DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Planning and travellers

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Brandon Lewis): The Coalition Government has taken a series of steps to ensure fair play in the planning system. We have tackled the abuse of planning rules by a small minority, abolished top-down targets, increased protection of the Green Belt and aligned the planning system for traveller sites with that for settled housing. A more detailed list of measures we have taken is outlined in my answer of 25 April 2013, *Official Report*, Column 1132W.

Protecting the Green Belt

Our policy document, *Planning Policy for Traveller Sites*, was issued in March 2012. It makes clear that both temporary and permanent traveller sites are inappropriate development in the Green Belt and that planning decisions should protect Green Belt land from such inappropriate development.

As set out in that document and in March 2012's *National Planning Policy Framework*, inappropriate development in the Green Belt should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Having considered recent planning decisions by councils and the Planning Inspectorate, it has become apparent that, in some cases, the Green Belt is not always being given the sufficient protection that was the explicit policy intent of Ministers.

The Secretary of State wishes to make clear that, in considering planning applications, although each case will depend on its facts, he considers that the single issue of unmet demand, whether for traveller sites or for conventional housing, is unlikely to outweigh harm to the Green Belt and other harm to constitute the "very special circumstances" justifying inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

The Secretary of State wishes to give particular scrutiny to traveller site appeals in the Green Belt, so that he can consider the extent to which *Planning Policy for Traveller Sites* is meeting this Government's clear policy intentions. To this end he is hereby revising the appeals recovery criteria issued on 30 June 2008 and will consider for recovery appeals involving traveller sites in the Green Belt.

For the avoidance of doubt, this does not mean that *all* such appeals will be recovered, but that the Secretary of State will likely recover a number of appeals in order to test the relevant policies at national level. The Secretary of State will apply this criteria for a period of six months, after which it will be reviewed.

Revoking "Equality and diversity in planning"

Under the last Administration's flawed rules, a sense of unfairness was embedded in the planning system. Unauthorised developments created tensions between travellers and the settled population, whilst some community groups seemingly were given

favoured treatment. That approach has harmed community cohesion. We want to redress the balance and put fairness back into local communities.

I appreciate that there is ongoing concern, as reflected by some Hon Members recently proposing a Private Member's Bill on this issue.

I can announce today that the Government is cancelling the last Administration's practice guidance "Diversity and Equality in Planning" which was issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2005.

This guidance is outdated, excessive in length (at 186 pages), and sends unhelpful signals about the planning process. For example, the document:

- Fails to strike the correct balance between the spatial impact of a planning proposal and the background of the applicant in considering a planning application.
- Encourages monitoring of local residents' private lives – such as through intrusive lifestyle/diversity surveys.
- Promotes the excessive use of Equality Impact Assessments, which are an expensive and bureaucratic burden on the public sector.
- Tells councils to translate into foreign language, which undermines integration by discouraging people from learning English, weakens community cohesion and a common British identity, and wastes taxpayers' money.

As part of our wider consolidation of practice guidance, we do not intend to replace it.

The National Planning Policy Framework makes clear that councils should plan to provide wide choice of high quality homes based on the needs of their local community. Councils should simply use their common sense in light of prevailing legislation, planning policy and material considerations.

I hope this will send a positive message about treating all members of the community with respect and with due process, and that this Government is restoring a proper sense of fairness to the planning system.