



Mr Graham Hunt, Town Clerk
Thame Town Council
Town Hall
High Street
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11 July 2017

Dear Graham,

Neighbourhood Planning

I am regularly asked questions about Neighbourhood Planning by communities trying to decide whether or not to make a Plan and by those already on the process. I remain fully committed to the process and am pleased that the new Planning Minister has recently affirmed the Government's ongoing support. He has also confirmed my role as the Department's National Neighbourhood Planning Champion.

Since the introduction of Neighbourhood Planning there has been continual learning and changes have been introduced to strengthen the power of communities in Plan making. I know that in some areas developers have tried to thwart the process and get in first which has been a huge frustration. My purpose in writing now is to draw your attention to an Adjournment Debate that I held last week in the House on the subject. I took the opportunity to raise some of the key issues which have emerged and was pleased at the Minister's reply which sets out his intentions to give further support to communities for Neighbourhood Planning.

The first group of issues I raised related to when Neighbourhood Plans carry weight with regard to decision making in the planning system. The National Planning Policy Framework sets some criteria and many issues are resolved on a case by case basis by the Planning Inspectorate. In order to give more certainty for communities I asked the Minister to consider bringing in a moratorium on new house building where a Plan is being put together. In relation to this I also asked for Guidance to the Planning Inspectorate to ensure consistency and also to prevent unnecessary delay.

The second group of issues related to the number of houses required and getting the type of houses a community needs especially for smaller, more affordable market housing to help younger families. In relation to this I asked the Minister to quickly move forward with consultation on changes to the calculation of housing numbers and to allow for a community to include the type of housing required in its Neighbourhood Plan and to have some role in helping with affordability.

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I recognise the hard work that is put into developing these plans and so encouraged the Minister to do all that he can to strengthen it for communities. In replying the Minister stressed the Government's ongoing commitment to Neighbourhood Planning and committed to look carefully at the issues I have raised. I wait with anticipation for the outcome of this and hope that you will feel encouraged if you are already working on a Neighbourhood Plan. If you are not preparing a Plan I would strongly urge you to reconsider and would be happy to meet with you to discuss this.

A transcript of the debate is also attached.

Opportunities to meet

Some of you may recall that I have used the September Parliamentary recess to visit as many communities as I can, and especially to meet with Parish Council representatives. This is a valuable way for me to keep in touch with the work that you do and the key issues that arise on our communities. Rather than wait for this time each year I would like to set up a rolling programme of meetings and would welcome a call to set something up with each of you. There are some limitations on my availability and in reality it will not be possible to make all of these meetings in an evening. I appreciate that this makes it difficult for some and if it is only possible to meet with a few representatives this may be the best way forward.

When Parliament is sitting I can sometimes get back to the constituency for a Thursday evening meeting, depending on the business of the House. I can be available on Friday's. In a parliamentary recess I have much greater flexibility. We will soon start the summer recess which may offer opportunities. If you would like to meet please call my constituency office on 01491 613072 to arrange a mutually convenient time for us to meet.

In closing may I thank all of you for the work that you do for your communities. I know from my own experience that it can at times seem like a thankless task but I can assure you that your work is very much appreciated.

With best wishes,

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