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Sent via Email

Dear Michael,

PLANNING AND COVID-19: SEEKING A MINISTERIAL STATEMENT – EMPHASIS ON WEIGHT ATTACHED TO ECONOMIC GROWTH OF RURAL AND URBAN ECONOMIES BY DECISION MAKERS (COVID-19)

Many thanks for your time a week last to discuss how COVID-19 is affecting our rural clients' business and social and environmental operations in the context of the planning system. That call was a follow up to our suggested ten-point short term action plan on COVID-19 by national and local government. I applaud the speed at which you and your department has responded to decision making needs on planning.

I stated that I would follow up on our call with Rural Solutions' (RSL) views, informed by views of our clients, on short and medium-term policy initiatives which will assist in delivering economic growth at this critical time through the planning system. The content here is also informed by discussions with, but is not necessarily the direct input of, two eminent planning Barristers we work with – Jonathan Easton at Kings Chambers and Stephen Whale at Landmark Chambers.

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK REVIEW 2020

We know further to the brief 'Planning for the Future' (March 2020) policy paper that the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is due for review in 2020. When that document was written I can only surmise the knowledge of COVID-19 and its implications for the economy and our communities was very limited. It is essential that the 2020 NPPF review broadens its scope to at least include existing policy on economic growth.

The NPPF of 2012 was a special purpose instrument in seeking to help drive the national economy out from the wreckage of the 2008 economic crash. That policy was particularly successful in lifting the game of the planning system; it has been the most effective national planning policy document brought forward in my 30 years of planning to that end. We now need an amended NPPF fit for purpose for quickly bringing our local economies out of what will be a potentially deeper recession and securing vitality in all our communities.

The review process of the NPPF will take time and we at Rural Solutions (RSL) will seek to ensure the rural voices are heard so that new planning policy effectively addresses those specific current and future needs. Meanwhile, there is an urgent and

pressing need for positive action from central government to enable the fastest possible economic recovery across the country. It is therefore on the short-term matter of policy application by decision-makers (Secretary of State, Inspectors, and local planning authorities (LPAs)) that I am writing to you.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT – WEIGHT ATTACHED TO SUPPORTING ECONOMIC GROWTH IN DECISION MAKING

Ministerial Statements, a clear expression of Government policy, are a way for Ministers to bring an important matter to the attention of the public, decision-makers, and the House at short notice. Aside from the health of the nation, it is considered that the most important matter before the Government is the state of the national economy. The effects of the 2008 crash were far more localised in impact on the national economy than the effects of COVID-19; everyone, every community in the UK, has been affected by COVID-19. Consequently, we need an even more pervasive planning policy response to COVID-19 than we saw from the first NPPF in 2012.

One important and essential action in the short term from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is to write and release a Ministerial Statement that qualifies the following:

- The Ministerial Statement will draw decision-makers' attention to the NPPF's requirement that significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account current and future business needs and wider opportunities to development; allied to which
- The Statement should point out the necessity for decision-makers (Secretary of State, Inspectors, and local planning authorities) to pay special attention in practice towards supporting economic growth, at a time when this need is urgent and pressing.

We (RSL) have spent good time speaking with our clients in the past weeks on their responses to COVID-19 and understanding their future need and opportunities to deliver economic growth. Many of our clients are significant landholders and/or significant national leaders in rural business. The recurring theme from these discussions is that our clients need the confidence when advancing business growth initiatives to LPAs that these bodies will recognise the considerable importance that should be attached to economic growth and pay special attention to it in both decision and plan making.

We are certain in the knowledge that a Ministerial Statement of the type recommended will be the difference for many from 'sitting it out and watching on' to grasping the nettle and acting now to secure the vital and viable futures of their existing businesses, which impact so greatly on local communities.

I would be only too pleased to speak further with you on this call for action for a new Ministerial Statement to pay special attention in Planning practice to essentially help deliver economic growth at a time when it is most needed.

Yours sincerely,



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