



Department for  
Communities and  
Local Government

**Brandon Lewis MP**

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**Department for Communities and Local  
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Dear Simon,

### **Landscape character and prematurity in planning decisions**

I have become aware of several recent appeal cases in which harm to landscape character has been an important consideration in the appeal being dismissed.

These cases are a reminder of one of the twelve core principles at paragraph 17 of the National Planning Policy Framework – that plans and decisions should take into account the different roles and character of different areas, and recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside – to ensure that development is suitable for the local context.

While National Parks, the Broads, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Heritage Coasts quite rightly enjoy the highest degree of protection, outside of these designated areas the impact of development on the landscape can be an important material consideration. We are publicising some of these appeal cases more widely, with the help of the Planning Advisory Service, to promote greater understanding of how landscape character can be taken into account by local planning authorities in their decisions.

These cases also reflect the wider emphasis on delivering sustainable outcomes at the heart of the Framework, which means taking full account of the environmental as well as the economic and social dimensions of development proposals. And, of course, these roles should not be undertaken in isolation - the economic factors can secure higher social and environmental standards.

I would also like to take this opportunity to restate our position on prematurity, which I know is also an issue that causes debate in some cases. Paragraph 216 of the National Planning Policy Framework makes clear that weight can be given to relevant policies in emerging Local and neighbourhood plans, and the particular factors that need to be considered when doing so.

When arguments relating to the prematurity of development are advanced, our planning guidance sets out the tests to be applied. The weight that can be attached to an emerging plan will need to be considered carefully when assessing whether a prematurity argument is justified. We will continue to consider whether this careful balance is best serving local communities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brandon Lewis', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**BRANDON LEWIS MP**