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Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP
Minister of State for Housing
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Sent via email

26 February 2020

Dear Mr Pincher

Many congratulations on your appointment as Minister for Housing.

South East England Councils is a cross-tier and cross-party membership body which represents the majority of local authorities across the South East. The South East has delivered over 117,000 homes during the last three years, the most in England. Our members are keen to see delivery of homes and infrastructure to support sustainable communities. As you will be well aware barriers and challenges exist in all regions, but are especially acute in the South East which has to take such a high proportion of new dwellings and which already suffers from serious overdevelopment and congestion.

We felt it was timely to highlight five areas where help from the Government could improve delivery of housing in the South East:

Unimplemented permissions. Although delivering the most homes in England, there is a growing backlog of unimplemented permissions across the South East, with estimates showing that over 150,000 homes granted planning permission in the past decade have not yet been built. This is a national problem that requires national solutions such as those proposed by the Local Government Association.

The Government could help by giving councils more powers to ensure planning consents are acted upon, for example: to amend compulsory purchase legislation to give local authorities greater power to force developers to sell sites which have been left undeveloped for an unreasonable amount of time; and to require more substantial progress on construction works to have been undertaken for permission to remain valid.

Balancing issues sustainably. Given over 40% of the South East is covered by environmental assets such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and National Parks, and protection such as Green Belt, it is especially difficult for some councils to find the space for new housing.

Councils in the South East face a delicate balancing act due to high levels of development need, acute transport and congestion pressures, and a need and desire to protect and enhance the natural environment. National Planning Policy does not give sufficient recognition to this tension, and in particular we urge Government to review the standard methodology for assessing housing need to take account of local circumstances.

Affordable/Social housing. South East house prices are up to 12 times average earnings and 40% above the UK average, and according to Halifax Building Society 7 of the 10 least affordable districts for housing are in the South East. Delivery of Affordable/Social housing must be a priority for central as well as local government.

The Government could make a difference by increasing funding for Affordable/Social housing to all providers. Councils should be able to keep 100% of Right to Buy receipts without restrictions so replacement Affordable/Social homes can be delivered and have flexibility about the level of reduction offered at a local level.

Permitted Development Rights. Government policy on Permitted Development Rights is leading to many homes which are not fit for purpose, in the wrong locations and leading to the loss of employment space and a lack of affordable housing financial contributions that communities need. This is particularly significant in the South East not only given the high demand for housing but also the existing lack of affordable homes and infrastructure funding deficits.

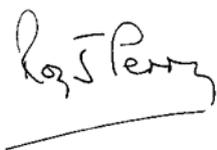
We urge the Government to instigate an urgent review of Permitted Development Rights with the aim of improving standards, delivering affordable housing and supporting employment.

Infrastructure funding. We have written separately to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, emphasising the importance of adequate infrastructure funding in the South East to support economic growth and sustainable communities.

Independent assessments have identified an infrastructure deficit of over £15.4bn in the South East by 2030. As Councillors we know inadequate infrastructure provokes local residents in many cases to resist more development. We would welcome your support in making the case to Treasury colleagues not only for sufficient infrastructure funding needed for the high levels of housing growth in the South East, but also importantly for it to be delivered *in advance* of homes, to ensure a sustainable future for our communities.

We would very much welcome the opportunity to meet you to explore how together (central and local government) we can better address the housing issues of this key region.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Roy Perry
Chair



Cllr Ralph Bagge
Deputy Chair