



THE RT. HON. SIR ALAN HASELHURST, M.P.  
Member of Parliament for Saffron Walden

House of Commons  
London SW1A 0AA

4<sup>th</sup> October, 2011

Mr. and Mrs. N. Baker,  
Ham Cottage,  
Woodend Green,  
Henham,  
Herts. CM22 6AZ

*Dear Mr. and Mrs. Baker,*

Thank you for your communications about planning reforms.

I naturally understand your concerns, but I can assure you that I have not been Member of Parliament for a magnificent rural constituency for 34 years, suddenly now to be converted to approval of rampant development. You would surely recognise that I have been a staunch opponent of the expansion of Stansted Airport (even before I became the MP for Saffron Walden) precisely because, apart from anything else, I saw it as the begetter of urbanisation. People would be and have been drawn from all parts of the country to take up the jobs created. This inevitably has had an effect on housing demand, which shows little sign of abating. At the same time North West Essex, Uttlesford in particular, is regularly revealed by polls as being one of the most desirable parts of the country in which to live. So, yes, we are under pressure. There is barely a square inch of land in respect of which developers do not have either ownership or options.

What has attracted particular criticism in the proposed National Planning Policy Framework is the default presumption in favour of sustainable development. I am surprised about this, because a presumption in favour of development has been at the heart of our planning system since at least 1947 and some people would argue, even earlier than that. I do not see that the insertion of the word "sustainable" as doing anything to reinforce that presumption, rather it is intended to narrow it. The framework contains specific protection for such as SSSIs, national parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Once a local authority has put in place its Local Development Framework, it will have a defence against development which exceeds or contradicts it. I am most certainly anxious to ensure that any gap between approval of the NPPF and agreement on the LDF cannot be exploited by developers. Taken together with the provisions of the Localism Bill, parish councils and even neighbourhood communities will find themselves having greater influence on the planning system.

It is my belief that the Government's intentions have been severely misrepresented, most notably by the Daily Telegraph. However, the NPPF is still a draft and I have no doubt that the Government will take account of the questions which are being asked, not least by MPs. That there is a need for more housing in North West Essex cannot be denied. The question is how much, of what nature and where? The Government wishes to see that question answered as locally as possible, but then, once agreed, these plans should be implemented with reasonable speed.

Finally, I am not usually in the habit of praying Labour politicians in aid. However, I noticed a letter from the former Housing Minister, Lord Rooker, which was printed recently in the Daily Telegraph in which he pointed out that the land area in England designated as national parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Green Belt amount to 37%. Based on estimates made when he was a Minister in the Department for Communities and Local Government, the area of land required to meet housing and other development issues amounted to 1%. I think that this introduces an element of perspective to the debate.

*Yours sincerely,*  
*Alan Haselhurst*