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Y Gweinidog dros yr Amgylchedd, Cynllunio a Chefn Gwlad  
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Welsh Assembly Government

Our ref : MB/CJ/299/07

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March 2007

Dear

## LOW COST HOUSING AND PLANNING RESTRICTIONS ON SECOND HOMES

With reference to the question from Kirsty Williams AM to the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration in Plenary on 1 February 2007 about the provision of affordable housing in Wales (OAQ1053), I am writing in response to your follow-up question about low-cost housing and possible planning restrictions on second homes.

Regarding low-cost housing, it is the Assembly Government's priority to facilitate the provision of more affordable housing to assist in the maintenance and creation of sustainable communities. To this end, in June last year I published a Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statement on *Housing* (MIPPS 01/2006) and two related 'housing' Technical Advice Notes (TANs 1 and 2) to provide clear guidance for local planning authorities on the steps to support the delivery of affordable housing through the planning system. As set out in the MIPPS, local authorities need to understand their whole housing system so that they can develop evidence based market and affordable housing policies in their local housing strategies and development plans. To develop this, understanding local authorities must carry out an up-to-date assessment of the full range of their housing requirements in partnership with local stakeholders, including private house builders. Guidance on carrying out such assessments is set out in the *Local Housing Market Assessment Guide* which was published by the Assembly Government in March 2006.

Local planning authorities are also required to include an affordable housing target in their Development Plan and to indicate how this target will be achieved using identified policy approaches. The provision of affordable housing against this target must be monitored and, where necessary, action must be taken to ensure that the target is met. Also, as TAN 2 (*Planning and Affordable Housing*) sets out, if the proposal for a site does not contribute sufficiently towards the objective of creating mixed communities, for example by only providing 'executive' houses, then the local

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planning authority can renegotiate a revision of the mix of housing or may refuse the application.

In addition, to ensure that local authorities implement the Assembly Government's planning policies on affordable housing, we are working with the Welsh Local Government Association to provide officer and member training.

On the subject of "planning restrictions" on second homes, this was proposed by Plaid Cymru in May 2004 in the form of an amendment to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes Order) 1987 to make provisions for the creation of a new use class specifically for second homes. I opposed this proposal as I considered that it would not achieve the stated aim of enabling local authorities to manage the second home market for the benefit of full-time residents of rural communities. Essentially, such a change to the Use Classes Order would result in fundamental problems in terms of defining primary and secondary use in statutory planning terms, and so of enforcement, thus making the proposal impractical. This was also the view of the research team which specifically examined this issue as part of the Assembly Government commissioned research into 'Second and Holiday Homes and the Land Use Planning System', which was published in 2002. The Environment, Planning and Countryside Committee Inquiry into planning and affordable housing (February 2004) also sought legal advice on this matter. This advice was in line with that of the 'Second Homes' research and the Committee subsequently decided not to include this proposal in their Inquiry Report.

Although the second home market can affect the price of homes in the locality, the 'Second Homes' research found that there had been a 10-12% reduction in the overall number of second homes in Wales over the period 1991-2001. The research concluded that across Wales in general, retirement, commuting and demand from permanent incomers were more significant components of the external housing pressures facing rural areas than second home buying. These are issues which local authorities need to address through their Local Development Plans and Community Strategies.

Yours Sincerely

**Carwyn Jones AM**