

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP  
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government  
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government  
2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DF

28 April 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

**Re: Safeguarding the public voice in planning under Covid-19**

The coronavirus has required significant changes to the way the planning system operates, like so much else. We are fully supportive of the need for economic recovery to meet society's needs in the "new normal" situation after the period of lockdown. Planning has a crucial role to play in this recovery, but the imperative to keep the economy moving is not a reason to allow short-term, socially and/or environmentally-damaging development that we will live to regret.

Councils are interpreting the new rules for virtual meetings in very different ways. While these unprecedented times rightly call for innovation, the current *ad hoc* access to the democratic and participatory process creates an unfair 'postcode lottery' which could result in long-term damage to the interests of local communities, to the well-being of vulnerable citizens and to the environment.

As you will be aware, major planning decisions are normally made by a vote in open meetings of elected councillors, with speaking rights for applicants and objectors. Such fairness and transparency are as fundamental to every local authority's constitution as they are to the correct operation of the planning system.

Your Department can, and should, do more to explicitly recognise the important role of communities in decision-making and to highlight the risks of failing to engage with them. The input and expertise of communities and third parties and the benefits of public scrutiny can be critical to the creation of better, more beautiful and more resilient developments.

We call on the government to safeguard the role of communities in the planning process by asking local authorities to respect our six key principles, set out overleaf. Furthermore, we would ask that you issue directions to temporarily relax or extend deadlines for the determination of planning applications, to take the pressure off decision makers while they make the necessary changes to their systems, and to provide further guidance to them.

We would very much welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues further with you, and look forward to working with you, your department and local authorities to ensure the productive and democratic operation of the planning system, in the interest of economically, socially and environmentally sustainable development. If a meeting is of interest, please contact Sarah McMonagle, CPRE, the countryside charity's Head of External Affairs, via [sarahmc@cpre.org.uk](mailto:sarahmc@cpre.org.uk).

Yours sincerely,



**Crispin Truman**  
**Chief Executive**  
**CPRE The countryside charity**

Signed on behalf of:

**CPRE London | CPRE The countryside charity | Friends of the Earth | Just Space | London Forum of Civic & Amenity Societies | Town and Country Planning Association**

## **Our six key principles:**

1. No planning application normally decided by a committee should be decided using delegated or executive powers.
2. Virtual meetings should be reliably live streamed on video, with speaking rights for public objectors / third party representatives, as with normal committee meetings.
3. Councils should produce a report setting out how, under the Covid 19 regulations, they will follow best practice for the involvement of communities, particularly disadvantaged communities and those with less access to technology and broadband.
4. Councils should create, and promote widely, a designated website page giving full information on upcoming meetings and consultations, providing clear guidance to communities and third parties on how to take part.
5. Councils should look to extend deadlines attached to the determination of planning applications and responding to consultations.
6. Any public referenda or votes associated with Estate Regeneration should be put on hold until there is a reliable, democratic way to vote, as has happened with the referenda for Neighbourhood Plans.