



Minister for Housing and Construction

Department of the Environment
2 Marsham Street London SW1P 3EB

Telephone 01-212 7601

Mr. Lingham!

Agree to this letter?

JJ

27 April 1984

27/4

Dear David,

The enclosed letter from Mr Robin Thompson of the National Agricultural Centre Housing Association appeared in the Times on 23 April. The letter contains certain factual inaccuracies which the Minister considers it important to correct before the Housing and Building Control Bill returns to the House of Lords for consideration of Commons' Reasons, probably on 10 May. Mr Gow wishes to send the enclosed letter to the Editor of the Times and would be grateful for the Prime Minister's approval.

Yours sincerely,

P. Britton

Yes

Paul Britton

P J J BRITTON
Private Secretary

JJ 30/4

David Barclay Esq



FILE

S4

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

30 April, 1984

Thank you for your letter of 27 April, which which you enclosed the draft of one which Mr. Gow proposes to send to the Times about the Housing an Building Control Bill. The Prime Minister is content that this letter should issue, as proposed.

TIMOTHY FLESHER

P. J. J. Britton, Esq.,
Department of the Environment

S4

DRAFT LETTER TO 'THE TIMES'

I write to correct some misunderstandings in the letter (23 April) from Mr Robin Thompson, of the National Agricultural Centre Housing Association, and others on proposals in the Housing and Building Control Bill to safeguard the position of elderly persons' dwellings in rural areas under the right to buy.

The additional safeguard approved by the House of Commons on 12 April (local authorities in designated rural areas already have the right to impose 10-year pre-emption covenants on all sales) would enable local authorities in those areas to apply to the Secretary of State to have individual elderly persons' dwellings exempted from the right to buy. This safeguard would apply not only to the 22 areas described by Mr Thompson, but also to areas covered by the National Parks and to all designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In all, some 170 local authorities in England and Wales would be affected to a greater or lesser extent.

As I made clear in the House on 12 April, in considering future applications from local authorities for designation as rural areas, the Secretary of State will take account of any representations on the problems faced by a particular area in meeting the housing needs of the elderly.

The House of Commons also approved on 12 April an additional safeguard which will allow authorities selling elderly persons' dwellings to impose a pre-emption covenant over a period of 21 years not merely when a dwelling is sold but also when it passes on death to a non-resident beneficiary other than a surviving spouse.

I emphasise that sheltered accommodation and housing owned by charitable housing associations (of which the National Agricultural Centre Housing Association is one) will remain excluded from the right to buy.

THE TIMES

Safeguarding the rural elderly

From Mr D. R. B. Thompson and others

Sir, On February 28 this year, during the committee stage in the House of Lords of the Housing and Building Control Bill, an amendment was passed which exempted non-sheltered dwellings for the elderly from the right to buy. The view prevailed that the shortage of such accommodation provided by local authorities and housing associations, particularly in the rural areas, was a more important consideration than the Government's wish to extend home ownership.

In the House of Commons on April 12, during consideration of the Lords amendments, the Government successfully sought to remove the exemption agreed by the Lords and to provide the long-promised "rural safeguards". The Government's amendments were tabled too late to allow time for consideration and comment by those organisations with long experience and evidence of the problems of rural housing.

The so-called safeguards now contained in the Bill depend on the Secretary of State's designation of rural areas on application by the local authority. No statutory criteria for designation are contained in the Bill and the best guidance we have is to be found in the record of such designations since the 1980 Housing Act.

Of 130 applications only 22 have been accepted. Faced with the curious view which the Secretary of State has taken in refusing to designate what are, in anyone else's language, rural areas, many local authorities have not wasted their time with further applications.

Until the Government will clearly define its criteria for the designation of a "rural area", the new amendment's true meaning, and therefore its value in tackling the problem perceived by their Lordships, cannot be examined. As it stands it is, at best, a gesture and on past evidence is, at worst, a mechanism for allowing ministerial action to alter the apparent intentions of an Act of Parliament.

If the Government is sincere in seeking to provide safeguards to preserve the small stock of rented housing for the rural elderly, then the intentions it has expressed must be translated into a demonstrated readiness to designate rural areas.

Yours faithfully,
ROBIN THOMPSON,
(Chairman, National Agricultural
Centre Housing Association),
MOIRA E. CONSTABLE,
(Chief Executive, National
Agricultural Centre Rural Trust),
DAVID CLARK,
(Secretary, Rural Voice),
National Agricultural Centre Rural
Trust,
35 Belgrave Square, SW1.
April 13.

27 APR 1984

