

THE  TIMES

# Planning reforms decision delayed after consultation responses

Ministers have delayed reaching a decision about the controversial planning reforms for another four or five months after a massive response to the consultation paper.

The Communities Department has received over 12,000 responses to the draft document which has sparked a furious row with rural and environmental campaigners as well as Tory MPs.

Officials have admitted that the size of the response is one of the largest ever received by the Communities Department and will take months to trawl through.

The delay will also allow time for the Government to try to defuse the present row which has already provoked petitions signed by over 400,000 people from the National Trust, CPRE and other organisations opposing the changes.

In a written ministerial statement Greg Clarke, the planning minister, said the revised policy, essential to the Government's growth strategy, would be published by next March at the latest, though before if possible.

The changes, which are aimed at speeding up house building by changing the presumption of planning decisions in favour of development, are to be debated in the Commons today and in the Lords next week.

Mr Clark said he would work closely with local authorities to ensure that "appropriate transitional arrangements" are in place before the new framework comes into force.

The National Trust, which has spearheaded the campaign to rethink the reforms said it welcomed Mr Clark's commitment to "enshrine in the planning system the principle that the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainable development should be considered in a balanced way".

But a spokesman said that to reinforce this principle of balance, it was essential the draft was rewritten.