

3<sup>rd</sup> June 2010

### **Pickles moves to scrap regional plans**

Communities and Local Government secretary Eric Pickles has told councils and the Planning Inspectorate that the regional planning regime for England should no longer carry any weight in terms of planning decisions.

He has written to every local planning authority (LPA) and the Inspectorate highlighting the coalition Government's plans to abolish regional spatial strategies and stressing that decisions on housing supply "will rest with LPAs without the framework of regional numbers and plans".

The secretary of state said councils and the Inspectorate should "have regard to this letter as a material consideration in any decisions they are currently taking".

In the letter Pickles stressed the administration's commitment "to rapidly abolish regional strategies and return decision-making powers on housing and planning to local councils".

"Consequently, decisions on housing supply (including the provision of traveller's sites) will rest with local planning authorities without the framework of regional numbers and plans," he said.

He promised a formal announcement "soon". **The letter has had an immediate effect with a number of LPAs announcing that work on core strategies was being reviewed or put on ice.**

The secretary of state commented: "We've promised to use legislation to scrap top-down building targets that are eating up the green belt, but I'm not going to make communities wait any longer to start making decisions for themselves.

"I have written to all councils to let them know that they can make planning decisions in the knowledge that 'regional strategies' will soon be history. It will no longer be possible to concrete over large swathes of the country without any regard to what local people want."

Housing developers have expressed concern over these latest developments. The Home Builders Federation, the sector's trade body, has warned that existing housing shortages will get worse because of policy uncertainties.

HBF executive chairman Stewart Baseley said: "The Government says it is committed to delivering more homes, but without urgent guidance, this aspiration will not be achieved. Scrapping the existing system without a replacement is a recipe for disaster.

"We have an acute housing crisis in this country, approaching a shortfall of a million new homes. We just cannot afford a period of confusion to reduce house building still further at a time when we are already building at the lowest level for many decades."