

Annex A Written Ministerial Statement: Planning for Growth (23 March 2011)

The Minister of State for Decentralisation (Mr. Greg Clark):

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has today issued a call to action on growth, publishing an ambitious set of proposals to help rebuild Britain's economy. The planning system has a key role to play in this, by ensuring that the sustainable development needed to support economic growth is able to proceed as easily as possible. We will work quickly to reform the planning system to achieve this, but the Government recognises that many of these actions will take some months to deliver, and that there is a pressing need to ensure that the planning system does everything it can to help secure a swift return to economic growth. This statement therefore sets out the steps the Government expects local planning authorities to take with immediate effect.

The Government's top priority in reforming the planning system is to promote sustainable economic growth and jobs. Government's clear expectation is that the answer to development and growth should wherever possible be 'yes', except where this would compromise the key sustainable development principles set out in national planning policy.

The Chancellor has today set out further detail on our commitment to introduce a strong presumption in favour of sustainable development in the forthcoming National Planning Policy Framework, which will expect local planning authorities to plan positively for new development; to deal promptly and favourably with applications that comply with up-to-date plans and national planning policies; and wherever possible to approve applications where plans are absent, out of date, silent or indeterminate.

Local planning authorities should therefore press ahead without delay in preparing up-to-date development plans, and should use that opportunity to be proactive in driving and supporting the growth that this country needs. They should make every effort to identify and meet the housing, business and other development needs of their areas, and respond positively to wider opportunities for growth, taking full account of relevant economic signals such as land prices. Authorities should work together to ensure that needs and opportunities that extend beyond (or cannot be met within) their own boundaries are identified and accommodated in a sustainable way, such as housing market requirements that cover a number of areas, and the strategic infrastructure necessary to support growth.

When deciding whether to grant planning permission, local planning authorities should support enterprise and facilitate housing, economic and other forms of sustainable development. Where relevant - and consistent with their statutory obligations - they should therefore:

- (i) consider fully the importance of national planning policies aimed at fostering economic growth and employment, given the need to ensure a return to robust growth after the recent recession;
- (ii) take into account the need to maintain a flexible and responsive supply of land for key sectors, including housing;
- (iii) consider the range of likely economic, environmental and social benefits of proposals; including long term or indirect benefits such as increased consumer choice, more viable

communities and more robust local economies (which may, where relevant, include matters such as job creation and business productivity);

(iv) be sensitive to the fact that local economies are subject to change and so take a positive approach to development where new economic data suggest that prior assessments of needs are no longer up-to-date;

(v) ensure that they do not impose unnecessary burdens on development.

In determining planning applications, local planning authorities are obliged to have regard to all relevant considerations. They should ensure that they give appropriate weight to the need to support economic recovery, that applications that secure sustainable growth are treated favourably (consistent with policy in PPS4), and that they can give clear reasons for their decisions.

To further ensure that development can go ahead, all local authorities should reconsider, at developers' request, existing section 106 agreements that currently render schemes unviable, and where possible modify those obligations to allow development to proceed; provided this continues to ensure that the development remains acceptable in planning terms.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government will take the principles in this statement into account when determining applications that come before him for decision. In particular he will attach significant weight to the need to secure economic growth and employment.

Benefits to the economy should, where relevant, be an important consideration when other development-related consents are being determined, including heritage, environmental, energy and transport consents. The Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change and the Secretary of State for Transport have consequently agreed that to the extent it accords with the relevant statutory provisions and national policies, decisions on these other consents should place particular weight on the potential economic benefits offered by an application. They will reflect this principle in relevant decisions that come before them and encourage their agencies and non departmental bodies to adopt the same approach for the consents for which those other bodies are directly responsible.