



THAME

Town Council

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Graham Hunt, Town Clerk & RFO

Alok Sharma MP
Minister of State
Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
LONDON
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3 July 2017

Dear Minister

Protection for Neighbourhood Plans

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister of State for Housing and Planning.

As you probably know, Thame was a front-runner in terms of Neighbourhood Planning, was one of the first areas to have a Neighbourhood Plan adopted and is a strong advocate for the continued success of Neighbourhood Plans. We enjoy specific support from our MP, John Howell.

With detailed planning permission already granted for 620 out of 775 allocated dwellings, of which close to 150 are already built and occupied, Thame is an exemplar in proving that Neighbourhood Planning speeds up development in appropriate and sustainable locations. With windfalls included, we expect close to 1000 new dwellings being built in Thame by the end of 2019, just 6 years into the plan.

As you also know, many areas with an adopted Neighbourhood Plan came under significant threat through the lack of a Five-Year Land Supply of deliverable housing sites elsewhere in the Planning Authority area. This ultimately resulted in your predecessor issuing a very welcome Ministerial Written Statement on 12 December 2016.

The expectation was that extension of the protection given by the Statement (time-limited to 2 years) would be written into legislation through the Housing White Paper. We fear that the recent general election and resulting changes in the legislative programme as covered in the Queen's Speech may have changed the timescales for that continued protection.

Can you please clarify to us the plans you have for continuing the protection, so that those areas that have put the community effort into ensuring a plan led approach to sustainable development are not overtaken by speculative developer led development exploiting any deficiency in the Five-Year Land Supply in the wider district?

This is even more pertinent to us, as we now embark on a re-write of the Neighbourhood Plan (again probably one of the first areas to do so), as the Local Plan changes above us. We need the engagement of the community and their confidence in Neighbourhood Planning to be sustained for that new Neighbourhood Plan to be as successful as its predecessor.

We look forward to your response and also cordially invite you to visit Thame at any time, so that we can demonstrate Neighbourhood Planning in action.

Yours faithfully

Graham Hunt
Town Clerk