

The Rt Hon Caroline Flint MP
Minister for Housing and Planning
Department for Communities & Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

2nd October 2008

Our ref RSS10

Dear Minister,

Government guidance on housing provision to inform regional strategy revisions and implications for Partial Review of Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West

Thank you for your letter dated 16th July 2008, which has been given careful consideration by 4NW officers and discussed in detail with colleagues at Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA). 4NW – the Regional Leaders Forum and the NWDA would like to reiterate our commitment to putting in place a regional spatial planning policy framework that will help to facilitate the long term delivery of more homes in the region. You will be aware that 4NW submitted a response to you on 1st August 2008.

However the publication this week of the final version of RSS, will facilitate a dramatic uplift in additional housing delivery compared with the existing RPG13. When coupled with the approach of moving from maxima to minima housing figures, and the recently announced growth points in the region, this will make significant progress in delivering increased housing provision in the region in line with the Housing Green Paper aspirations.

Most importantly, this will also provide certainty, to enable Local Planning Authorities in the North West to make more speedy progress of the preparation and adoption of Local Development Frameworks.

Therefore after further dialogue over the summer, with colleagues at CLG and, GONW, 4NW and the NWDA would like to suggest the following revised course of action, which is supported by GONW:

- Suspend work on the housing, renewable energy and waste location elements as a formal part of the ongoing Partial Review of Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the North West. This does not mean that the work connected with housing, waste and renewable energy will cease. Instead 4NW and the NWDA will continue to work with partners to develop the evidence base and incorporate it as appropriate into our joint work on developing a Regional Strategy.

This will allow more consideration of :

- ~ changing circumstances in the housing market;
- ~ the need to get a more complete evidence base on a number of issues including housing land availability, location of regional waste facilities, potential for renewable energy and environmental \ infrastructure capacity;
- ~ policy developments relating to current housing market conditions, the NHPAU advice and new growth points;
- ~ feedback from stakeholders on the recent Partial Review of RSS Options consultation exercise (which took place in June 2008);
- ~ the policy position that is emerging with the publication of the final version of RSS;

- The Partial Review of RSS is not just about delivery of more housing numbers. There are other important topics being addressed which cover significant policy gaps on a number of technical and politically very important issues (at both a national, regional and local level). Therefore 4NW and the NWDA would suggest that the Partial Review of RSS continues for the following topic areas – Gypsies & Travellers, Travelling Showpeople and Car Parking Standards.

In light of this revised scope, 4NW are currently revising the timetable for the Partial Review. As soon as this is finalised 4NW will discuss and agree it with GONW and the Planning Inspectorate.

This proposed course of action will allow some of 4NW's professional planning and housing resources to be refocused on the ongoing work with NWDA to develop a non statutory regional strategy in the Northwest. No doubt you will be aware of the indicative timetable being proposed for this work as set out below:

- Consultation on first phase of evidence base (July – Sept 08)
- Revision and development of evidence base (Sept 08 onwards)
- Development of a draft Principles and Issues paper (Oct 08 – Jan 09)
- Consultation on the Principles and Issues paper (Feb - April 09)
- Preparation of the draft Strategy (Apr - Sep 09)
- Consultation on the draft Strategy (Oct - Dec 09)
- Finalising the Regional Strategy (Jan10 - early Summer 10)
- Sustainability appraisal - involving strategic environmental assessment, habitats regulation assessment, equality and health impact assessments, rural proofing (Sept 08 - early Summer 10)

4NW are also in the final stages of reviewing the Regional Housing Strategy which will reinforce the need for long term growth in housing supply and interdependence of housing and economic growth by:

- achieving the right quantity of housing supply;
- continuing to raise the quality of the existing stock; and
- connecting people to the improved offer by helping increase access to affordable homes.

4NW and the NWDA hope that this will strengthen the role of strategic housing in the region, as we move towards the development of a Regional Strategy and establish firm strategic foundations for the Homes and Communities Agency to work within the region. We will write to you again later in the year with details, when we finalise the Regional Housing Strategy.

In order to deliver this series of actions, 4NW are working closely with NWDA and other partners to undertake work in the most appropriate way (including elected member input). In this context I look forward to receiving your agreement that the above suggested course of action offers a pragmatic and professional way forward in addressing the regional spatial planning strategic policy deficit that currently exists, whilst also continuing to facilitate the delivery of the Governments long term aspirations on housing.

Yours faithfully



Lord Peter Smith
Chair
Regional Leaders Forum – 4NW



Bryan Gray
Chairman
Northwest Regional Development Agency