



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

Rt Hon Lucy Frazer KC MP
Minister of State for Housing and Planning

***Department for Levelling Up, Housing and
Communities***

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Victoria Hills MRTPI FICE FRSA
Chief Executive
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20 January 2023

Dear Ms Hills,

Thank you for your letter of 24 October, to the Prime Minister, setting out the views of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) on a range of matters, including the resourcing and capacity of planning services, planning reform, and the enhancement of strategic cooperation. Your enquiry was passed to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and I am replying as the Minister responsible for these policy areas.

I do appreciate how important these issues are to the RTPI, I was grateful for your time discussing in our recent meeting and I am look forward to working with you going forward. I hope that the following summary of what the Government is doing to address the RTPI's concerns will be helpful.

The Government recognises that many local planning authorities, as well as the wider planning sector, are facing capacity and capability challenges. To ensure that local planning authorities are well equipped and supported to deliver development now, and in addition to the changes set out in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (LURB), the Government has already started to work alongside the sector to design targeted interventions to support the development of critical skills and to build capacity across local planning authorities. I understand that you are working with officials within the Department as part of this work to identify ways that we can support local planning authorities to recruit, retain and grow their own planners to help build a more sustainable planning system.

On the specific point of funding, the Government does recognise that there is a shortfall between the income from planning fees and the cost of processing planning applications, as shown by our statistics on local authority income and expenditure, which is set out in Table RO5 at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing-england-2020-to-2021-individual-local-authority-data-outturn>.

As announced earlier this year, to reduce this shortfall, the Government's intention is to consult on proposals to increase planning fees so that they cover a greater proportion of the cost of processing planning applications. I am unable to confirm a date for this consultation or when the fee increase will be introduced, but the intention is to do so at the earliest opportunity.

The Government has been clear that local communities must be at the heart of the planning process and will therefore reform the process for producing plans so that it is simpler, faster and easier for communities to engage with. There will be clear opportunities to get involved at key

stages in the process, with longer minimum periods for engagement than now, which will be made easier by plans themselves being shorter with more accessible documents.

The LURB will increase and enhance the opportunities for involvement to ensure that development is brought forward in a way that works best for local people. The Government is clear that communities must have a say on development that affects them. Communities will also retain the right to comment on planning applications.


You mention the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill, which allows the United Kingdom to take the next step in reasserting the sovereignty of Parliament. It will end the special status of retained EU law in the UK statute book and will enable the Government to more easily amend, revoke and replace retained EU law. The Bill will also sunset much of this retained EU law by 31 December 2023, unless an active decision is taken to keep it. All remaining retained EU law will either be reformed, restated, or assimilated into UK domestic law. Retained EU law was never intended to sit on the statute book indefinitely. It is both constitutionally anomalous and politically challenging, as some domestic laws, including Acts of Parliament, remain subordinate to some retained EU law. Upon Royal Assent, the Bill will enable the UK to fully grasp the myriad of opportunities to create modern and agile regulation to support the ambitions of our sovereign nation.

The Government wants to ensure that authorities have the flexibility to determine the most efficient way of getting plans in place in their area, in order to remove unnecessary duplication, and to address planning matters at the appropriate level. Effective town planning requires a coordinated approach between local authorities and for them to work together across a geography that better reflects daily life and transcends administrative boundaries.

The Government is abolishing the duty to cooperate because it is widely seen as having failed and become a bureaucratic exercise that has resulted in some notable plan failures. The Government will be replacing it with a more flexible policy requirement of an "Alignment Test" within the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The Alignment Test has yet to be developed and will be consulted upon as part of the development of the revised NPPF. However, we anticipate that it will remain essential for authorities to align their emerging plan proposals with those of neighbouring councils and other public bodies, especially infrastructure providers.

Thank you again for raising these matters. I hope you find this information helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lucy Frazer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

RT HON LUCY FRAZER KC MP