

Alok Sharma MP
Minister of State for the Department for Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

13 July 2017

Dear Minister

Request for meeting: Tackling London, East and South East housing delivery barriers

Congratulations on your appointment. We write on behalf of the Wider South East Political Steering Group – a cross-party partnership of all tiers of council across the South East and East of England, London boroughs and the Mayor of London. We are home to 24.2m people, some 44% of England’s population. We are keen to meet with you to discuss how together with Government we can tackle long-standing barriers to housing delivery, and progress the Housing White Paper’s aims to deliver more market and affordable homes more quickly. We are also keen to understand how you plan to take forward White Paper proposals in light of the Queen’s Speech.

Together London, the South East and East of England play a vital part in meeting the housing needs of the country’s growing population and driving the nation’s economy – delivering 87,000 homes in 2015-16 (46% of England’s total) and £773bn GVA (54% of England’s total). **However, we face ongoing barriers to delivering the full scale of homes we all need built, with a growing number of unimplemented planning permissions, estimated at 510,000+ across London, East and South East. These hold back our collective growth ambitions, and can restrict people’s access to the affordable or market housing they need.**

As cross-party cross-tier representatives we met with the previous Housing Minister Gavin Barwell on 19 January 2017. We discussed our growth aspirations, constraints on delivery, latest Government thinking and started to explore how we can work better together on changes to improve housing delivery. We want to work with you to make progress on these issues, but need to understand the new Government’s approach and any changes following the general election, Queen’s Speech and White Paper consultation.

Unimplemented permissions – a shared problem

A key shared concern is how to accelerate and unlock housing development on the large and growing number of unimplemented housing permissions across our areas. Our letter¹ sent to the previous minister included information and data on the scale of unimplemented permissions and key policy proposals for the White Paper on speeding up delivery of housing and associated infrastructure and utilities.

Solving the housing crisis will require developers, councils, housing associations, land agents and infrastructure providers to co-operate and deliver the homes we all need. We welcomed acknowledgement in the White Paper of the complex range of issues constraining

¹ https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/unlocking_unimplemented_housing_capacity_-_2nd_joint_letter_to_secretary_of_state.pdf

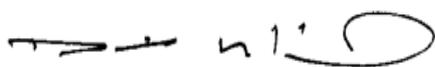
delivery of the large number of unimplemented housing permissions (estimated at 510,000+ across London, East and South East). However, whilst welcome, measures outlined in the White Paper alone will not give councils the means to ensure the step change in housing delivery that we all want to see. In particular the three areas below are fundamental to sustainable increases in housing supply:

- Industry delivery – speed, capacity and approach: We are pleased that Government has recognised the problem of unimplemented planning permissions and build-out times. We welcome White Paper proposals for some modest tools to help councils tackle slow delivery via development schedules/review mechanisms, and increasing construction skills. *However, further action is still needed to deliver the White Paper's aims of increasing housing supply – especially if the new 'delivery duty' on councils is to be introduced. Ministers have also been clear that delivery of local plans is a priority, so transition and implications for plan making are also important.*
- Affordable housing: We welcome several White Paper actions to support building affordable homes to rent and buy, especially recognition of the need for more rented homes, for which few issues around absorption rates would apply. *However, further action is needed to free-up finances to build affordable homes at scale, for example through relaxing Housing Revenue Account borrowing, increasing flexibilities around the use of Right to Buy receipts, and progressing housing deals as proposed in the White Paper.*
- Infrastructure: We welcome recognition of the importance of infrastructure in unlocking housing growth, including utilities, and some funding opportunities - including the new Housing Infrastructure Fund. *However the scale of challenge of improving and maintaining infrastructure requires more funding opportunities than are currently on offer, and we would be pleased to discuss ways this could be addressed. Additionally, a strategic approach is needed from the construction industry/utilities and regulators to allow for timely funding and delivery of large scale infrastructure to unlock development.*

We are also keen to discuss how local government can help with transition to new housing needs assessments, the application of increased planning fees, and ensuring accurate national assessment of the scale of unimplemented permissions.

We would be pleased to discuss our specific suggestions to help deliver homes more quickly, and ask to meet at the earliest opportunity to shape the way ahead.

Yours sincerely



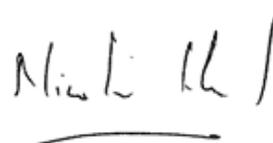
Cllr David Finch

Chairman of the East of England Infrastructure & Growth Group
and Leader of Essex County Council



Jules Pipe

Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration & Skills, Greater London Authority



Cllr Nicolas Heslop

Chairman of South East England Councils
and Leader of Tonbridge & Malling
Borough Council



Cllr Daren Rodwell

London Councils Portfolio Holder for City
Development and Leader of London
Borough of Barking & Dagenham

Greater London Authority the Mayor of London provides citywide leadership and creates policies to improve London for all.

London Councils represents London's 32 borough councils and the City of London.

South East England Councils (SEEC) is a cross-party partnership representing county, unitary and district councils in Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Surrey, East & West Sussex and Kent.

The East of England LGA is a membership organisation of the district and county councils in Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk and the unitary councils of Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, Luton, Peterborough, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock.