

January 2000

John Prescott MP
Secretary of State
DETR
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU

Dear Mr Prescott

I am writing to express my concern about the conclusions of the Panel Report of the Public Examination into the SERPLAN draft regional planning guidance for the South East. I am particularly concerned about the 1.1 million new homes recommended in this report for the South East and in addition the recommendation that only 50% of these should be built in existing towns and cities.

I understand that SERPLAN has in fact stated that building more than 900 000 new dwellings will have widespread and significant environmental impacts on the region. If the figures recommended for over 1,098,500 new homes to be built outside of London are accepted, I believe the impact on the countryside in the South East would be catastrophic. It would lead to growth in traffic, and also serve to undermine efforts to promote an urban renaissance in other parts of the country. The predict and provide approach to planning for housing is outdated. The South East needs a well thought out, sustainable land use planning strategy which this report does not represent.

The Government needs to look at ways in which existing housing stock can be maximised. For example, the Empty Homes Agency estimates that there are 770 000 empty houses in the UK and that 880 000 homes could be created by converting existing empty buildings. The current VAT situation exacerbates the situation with new build zero rated in comparison to the 17.5% levied for conversion and renovation. In addition the Government could look at measures such as introducing a greenfield tax, the revenues from which could be used to subsidise decontamination of redundant brown field sites. Private non-residential parking spaces could be taxed which would serve both to promote public transport and to reduce the amount of urban land dedicated to car parking, freeing it up for housing. Planning Guidance needs to be drafted to encourage well-designed high density, car free housing in urban centres and on housing developments.

I have been contacted by a number of constituents in the South East who are horrified by this proposed housing increase. Horsham District Council in particular asked me to raise this issue

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with you. I very much hope that you will rethink the recommendations made by the Inspectors and I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Lucas MEP
South East Region