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Date: 30 December 2025

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The Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Via Email: steve.reed.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Mr Reed

Braintree District Council Response to proposal to refer developments of over 150 units to the Secretary of State

Following a meeting of Full Council on 08 December 2025, I am writing as the Leader of Braintree District Council to raise serious concerns over the Government's recent announcement that it plans to limit the ability of local councils to refuse planning permission for large housing developments of over 150 units where proposals are inappropriate in planning policy terms.

Braintree District Council does not agree with the proposed requirement to refer developments of over 150 units to the Secretary of State. Braintree District Council is an authority which understands the need to build for the future and works to support the government's growth agenda. The Council has an up to date local plan and a proven track record of delivering homes. This is evidenced by the Housing Delivery Test results showing the Council has delivered 155% of its housing target in the most recent results available. In addition, the Council is also carrying out a review of the Local Plan to ensure a suitable supply of housing land is available to meet the higher housing target that has been required by the Government which it is aiming to submit for examination by the December 2026 deadline.

As such, the objection to this proposal is not raised in order to allow the Council to find a reason to undermine the government's commitment to build 1.5 million homes by the next parliament. Rather, the objection is raised on the basis that this proposal would undermine local decision-making and local democracy. Moreover, whilst the Council recognises the importance of delivering new homes, this should not be at the expense of providing new residents with high quality places to live or failing to ensure there is a good level of benefits arising from schemes including providing mitigation in the form of enhanced key local services for all our residents. Any actions which remove the ability of the Council to properly consider applications could

undermine these aims. It has too often been the case that permissions granted on appeal leave important details to be dealt with through conditions rather than requiring more detail upfront, which allows the Council to hold developers to account in terms of the quality of the place they are creating.

Whilst it is appreciated that the planned changes attempt to streamline the planning system, it is queried whether a referral process – presumably to the National Planning Casework Unit – would speed up the granting of a permission. This is based on the current timescales taken by the Planning Inspectorate to process a major planning appeal which is currently 30 weeks when a Public Inquiry is required.

Braintree District Council would also highlight that there is a notable absence in potential changes to public policy which would require developers to build out a planning permission once it has been granted. Despite consistently allocating sufficient housing land and working hard to grant permissions on allocated sites as well as managing the build out of sites granted on appeal, the Council has a number of sites where build out rates are slow due to market conditions, and in some cases, non-existent. The Council is of the view that developers who fail to build out a development once planning permission has been granted undermines confidence in the planning system at a local level and allows other developers to attack a 5 year land supply position through the appeal process.

In view of the above, the Council requests that the government reconsiders its position regarding a change to the call-in powers and turns its attention to ensuring developers who are granted planning permission are incentivised to build as quickly as possible in order to avoid an influx of applications for over 150 units which look to bypass local decision-makers.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham Butland', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Cllr. Graham Butland
Leader of Braintree District Council