



Sir Mark Sedwill, Cabinet Secretary
By email

28 May 2020

Dear Sir Mark,

I am writing to contact you regarding a decision made by Robert Jenrick, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on 14 January 2020 to approve a 1,524 home development on the site of Westferry Printworks in Tower Hamlets by Northern & Shell, owned by Conservative donor Richard Desmond. His decision was made despite the development being opposed by local residents, the local authority of Tower Hamlets, and against the advice of the government planning inspector.

This decision was made one day before the local authority approved a new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule. Under the schedule in effect when Mr Jenrick granted planning permission, the developer was zero-rated for CIL. The rating that came into force the following day would have seen the developer liable for an estimated £30-50 million, which would have been used by Tower Hamlets to fund local infrastructure improvements and affordable housing.

In correspondence to the local authority before they took legal action against Mr Jenrick in March, he indicated that the decision was made before the changes to CIL took place to avoid the developer paying the charge.

When the local authority went to court over his decision to approve the application, Mr Jenrick was ordered to release documents on his decision so the court could decide whether he was influenced by a desire to save the developer money. Instead of releasing the documents, he accepted that his decision showed “apparent bias”, and the future of the application will now be decided by another Secretary of State. A spokeswoman from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government stated that despite this, the department does not accept that there was any “actual bias in the decision.”

The consequence of Mr Jenrick’s decision was to save a developer a very great amount of money and, in the light of conceding the JR claim give rise to serious questions which require answers.

I ask that the Cabinet Office fully investigate this matter, and answer the following questions:

- Why did he grant planning permission despite the clear objections of the local community, the local authority, and the clear recommendation of the independent Planning Inspector’s to reject the application?



- What contact did Mr Jenrick, or officials in his department, have with the developer or their representatives regarding the application and, specifically, regarding the £30-50 million the developer would be liable for after 14 January?
- What conversations, if any, has the Prime Minister had with Mr Jenrick regarding about this application?
- Will the Cabinet Office now ensure that Mr Jenrick releases the documents so that full public scrutiny can take place?
- If the appeal application is rerun and re-heard by a different Secretary of State what faith can the local authority now have that the case will receive a fair hearing?

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mike'.

Mike Amesbury MP
Shadow Minister for Housing and Planning