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Communities and
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Dear Colleague,

Development on brownfield and Green Belt land

This Department has received a large number of identical letters, forwarded by Members of Parliament, which concern the National Planning Policy Framework, housing provision, and the need to re-use brownfield land and protect Green Belt. These concerns arise from our recent consultation on proposed changes to the Framework, and from recent misreporting of potential development on Green Belt land. I am writing to clarify the Government's position.

The claims made in the reports are misleading and speculative as they include figures based on unadopted Local Plans and unapproved planning applications. The Government has put in place the strongest protections for the Green Belt. The Framework makes it clear that inappropriate development may be allowed only where very special circumstances exist, and that Green Belt boundaries should be adjusted only in exceptional circumstances, through the Local Plan process and with the support of local people. We have been repeatedly clear that demand for housing alone will not change Green Belt boundaries. However, we recognise that it is local authorities, working with their communities and with detailed local knowledge, which are best placed to decide the most sustainable, suitable and viable sites for new homes. The Housing and Planning Act 2016 has increased local people's power to plan their areas with new measures to speed up and simplify neighbourhood planning.

This Government is committed to re-using brownfield sites for housing, and we have undertaken to ensure that 90 per cent of brownfield land suitable for housing will have planning permissions for new homes in place by the end of this Parliament. To support this policy, we have introduced local brownfield registers; accelerated disposal of public sector brownfield for housing – with a commitment to release land for at least 160,000 homes by 2020; extended permitted development to give new life to thousands of buildings; and set up a Home Building Fund to provide £2 billion of loans for infrastructure and land remediation to support large housing sites. We expect 50% of this Fund to be spent on brownfield land. In addition, £1.2 billion of our £2.3 billion starter homes funding will support brownfield site preparation; delivering at least 30,000 starter homes.

Green Belt remains constant at around 13% of England, and in 2014-15 there was only a 0.1% reduction in size as a result of Local Plan reviews. Furthermore, only 0.02% of Green Belt was converted to residential use, after consulting local people. Taking account of land reclassified as national park, the Green Belt is actually 120 square miles larger than in 1997.

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