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The Rt Hon Caroline Flint MP
Minister for Housing and Planning
Department for Communities & Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

1st August 2008

Our ref RSS10

Dear Minister,

Government guidance on housing provision to inform regional strategy revisions and implications for Partial Review of Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West

Thank you for your letter dated 16th July 2008, which has been given careful consideration by 4NW officers. 4NW would like to reiterate its commitment to putting in place a regional spatial planning policy framework that will help to facilitate the long term delivery of more homes in the region.

In light of the current situation, after dialogue with colleagues at the Northwest Regional Development Agency, 4NW would like to suggest the following course of action.

- The Government as a matter of some urgency, completes and publishes the final version of RSS (which is going through the final stages of the full review process started in 2005). This will facilitate a dramatic uplift in additional housing delivery compared with the existing RPG13. When coupled with the approach of moving from maxima to minima housing figures, this would also seem to provide a basis for moving forward with the recently announced growth points in the region.

However most importantly, this will provide certainty, to hopefully enable local planning authorities in the North West to make more speedy progress of the preparation and adoption of Local Development Frameworks.

- Suspend work on the housing elements of the ongoing Partial Review of Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the North West. This will allow more consideration of emerging evidence and policy developments relating to current housing market conditions, the NHPAU advice, new growth points, environmental / infrastructure capacity, and feedback from consultation on recent options stage of the Partial Review. This will allow some of 4NW's professional planning and housing resources to be refocused on the ongoing work with NWDA to develop the non statutory regional strategy, currently being developed in advance of the relevant legislation. [Given that this will be non statutory in nature, it is not possible to include revised housing provision figures, as these will have questionable value as a material consideration in the planning process, and thus have a limited value in supporting the delivery of the Housing Green Paper growth agenda].

However, it is suggested that the situation is reviewed in 12 months time, in light of these factors, along with progress on the primary legislation which will enable the preparation of statutory single regional strategies (which could incorporate revised housing provision figures). If there are delays in legislative progress, this will enable this element of the Partial Review of RSS to be rapidly recommenced, to ensure that the North West can make progress in putting in place revised housing provision figures through the statutory RSS process.

- However the Partial Review of RSS is not just about delivery of more housing numbers. There are other important topics being addressed which cover significant policy gaps on a number of technical and politically very important issues (at both a national, regional and local level). Therefore 4NW would suggest that the Partial Review of RSS continues for the following topic areas – Waste, Renewable Energy, Gypsies & Travellers, Travelling Showpeople and Car Parking Standards.

In this context I look forward to receiving your agreement that the above suggested course of action offers a pragmatic and professional way forward in addressing the regional spatial planning strategic policy deficit that currently exists, whilst also continuing to facilitate the delivery of the Governments long term aspirations on housing.

Yours Faithfully



Lord Peter Smith
Chair
Regional Leaders Forum – 4NW

Cc Michael Gallagher – NWRA
Patrick White – NWDA
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