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Craig Hoy MSP
Convenor
Social Justice, Housing and Local Government
Committee
Scottish Parliament

By email to: SJHLG.committee@parliament.scot

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Dear Convenor,

Thank you for the opportunity to attend the Social Justice, Housing and Local Government Committee on 9 September. At that, I indicated I would write to you to regarding my meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing on the crossover work between the planning directorate and the housing directorate. On the 16 September, the Cabinet Secretary also indicated I would respond to the committee in writing on the question asked by Steven Bonnar MSP regarding planning system constraints on housing delivery. This letter addresses both of those matters.

Planning and Housing Directorates Joint Working

On 30 September a joint Ministerial meeting took place between the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing, myself and Homes for Scotland. These joint meetings with the industry body have been in place with previous Ministers with housing and planning responsibilities and we have committed to continue them. They provide a welcome opportunity to hear both the concerns and the suggestions of the industry. The recent meeting covered progress on More Homes Scotland and the opportunities for planning reform amongst other matters.

The joint working at Ministerial level is mirrored in joint working at official level. There are frequent discussions between the Directors of Planning and Housing. Teams have worked in close collaboration on the Housing Emergency Action Plan, and there is continued co-ordination on the planning functions for More Homes Scotland. Working together will ensure that planning is doing all it can to be an enabler of more quality homes being built.

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Planning, Constraints and Housing Delivery

The national housing emergency has generated significant action in the planning system in recent years. In November 2024, the Planning and the housing emergency delivery plan was published setting out over 20 actions focused on policy, delivery, efficiency and capacity. Work was undertaken at pace and an update provided in October 2025 indicated each action was underway or delivered. Building on the momentum, we committed to further planning actions in the Housing Emergency Action Plan (HEAP) in September 2025, with each completed. Undertaking these actions has indicated a range of matters impact on housing delivery.

Work on stalled housing sites and associated brokerage enabled a better understanding of challenges faced. Whilst there are some specific planning challenges around resource and skills for development delivery, key issues of infrastructure provision, including education, transport, flooding and drainage, and their impact on development finance and financial viability of proposals was evident. Joint working across stakeholders also made clear matters that are not within the control of the planning system, for example decisions on if and when permissions in place are built out – these are largely for the development industry. The learning from the stalled sites work is informing the role and functions of More Homes Scotland.

A year ago we also put in place a planning application Notification Direction to enable close monitoring of the implementation of national planning policy on housing. This followed industry concerns on policy interpretation in practice. The data gathered shows that as of September 2026, 81% of housing applications for 10 or more homes on land not allocated for housing have been approved. This illustrates the flexibility that can be applied through the planning system. When coupled with the evidence that approval rates remain consistently high, at 96% in the first half of 2025-26, this paints a positive picture.

I am aware of concerns around land supply in local development plans and the timely progress of new plans. We recognise and share concerns about the pace of plan progress to meet the expected timescales of having all plans in place by May 2028. We are taking action to accelerate plan preparation alongside the National Planning Hub and the National Planning Improvement Champion. We are closely monitoring timescales, with planning authorities reporting to Ministers on a 6 monthly basis – the most recent deadline being 30 September and which we are analysing the latest position. We have also convened key stakeholders, agreed actions to be taken by them, and clarified advice on what is essential at different stages of LDP preparation.

Further, to avoid impacts from extended preparation, we set out in March that Ministers expect that in decision making significant weight should be given to Proposed Plans, including site allocations, when they are published. This stage of preparation provides a strong indication of a Council's view of where new development should take place and where it should not, based on comprehensive evidence. Earlier decision making will support delivery of development sooner.

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I am acutely aware that resourcing of the planning system remains a key issue and a number of actions have been undertaken to support this. The National Planning Hub was established and has provided over £1m to planning authorities in 25/26. We are also supporting a Future Planner Programme, Planning Bursary Scheme and the National Planning Improvement Champion, along with planning fees continuing to increase in line with inflation.

The committee will be aware of our commitment in the Programme for Government to reform the planning system to speed up developments and make it easier to get projects to completion and families into homes. Over the summer I have engaged extensively with a wide range of stakeholders and we will consult on reforms that will target greater efficiency, proportionality and clarity across our consenting system. This represents our continuous improvement approach to the planning system to ensure it is high performing and that it offers confidence to both investors and communities.

I would be pleased to keep you informed as this work progresses.

Sincerely

HANNAH MARY GOODLAD

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