



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Nick Boles MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Planning)

**Department for Communities and Local
Government**

Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

The Rt Hon Nicholas Soames MP
The Rt Hon Nick Herbert MP
House of Commons
SW1A 0AA

Tel: 0303 444 0000

E-Mail: nick.boles@communities.gsi.gov.uk

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Thank you for your letter of 24 June 2013 on Lord Taylor of Goss Moor. I am replying as the lead Minister for the department's review of planning practice guidance. I have considered your letter carefully and discussed the issue with the Permanent Secretary.

As explained on our departmental website¹, I would observe that Lord Taylor is part of a wider group of planning experts who are helping the Government review the thousands of pages of technical planning practice guidance. The group includes Simon Marsh from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Andrew Whitaker from the Home Builders Federation, Trudi Elliott from the Royal Town Planning Institute and Councillor Mike Jones, the Conservative leader of Cheshire West and Chester Council. Whilst they are sitting independently and not representing their organisations, it is clearly beneficial to have people on the panel who have practical experience and expertise of the planning system. They have all provided their advice and time free of charge, and it is not unreasonable for them to have external employment.

I can confirm that the Mayfield interest was declared appropriately by Lord Taylor to the Department, along with his other external interests. I note that all his interests are also published in an open and transparent way on the House of Lords website.

Lord Taylor has no decision making role in determining the new planning practice guidance. Decisions on the guidance will be taken by Ministers, advised by officials.

For the avoidance of doubt, he also has absolutely no role in deciding planning applications.

Indeed, bearing in mind that planning is a quasi-judicial process, Ministerial involvement in 'called-in' or 'recovered' planning applications strictly follows the planning probity guidance which can be found on our website.²

Consequently, I am satisfied that appropriate steps have been taken to avoid a conflict of interest. Any suggestion that he might somehow benefit as a consequence of his role on the Review group is unfounded and unfair.

¹ www.gov.uk/government/news/lord-taylor-to-review-practical-planning-guidance

² www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-probity-issues-guidance

Indeed, I think it is important to avoid a situation where the government of the day is unable to bring in independent, unpaid experts to assist with technical reviews because of tenuous accusations of 'conflicts of interest'. The public interest is best served by drawing on a wide range of opinion and expertise: civil servants and Ministers do not have a monopoly of knowledge. Indeed, when Nick was Police and Criminal Justice Minister, he benefited from independent experts like Tom Winsor, Sir Edward Crew and Professor Richard Disney from undertaking a technical review of public policy.

Whilst I cannot become involved in any individual planning application (in line with that probity guidance), I would be very happy to meet you to discuss broader government policy on local and neighbourhood plans. The Government have been clear that local plans, drawn up in consultation with local people, should determine where development should and shouldn't go.

I have placed this letter in the public domain, in the interests of transparency.

NICK BOLES MP