

## Planning minister's in pact with developers over reforms

*Greg Clark, the planning minister, privately has urged property developers to lobby David Cameron amid concerns that his planning reforms will be blocked, according to a leaked email seen by The Telegraph.*

Property developers privately admitted that the minister's objectives "align with ours" and said they had "earned more brownie points than we could ever imagine" by helping him.

Mr Clark is spearheading plans to overhaul England's planning system, to encourage development by simplifying the rules. This newspaper has launched a campaign opposing the changes.

The minister has publicly insisted that he is introducing carefully balanced proposals taking into account both environmental and economic concerns.

However, the leaked email will add to growing fears that the minister has become too close to the property industry and is working alongside developers to force through reforms, which establish a "presumption in favour of sustainable development".

The message was sent between senior members of the British Property Federation, a lobbying group for developers, housebuilders and supermarkets, following private discussions with Mr Clark and his officials.

In it, Ghislaine Trehearne, the group's policy officer, disclosed the minister's fears that Mr Cameron may back down on the reforms following public opposition.

"Greg Clark and his officials are ... deeply concerned at the level of opposition that has been provoked by The National Trust and are worried that Number 10 might be spooked by this mobilisation of middle England and do the sort of U-turn that they did on the forestry sell-off," she wrote.

"We have been firing off letters to the press, and have sent a letter to No 10 supported by the leading developers in the commercial property industry."

The email also appears to confirm fears among campaigners that the changes to the draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) are being driven by the Treasury, which is looking for ways to stimulate the economy, at the expense of the natural environment.

The email continues: "The upshot of all this is that minister Greg Clark is delighted with the BPF and hugely grateful for our effort. He is of the opinion that the Chancellor will stand firm in the face of opposition from National Trust members in the shires – but he doesn't believe we can afford to let up and should seize every opportunity to press the case for planning reform.

"We are not, of course, a mouthpiece for CLG [the Communities and Local Government department] ministers but on this occasion their objectives definitely align with ours – so we can afford to be enthusiastic in our support, with the advantage that we have now earned more brownie points than we could ever imagine." The email appears to have been sent at the end of last month.

Developers who were sent the email include Sue Willcox, head of planning at Sainsbury's; Niall Tipping from Grosvenor Estates; Nigel Hawkey, head of planning at Quintain Estates, and Emma

Cariaga, head of strategic projects at Land Securities.

Disclosure of the message comes after *The Telegraph* revealed that the Conservatives had accepted millions of pounds from developers – and a special club had been set up that allowed developers to effectively buy places at meetings with ministers and senior Tories.

Yesterday, it emerged that senior members of the housebuilding industry helped draft the wording of the government's consultation document.

Jack Dromey, Labour's shadow communities minister, said the Government needed to "come clean" over its links to property developers. A spokesman for The National Trust said: "It saddens us but doesn't really surprise us that the developers are in the minister's pocket. All those who are 'pro' the NPPF are those who stand to gain."

The news comes as up to 80 MPs and peers were due to meet today in the first public show of discontent about the policy. Last night, a Government source said: "Number 10 are fully behind our planning reforms and fully behind what we are doing. The Government utterly rejects any suggestion that policy is being driven by property developers."

Liz Peace, chief executive of the British Property Federation, defended the email. She said: "I don't accept that this amounts to collusion – it's simply us doing our job to support the interests of our members."