

To: Peter Lamb MP for Crawley

Subject: Democratic Accountability and Planning Powers – West of Ifield

Dear Peter,

Thank you for your detailed reply concerning the question of democratic planning law and due process West of Ifield. I appreciate your explanation of how planning powers are delegated from the Secretary of State, and the role this plays in the current system.

However, your response confirms precisely the concern I raised — that local democracy exists only by ministerial discretion, and that the Secretary of State or Homes England may intervene or self-approve at any time, thereby bypassing public scrutiny. That such powers exist, even if not immediately exercised, represents a structural weakness in the democratic process that governs local planning.

You note that, as a successor to the Commission for New Towns, Homes England technically has the power to grant itself planning permission on its own land. I believe this power — when exercised by a Government-appointed body acting also as landowner and applicant — conflicts with the principles of natural justice, particularly the rule that no party should be judge in its own cause. Even the perception of such a conflict undermines public trust in due process.

You further suggest that the lifting of water-neutrality restrictions restores local democratic control. Respectfully, I would argue the opposite: it removes an independent environmental safeguard and places still greater reliance on ministerial discretion and developer assurances. The notion that a quango's removal increases democracy misunderstands the nature of environmental oversight — which exists to protect the public interest precisely when local political or economic pressures risk overriding it.

I also take note of your statement that large-scale development in the sub-region is inevitable and that a new town will be required. I would urge you, in your continued discussions with ministers, to ensure that any such proposals are developed transparently, lawfully, and with genuine local consent, rather than through top-down imposition or the extraordinary powers available to government development agencies.

In summary, my concern is not simply with one planning application, but with the erosion of democratic accountability in the planning system itself. The Ancient Parish of Ifield, with its centuries of continuous settlement, deserves to have its future decided through open and lawful local processes — not administrative discretion exercised behind closed doors.

I would be grateful if you could:

1. Confirm whether you believe Homes England's statutory power to self-grant planning permission is compatible with democratic planning law; and
2. Indicate whether you will raise with the Minister the need to review or restrict such powers to ensure proper oversight and public confidence.

Thank you again for your attention to this matter.

Kind regard

