



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
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Luke Stephens

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Dear Mr Truman

Thank you for your letter of 28 April to the Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, signed on behalf of the Campaign to Protect Rural England, CPRE London, Friends of the Earth, Just Space, London Forum of Civic & Amenity Societies, and the Town and Country Planning Association, about the conduct of the planning system during the Covid 19 restrictions. I have been asked to reply.

The six key principles for local authorities to observe, which you set out in your letter, have been noted. We are encouraging local authorities to continue, as much as possible, to work pro-actively with their communities and other stakeholders. You may have seen that, in his Newsletter of 23 March, the Chief Planner asks local authorities to provide the best service possible in these stretching times, and to prioritise decision-making to ensure the planning system continues to function. In the current emergency we ask local authorities to be ready to be innovative, using all options available to continue the planning service safely.

Face-to-face events, meetings and some visits may have to be cancelled, but local authorities should explore all methods of communication to ensure that discussions and consultations with local people go ahead safely.

Whilst we recognise your concern about greater delegation of planning decisions, this is principally a matter for each local planning authority about how it effectively operates during these exceptional times. Greater delegation may have a role to play in some authorities, but we have also been determined to ensure planning committees can meet remotely and continue to take decisions, wherever compatible with government guidance on social distancing. We introduced legislation (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/392/part/1>) to allow council committee meetings to be held virtually for a temporary period. We expect local authorities to make standing orders and other provisions governing remote attendance at meetings, and to provide for full participation in the planning system by the public and the press, enabling them to attend or contribute by telephone and video conference, live webcasts, and live interactive streaming.

Local authorities should still progress their development plans, even if some adjustments to timetables are necessary. The Planning Advisory Service website provides useful advice on consultation during this difficult period.

You also mention voting on estate regeneration schemes. The Estate Regeneration National Strategy (December 2016) sets out the Government's expectation that estate regeneration schemes should have the support of a majority of residents on the estate, and that landlords

and their development partners will be able to demonstrate the level of that support. There is no legal requirement for a ballot on all estate regeneration schemes; the Strategy acknowledges that local circumstances will determine the best mechanism for measuring resident support. During the current Covid-19 pandemic, meetings and votes in person may not be possible, but we expect proponents of regeneration to explore all safe methods of communication to allow residents' opinions to be expressed and recorded.

I am grateful to you for drawing your, and your co-signatories', concerns to the Department's attention. Although Ministers are not able to add new meetings at present, we are always keen to be kept in touch with the views of CPRE and other NGOs.

Your sincerely

LUKE STEPHENS

Head of Ministerial Correspondence