



Department for  
Communities and  
Local Government

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Thank you for your follow-up letter of 11 January regarding your previous correspondence dated 11 December to the Secretary of State on behalf of your constituent, Cllr David Watts.

In response to your question regarding the revocation of the regional strategies, as our written statement of 25 July 2012 states, it remains our policy to revoke these as soon as possible, subject to the environmental assessment process that is in train. A ruling of the European Court of Justice in March 2012 made it clear that the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive applies to a procedure for the total or partial revocation of a land use plan. In light of this, and following earlier consultation responses, the Government is updating the environmental reports and undertaking additional consultation.

I appreciate that it is frustrating that a specific date cannot be set on which regional strategies can be revoked whilst this process is in train. The first step has been taken to revoke the East of England Regional Strategy with an Order laid in Parliament on 11 December and consultations on the environmental reports for all the regional strategies have now been published. The consultation on the environmental report for the East Midlands closed on 19 December.

Until such time as they are abolished, regional strategies remain part of the statutory development plan. This means that a local plan document must be in general conformity with the regional strategy at the stage that the plan is submitted for examination. It is for the local council submitting the plan to determine how their plan meets the requirement of general conformity. That being said, it is always open to local councils to bring forward proposals in their plans – for example on housing targets – with a local interpretation, based on their own sound evidence where that is justified in local circumstances.

On the Green Belt, we have been clear that councils are in control of their Green Belt boundaries. The National Planning Policy Framework expresses the importance we attach to the Green Belt, which keeps land permanently open by preventing inappropriate development. Inappropriate development should not be allowed on the Green Belt other than in very special circumstances and Green Belt boundaries only revised in exceptional circumstances. This policy must be taken into account when developing local plans and in individual decisions.

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