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Max Jones

**Department for
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Dear Cllr Lowe

Thank you for your letter of 21 October to the Rt Hon Greg Clark MP about affordable housing. I am replying as Housing and Planning Minister and I apologise for the delay in doing so.

The Government was elected on a strong mandate to make sure the homes this nation deserves are built quickly and where communities need them. We want to see a range of housing delivered of all tenures which will be delivered through the Housing and Planning Bill and a range of other policies. The Spending Review doubles our investment in affordable housing from 2018-19, to £8 billion to deliver over 400,000 affordable housing starts consisting of: £4 billion for 135,000 Help to Buy: Shared Ownership homes, which will allow people to buy a share in their home and increase that equity over time; £2.3 billion towards delivering new Starter Homes, and £1.7 billion for 100,000 affordable homes for rent.

We especially want to ensure young people are not denied what their parents took for granted – the opportunity to buy their own home, settle down and enjoy the security that home ownership brings. That is why we are committed to delivering 200,000 high quality Starter Homes exclusively for young first time buyers under 40 to be sold at a minimum of 20% below the open market value. The Housing and Planning Bill will set out a new statutory framework for the delivery of Starter Homes, and is subject to Parliamentary Scrutiny over the coming months. It includes the definition of a Starter Home; a general duty for local planning authorities to plan for the delivery of Starter Homes and, a specific duty for Starter Homes to be built on all suitable, reasonably sized housing developments.

However, we want to see a degree of flexibility with the Starter Homes requirement which will be set out in regulations- to reflect the different nature of residential development and viability pressures across the country. We intend to consult and engage with developers, local authorities and other interested parties on the details of the requirement; including the percentage and any proposed exceptions or variations. I appreciate your initial feedback and would encourage your further views when the consultation document is published for comments so we get the requirement right.

The Bill also proposes that the regulations could allow developers to pay local authorities a commuted sum, allowing starter homes to be delivered on another piece of land, if it is the only way new homes will be viable there.

We want to ensure that thriving rural towns and villages across England can accommodate young people and young families by enabling a small level of development sympathetic to local concerns and which is clearly supported by local people as announced in our Rural Productivity Plan. As part of a national planning policy consultation to be published shortly, we will be seeking views on if rural exception sites should be used to deliver Starter Homes in rural areas. Including if there is a special case that Starter Homes on these sites should be kept at a discount 'in perpetuity' rather than allowing the owner to sell at full market value; and/ or if there should be a local connection test, given the particular housing market in rural areas. Furthermore, this consultation will seek views on changing the definition of affordable housing for planning purposes to include Starter Homes.

Again, I would appreciate the views of Sevenoaks District Council on these proposed planning policy changes and I hope that Sevenoaks can play a valuable role supporting our Starter Homes ambition. I understand that the Chief Executive of Sevenoaks District Council met with DCLG officials on 19 October 2015 to discuss planning issues.



BRANDON LEWIS MP

SIGNED ON BEHALF
OF MINISTER IN
HIS/HER
ABSENCE