



*To: Members of Parliament*

19 April 2013

Dear Colleague,

### **Making it easier for families to improve their home**

As you will be aware, Parliament has been considering amendments to the Growth and Infrastructure Bill on the issue of householder permitted development rights. We are seeking to deliver practical reforms to the planning system to help families improve their home, and to remove excessive red tape on uncontentious, small-scale extensions.

During the Commons consideration of Lords amendments on Tuesday, I gave a commitment to the House to listen to the representations made in both Houses and in the recent consultation. I said I would return with some constructive improvements and seek to establish a broad consensus. Following consultation with backbench and Ministerial colleagues of both Coalition parties, I am now in a position to outline our proposals.

I believe colleagues' key concern has been about potential effect on neighbours' amenity, and the lack of any say for those neighbours. I propose we tackle this head on. We will seek to move ahead with these new permitted householder development rights, but introduce a new light-touch **neighbours' consultation** scheme:

- Homeowners wishing to build extensions under the new powers would notify their local council with the details.
- The council would then inform the adjoining neighbours – this already happens for planning applications.
- If no objections are made to the council *by the neighbours* within a set period, the development can proceed.
- If objections are raised by neighbours, the council will consider whether the development would have an unacceptable impact on neighbours' amenity.
- This is a form of 'prior approval' process which allows for consideration by ward councillors, and (if the council wishes) by a Planning Committee.
- There will be no fee for householders to go through this process.

These proposals are similar to a policy originally recommended by Zac Goldsmith and Lord Deben (then John Gummer) in their 2007 *Quality of Life* report.

Benefits of this approach are:

- Uncontroversial improvements are fast-tracked.
- It builds consensus: it encourages homeowners to talk informally to their neighbours in advance.
- Neighbours' amenity is protected, with the council and councillors acting as independent arbiters.
- It saves homeowners' money: it will be cheaper to extend your home. There is no need for residents to purchase a Lawful Development Certificate from the council to provide certainty that they have the rights to extend their home.
- It is consistent with growth and with localism. We are cutting red tape and devolving power to the lowest appropriate level. We are decentralising power from the state down to local residents.

A Government amendment to primary legislation to help facilitate these reforms has been laid before the House of Lords for consideration on Monday. Subject to approval by the Lords, the amendment will then go to the Commons to consider.

I hope this shows that we have listened constructively and made a targeted and common sense improvement. Together with my Ministerial colleagues, we are very happy to assist those with any further questions.

We now have a set of reforms that will both help local traders and the wider economy. We are backing families who work hard, want to get on and improve their homes. We are strengthening individuals' property rights and supporting aspiration and home ownership.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Pickles". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

**RT HON ERIC PICKLES MP**