

7 May 2009

Mr. Tim Yeo, MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr. Yeo

Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill

We are writing to express our concerns about aspects of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill and to ask you to raise these concerns in Parliament on our behalf when the Bill enters the House of Commons for consideration.

The new Regional Strategy, as set out in Part 5 of the Bill, will be too focused on delivering economic growth and housing numbers. Of course the economy and housing are important, but if the proposed changes are implemented we believe we will lose too much open countryside and the quality and unique character of the regions as well as Suffolk, could be compromised.

Suffolk is earmarked for growth around Ipswich and Bury and new growth point 'opportunities' between the Ports of Harwich and Felixstowe. The Dedham Vale AONB is a small ring-fenced area amid ambitions for economic development on the Essex/Suffolk border. As you will know the housing numbers for Suffolk are damaging if we are to retain a county that people wish to visit as a tourist destination, and to enjoy some of the tranquillity that is fast disappearing from the home-counties because of past over-development.

We do need more affordable homes, but we do not need 3 million new *market* homes by 2020, an over supply of housing will not increase affordability, or is it a sustainable way forward with climate considerations in mind. Developers will always look for plots of 'greenfield' land to build new housing rather than previously developed 'brownfield' land which costs more to prepare for building. If the Government continues to press for such high housing targets in regional plans, then councils will be under tremendous pressure to approve any applications that come forward just to get close to their targets, no matter where they are or what other harm they might cause. This will undermine their ability to protect the countryside, reduce carbon emissions from transport, and boost local economies through the economic and physical regeneration of urban areas, and progress a sustainable planning future.

The building of houses in themselves is a huge consumer of energy, not to mention the services they will require. It is incumbent on government to ensure that precious resources are not wasted and that we build only what we *need* and that is built where it is most required.

In light of these concerns please could you raise the following points on our behalf when the Bill is debated? I would also be grateful if you could write to Local Government Minister John Healey to pass on our concerns:

- definition of ‘sustainable economic growth’ – to avoid confusion and to ensure that equal consideration is given to environmental, social and economic issues in the future, a definition of ‘sustainable economic growth’ should be included in the Bill. This should be the definition that has been adopted elsewhere: “economic growth that can be sustained and is within environmental limits, but also enhances the environment and social welfare, and avoids greater extremes in future economic cycles”;
- three million new homes - the Government should reassess its target for 3 million new homes by 2020 as recommended by the Environmental Audit Committee’s report, Greener Homes for the Future? Affordable homes are needed, especially in rural areas, but this undeliverable target will not help solve this very complex problem, and poses real threats to the countryside; and
- community and stakeholder involvement - should allow local people and communities to be able to engage in the planning process so they are able to influence the future of where they live. The Bill should include specific minimum standards and processes for stakeholder and community involvement so that they are able to engage in the development of the new regional strategies in a meaningful way.

Thank you for your help. We look forward to hearing from you shortly.

Yours sincerely,

Alfreda Thistlethwaite
Chairman
Suffolk Preservation Society
cc: Suffolk MPs
Media Consultants
SPS Executive Committee
SPS PTC