

THE  TIMES

# Planning rules to be redrafted ‘for clarity’

The Conservatives will try to placate countryside campaigners by redrafting planning reforms to make the protections for rural England clearer, The Times has learnt.

Ministers believe that the only way to appease the furious reaction among core Tory voters is to produce a new version of the document, which could be slightly longer than the 52 pages already published.

They are desperate to end a fractious row with high-profile rural groups including the [National Trust](#). Greg Clark, the minister in charge of the reforms, has taken representations from dozens of groups and individuals who have expressed concerns about the impact of the proposals on the countryside.

He is in the process of going through the document line by line with the National Trust. Sources say that Mr Clark is prepared to make changes to add clarity, although the overall thrust of the document, which lays down a “presumption in favour of sustainable development”, will not change.

David Cameron and George Osborne, the Chancellor, are determined not to step back on the issue because they believe that the reforms will unlock housebuilding, which they see as the key to economic growth.

The Prime Minister announced yesterday that council house tenants would be given much larger discounts than currently available if they wanted to buy their properties. The aim is to reinvigorate Margaret Thatcher’s right-to-buy policy, launched in the 1980s. Under Labour the average discount fell from 50 per cent to 24 per cent, and to just 10 per cent in London.

The Government will also promise to build one affordable home for every property sold under right-to-buy. “We are saying let’s bring back the right to buy your council house with proper discounts that Labour got rid of,” Mr Cameron told the BBC’s Andrew Marr Show.

“And let’s use that money, as young people choose to buy their council home, to build homes for rent, for low rents for families that are currently stuck on the housing list.” The Prime Minister said there were two million council houses available to buy.

The coalition also plans to release land capacity to spur on building. Overall the policies would lead to 200,000 extra homes and 400,000 extra jobs, Mr Cameron added.

One Cabinet minister said that housing was one issue on which Mr Cameron and Mr Osborne were not prepared to compromise.

However, they know that they have to face down hostility in Tory heartlands to their planning

proposals. Some critics say protections have been squeezed out by the reduction of the document from 1,300 pages to 52, and they want to see more definition of what is meant by “sustainable”.

Mr Cameron’s aim will be for the document to change enough to clarify protections for the countryside but not so much that its impact on growth is watered down. Sources say the document may have a page or two added, but it is unlikely to be much longer than that.

There are equally strong lobbies in favour of reforms. The [Home Builders Federation](#) said: “The Government needs to stand firm and not be swayed by the scaremongering. We need a robust planning system that delivers enough land for the homes we desperately need.”