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Dominic Raab MP
Minister of State for Housing and Planning
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
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17 January 2018

Dear Dominic

South East housing pressures: A way forward

In my role as Chairman of South East England Councils (SEEC), I want to offer my warmest congratulations on your appointment as Housing Minister. As a South East MP, I know you recognise the housing challenges many of us face but I would welcome the opportunity to meet you – with a small group of fellow council leaders – to discuss solutions that will help councils deliver more homes sustainably.

The key challenge for South East local authorities is how to deliver the homes that our local communities need without damaging the economy or decimating our precious green spaces.

SEEC members have identified policy solutions that would help councils overcome current barriers and balance the demands of housing, economic growth and environmental protection.

We would welcome a meeting to discuss ways in which Government can do more to help councils deliver. We believe there are three areas in particular that would benefit from swift action, with Government and local authorities working together to put solutions in place.

A sense check for proposed housing allocations

Local housing allocations set out for consultation in 'Right Homes in the Right Places' need review to address South East anomalies.

You will know that areas such as Elmbridge would see a 29% increase in housing under the new allocations but they are not alone. Many other South East councils would also see significant increases, for example +55% in Aylesbury Vale and +36% in Swale. We would like to talk to you about how allocations could be adjusted to take account of South East constraints, including Green Belt, National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

In contrast, pressurised South East towns such as Oxford and Reading would see reductions in their housing need figures that do not match with their local expectations. Elsewhere in the

country, reduced housing figures in many northern towns could undermine Government's growth ambitions for the north in favour of further increasing pressure in the South East.

Unimplemented planning permissions

SEEC members are keen to contribute to your ministry's thinking on unused planning permissions and Sir Oliver Letwin's review panel. Our most recent data shows a backlog of 66,750 unused planning permissions across the South East – around two years' supply of new homes at current building rates.

We would like to discuss new discretionary powers for councils to charge developers for unused permissions. These would allow councils to incentivise build out of approved homes and reduce the pressure to constantly release more greenfield sites for development.

Infrastructure for new homes

Despite Government investment, infrastructure funding is not keeping pace with housing growth in the South East. SEEC research shows an infrastructure funding gap of £15.4bn by 2030.

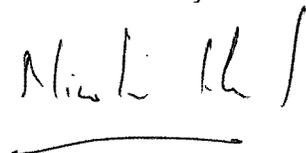
Without a way to address this gap, growing congestion and underperforming broadband will damage the South East economy and curtail its ability to contribute to Treasury's national spending power.

We want to discuss how giving councils access to a small portion of national taxes raised in their areas could help councils invest in local infrastructure themselves.

In summary, SEEC members are ambitious to deliver the housing and economic growth that their areas need and have devoted much thought to finding a way forward. I enclose a copy of our 2017 report 'Unlock the Housing Blockers' that sets out some of our ideas in more detail.

As an all tier group of councils representing 9.1 million residents across the South East, SEEC is keen to work with you to find solutions that will overcome some of the current barriers to housing delivery. We hope we will be able to find an opportunity to discuss our ideas with you shortly.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicolas Heslop', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Cllr Nicolas Heslop

Chairman, South East England Councils
and Leader, Tonbridge & Malling BC