



Partnership for South Hampshire

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Esther McVey MP
Minister of State for Housing
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)
Fry Building, 2 Marsham Street
LONDON SW1P 4DF

By email and post
25 October 2019

Dear Minister,

Formal request to the MHCLG to suspend National Planning Policy Framework Housing Delivery Tests for Partnership for South Hampshire local authorities.

I write on behalf of all members of the Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH), and further to my letter of 28 June to the former Secretary of State James Brokenshire. That letter highlighted the issues faced by our twelve local authorities following the introduction of the requirement that all new housing development must demonstrate nutrient neutrality. A copy of my letter, together with the response received from your predecessor Kit Malthouse MP, is attached for ease of reference.

The requirement is currently preventing, and in some cases completely halting, local planning authorities around the Solent from granting permission for new housing. Given the severely reduced number of permissions granted by PfSH local authorities in the financial year 2019/20, it is untenable to expect that the requirements placed upon them in the Housing Delivery Tests will be met - and the consequences of that is a cause of serious concern. The task of finding both short-term and medium/long-term solutions to address the problem is a shared one. This request is a measure agreed across PfSH that will alleviate unnecessary detrimental pressures on local authorities until solutions are found.

In his letter, Kit Malthouse undertook that MHCLG would continue to monitor the impact of the Housing Delivery Test by engaging with local authorities that are facing challenges, and commissioned a meeting between MHCLG officials and PfSH planning officers. That meeting took place on 20 August.

While I understand the meeting has led to cross-government discussions, primarily with DEFRA and its NDPBs (Natural England and Environment Agency), PfSH has received little substantive feedback to date on the progress and possible outcomes of those discussions. However, we do know that the legal text of the European Court of Justice ruling - that imposes the nutrient neutral requirement - is being examined, with the possibility of Natural England guidance being adjusted in-line with fresh interpretation. To date, the issue has been exacerbated by the disparity in the approach of two DEFRA NDPBs to the impact of the ruling - one issuing guidance on achieving nutrient neutrality, the other suggesting that no changes need to be made to waste water treatment works' permit levels. Going forward, it is essential that government advice presents us with a single unified message.

You will appreciate that any short-term measures that PfSH local authorities are undertaking to resume 'business as usual' will need to complement any wider solutions identified by your officials. PfSH has been working closely with MHCLG officials to assist and inform the approach to their discussions, has made clear the scale of the current backlog of consents and has been working closely in its own right with Natural England and Environment Agency to develop short and medium/long-term strategies to alleviate the problem. However, it is clear that the short-term mitigation options available, and that are

already being implemented, will not sufficiently reduce the backlog of development applications to a level that will allow us to meet the targets set in the Housing Delivery Tests. In addition, in the absence of mitigation options some local authorities are coming under increased scrutiny in terms of which types of permission they can include in their five-year housing land supply statements- particularly in relation to the new definition of what is 'deliverable' in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Granting a suspension of the Housing Delivery Test for PfSH local authorities will:

- be considered an important signal from central government that it recognizes that PfSH authorities are doing all they can to deal with the nutrient issue;
- remove the additional pressure of the penalties that PfSH authorities will face if the Housing Delivery Tests are not met, and which are not of their making;
- afford local authorities the time to focus on working collectively with all interested parties to implement joined-up and focused mitigations.

PfSH asks that you fully consider its request to suspend the Housing Delivery Tests for its members, and I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

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

Councillor Seán Woodward
Chairman, Partnership for South Hampshire

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About the Partnership for South Hampshire

The Partnership for *Urban* South Hampshire (PUSH) was formed in 2003 following recognition by the leaders of Eastleigh, Fareham, Gosport, Havant, Portsmouth and Southampton councils (the urban core of South Hampshire) and Hampshire County Council, that South Hampshire was underperforming in economic terms in comparison to the remainder of the south east England.

Subsequently, PUSH invited the leaders of East Hampshire, New Forest, Test Valley and Winchester councils to join in recognition that the natural economic area of South Hampshire included parts of these areas too. PUSH then evolved from an informal meeting of council leaders to a formally constituted Joint Committee with overview and scrutiny arrangements.

As a group of councils, it works together effectively and is committed to encouraging sustainable development and growth across South Hampshire.

In August 2019 the decision was made by the New Forest National Park Authority to join PUSH - following which the word 'urban' was withdrawn from the partnership's title to reflect the wider diversity of membership. The subsequent 'PFSH' sub-region covers the area outlined in the map below.

