



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Angela Smith MP
House of Commons
London
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24 JUN 2014

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18 JUN 2014

Thank you for your letter of 2 June to the Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP on behalf of your constituent Ruth Wilde, Chair of the Oxspring Neighbourhood Plan. I am replying as Planning Minister.

I am delighted that the Oxspring community are undertaking a neighbourhood plan. Neighbourhood planning is a vital part of the Government's reforms to help local communities play a much stronger role in shaping the areas in which they live and work and in supporting new development proposals.

I am sure you will appreciate that I am unable to comment on individual planning applications. I understand Ms Wilde's concerns about planning applications for development coming forward in advance of the preparation of a neighbourhood plan. However, planning authorities are legally required to determine the applications that come before them. Planning applications are decided in accordance with the development plan for the area, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Once a neighbourhood plan has been passed at referendum and brought into force, it becomes part of the development plan.

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out clearly that plans may gain weight in planning decisions before they are formally made. Ms Wilde is correct that we have provided guidance on the subject of the weight that can be attached to an emerging neighbourhood plan when determining planning applications. This guidance can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/ndlaeud>.

Planning guidance also sets out where circumstances may justify the refusal of planning permission on grounds that an application would be premature in relation to the emerging Local or neighbourhood plan.

The National Planning Policy Framework also makes clear that most development in the Green Belt is inappropriate and should be approved only in very special circumstances. However the Framework also makes clear that certain types of development are not inappropriate. For example, local transport infrastructure, which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location. These are decisions for the local planning authority.

It can be challenging when development comes forward in advance of a neighbourhood plan, however, I commend the community of Oxspring for their hard work in taking this opportunity

to influence development for many years to come and urge them to continue to progress their neighbourhood plan. It would be a shame for the community to miss this opportunity as well as the potential to receive an increased share of Community Infrastructure Levy in the long run because of uncertainty over the influence they can have on development in the months immediately ahead.

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NICK BOLES MP