remaining 21 two-tier areas and their neighbouring small unitary authorities to develop proposals for unitary local government.

Councils are responsible for working through the implications relating to local government reorganisation to develop robust and sustainable proposals that are in the best interests of their whole area. Proposals have been received from Surrey and these are currently out to statutory consultation: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/surrey-local-government-reorganisation>. Proposals for Devolution Priority Programme areas are due by 26 September and for all other areas by 28 November.

Under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, the Government cannot impose new unitary structures on local areas. The statutory process involves decisions by local councils (these decisions are not reserved to Full Council so may be taken by the Executive), by Ministers, and approval of the implementing secondary legislation by Parliament. The Secretary of State may not implement a proposal unless she has consulted with other councils affected by it and any other appropriate person.

On planning enforcement and developer accountability, once housebuilders have been granted permission, we expect to see these permissions built out as quickly as possible – and we recognise the frustrations that stalled, delayed or slowly built sites can cause to communities. That is why we are changing incentives in the housing market and giving local authorities the tools they need to speed up delivery through:

- Requiring developers to commit to delivery timeframes before planning permission is granted, alongside annual reports on their progress.
- Giving councils the power to refuse to consider applications from developers who consistently fail to build out quickly enough.
- Exploring a “Delayed Homes Penalty” – paid directly to local authorities – when development falls materially behind pre-agreed build out schedules.

- Supporting mixed tenure developments which build out faster and provide more affordable housing – including consulting on requiring this on larger sites.
- Making it easier for councils to issue completion notices – a form of “use it or lose it” that requires developers to complete their development within a reasonable period of time or the planning permission will cease.
- Making it easier for local authorities to acquire land through Compulsory Purchase Orders – unlocking stalled sites and making land assembly easier when this is in the public interest.

On the balance between sustainability and development, the National Planning Policy Framework is clear that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity. The planning system also affords strong protections from development to National Parks and the Broads, which are designated for wildlife and cultural heritage. The NPPF is clear that the scale and extent of development within these areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.

Our country is in the midst of a housing crisis after decades of not building enough homes. The impacts of this undersupply of homes can be seen in rising rents and housing costs – placing the dream of homeownership out of reach for many – and increasing homelessness, overcrowding and poverty.

There are simply not enough homes, and the number of new homes is estimated to drop to around 200,000 this year (2024/25).

We have a crisis of affordability making it harder for people to live and work where they want to – hampering economic growth across the country. In 1997, homes cost 3.5x median incomes, and by 2024, this had risen to 7.7x, meaning that in a single generation house prices have more than doubled relative to incomes (Source: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/datasets/ratioofhousepricetoworkplacebasedearningslowerquartileandmedian>).

At the sharpest end of the crisis are the over 127,890 households – including a record of over 165,510 children – in temporary accommodation (Dec 2024) (Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-october-to-december-2024/statutory-homelessness-in-england-october-to-december-2024#temporary-accommodation>).

This is why the Government is committed to delivering 1.5 million homes over this Parliament as set out in our Plan for Change. These will be high-quality, well-designed homes, supported by the necessary infrastructure, where people can thrive.

On climate policy, environmental assessments and Net Zero, the Government takes environmental protections seriously, and protecting and restoring the environment is also at the heart of its proposals. Shifting to a strategic approach to nature recovery will establish a more efficient and effective way for environmental obligations to be discharged at a scale that has the greatest environmental benefits.

The Planning and Infrastructure Bill, introduced to Parliament on 11 March, includes the Government's proposals for developers to pay into a fund for improvements to nature, as a quicker and simpler way of discharging environmental obligations. This approach to nature recovery has huge potential to accelerate housing and infrastructure delivery while also delivering outcomes for the environment.

These proposals have been informed by feedback to the Development and Nature Recovery Working Paper, as well as engagement with stakeholders including communities, developers, nature conservation organisations and local authorities.

The Government committed to only act in legislation where it could confirm to Parliament that the steps it is taking will deliver positive environmental outcomes.

Thank you for taking the time to write to us.

Yours sincerely,

Carole

Correspondence Unit