

South Kesteven District Council

Chairman
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30 June 2008

The Rt. Hon. Hazel Blears M.P.
Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
LONDON
SW1E 5DU

Dear Miss Blears

Designation of residential gardens as brown field sites

At the last meeting of the full council on 19 June, members of South Kesteven District Council debated a motion about the impact that the Government's policy of designating gardens as brown field sites has had on many residential areas. The member submitting the motion had been contacted by many of his constituents who were experiencing stress and a reduction in the enjoyment of their neighbourhood as a result of high density development in close proximity to their homes.

The council voted to support the motion that a letter be sent to you on behalf of its members to express displeasure at this policy. This policy has now opened the door to a surge of planning applications from garden grabbing developers whose actions are slowly destroying the pleasant environments in which many of our citizens live. Residential properties are now seen as prime infill opportunities to the detriment of the character of local communities.

Members were mindful that as a local planning authority, applications must be determined against planning law and policy guidance. However, each application should be determined on its merit, and members were very concerned that this blanket policy places pressure on local planning authorities because of the targets for building and drive for high density housing.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Exton'.

Chairman of the Council

17 July 2008

Councillor Mike Exton
Chairman of the Council
South Kesteven District Council
St. Peter's Hill
Grantham, Lincs
NG31 6PZ

Our Ref: HB/16/020865/08
Your Ref:

Dear Mr. Exton,

Thank you for your letter of 30 June to the Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP on behalf of members of South Kesteven District Council, follow a motion regarding housing development on garden land. Your letter has been passed to me for reply.

As you know, there is considerable need for new housing. The Housing Green Paper '*Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable*', published in July last year, outlined the Government's plans for delivering the homes that we need to meet the growing demand for housing and to address affordability issues.

But whilst the Government wants to see more housing, it also wants to see it built in a properly planned and strategic way, and not just at any cost. It is also important to ensure that housing development is in the right place. That includes preventing inappropriate development in residential areas or on garden land where it is not sustainable and other sites are available. I hope you would agree that the changes in policy that were put in place through the publishing of PPS3 in November 2006, do give local authorities like yours more flexibility to shape new development according to the needs of their area and make decisions on what sort of new housing they need and where it should be located. Local authorities can treat residential land differently from other kinds of brownfield land, and are able to place restrictions on development on residential brownfield land through adopting appropriate policies in plans.

Whilst PPS3 does quite rightly prioritise the use of brownfield land for development, one of its overarching objectives is to ensure housing is provided in suitable locations. That is why PPS3 states in clear terms that there is no presumption that land is suitable for housing simply because it is brownfield, stressing the need for sites to be suitable for housing development and that are in suitable locations.

However, this does place an emphasis on being able to identify alternative appropriate sites for development in order to support the additional homes in the most suitable locations. This is where the evidence based, and 'plan-led', approach set out in PPS3 becomes so important. The evidence that local authorities should pull together about need and demand, affordability and sustainability and supply of housing land, needs to be robust and up-to-date to then give them a good basis for making strategic and operational decisions. With local authorities identifying sites in their plans rather than relying upon speculative planning applications coming forward randomly, they can provide housing in suitable locations that will ensure local communities get the right kind of housing in the right place, at the right time, having regard to local needs.

Allied to this is the need for high quality design, which is at the forefront of the policy approach. PPS3 places a much stronger emphasis on the quality of residential design and layout, making clear that design which is inappropriate in its context, or which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area should not be accepted. Local authorities should also ensure that they develop their own design policies that set out the quality of development that will be expected in their local area. This includes providing for the retention or re-establishment of the biodiversity within residential environments.

I hope this is helpful

Yours sincerely,


Sangeeta Sofat