



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

**Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local  
Government**  
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[www.gov.uk/mhclg](http://www.gov.uk/mhclg)

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Date: **18 September 2020**

Dear Suzanne Clark,

Thank you for your letter of 15 May 2020 to the Secretary of State regarding the effects of the covid-19 outbreak on the planning system. I have been asked to respond as the policy official responsible for this area and please accept my apologies for the delays in issuing this response.

Through the Business and Planning Act, the Government is supporting the construction sector and local authorities by extending building site operating hours, as well as extending planning permission that lapsed or will lapse between 23 March and 31 December. These measures will help reduce delays caused by unimplemented planning permissions and reconcile worker safety with construction site productivity, enabling planning officers to bring land more swiftly for development.

We have also provided local authorities with guidance encouraging them to consider where deferrals for S106 may be appropriate and to use existing flexibilities to ensure that infrastructure is delivered at the right time, while removing barriers for developers and minimizing the stalling of sites.

I note the concerns you raise regarding the Housing Delivery Test and demonstrating a 5-year land supply under current circumstances. It is important to keep the planning system moving to enable it to play its full part in the economic recovery, but we will continue to monitor the situation. I would also like to draw your attention to the fact that the revised National Planning Policy Framework includes the important protection for designated neighbourhood areas from speculative development introduced in December 2016. This applies to neighbourhood plans which plan for housing where the local authority can demonstrate a 3-year land supply and where other criteria are met.

Regarding local plan policy, Planning Practice Guidance indicates that local plans should be kept under review (usually within five years of adoption) and updated if necessary. We recognise that some updates may involve substantial work, so we do not stipulate that the update must be completed within the five years. Notwithstanding this, the authority should press forward with the revised plan as soon as possible to reduce vulnerability to speculative development.

We recently published the Planning for the Future White Paper, a package which proposes significant changes to both the focus and processes of planning – to secure better outcomes in terms of land for homes, beauty and environmental

quality, as well as processes which give greater certainty and speed for communities, councils and developers. I would welcome your views as part of this consultation, which closes on 29 October, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future>.

Yours Sincerely,

Amy Brookes  
Planning Officer.