

Lee Rowley MP
Minister for Housing, Planning and Building Safety
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

21 March 2024

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you about the guidance on fire safety proposals in new residential buildings as set out in the consultation '*Sprinklers in care homes, removal of national classes and second staircases in residential buildings*' published in December 2022.

We welcome the clarity provided by the Government in July 2023 that new residential buildings of 18 metres or above will require two staircases and reiterating the message that existing buildings over this threshold with only one staircase remain safe, with no retrospective application of this new policy to existing buildings.

It was also positive news last month that the Government confirmed that guidance (in Approved Document B) on second staircases will be published by the end of March. As you will be aware, there are currently several challenges holding back housebuilding such as construction inflation and planning delays, so clarification about the design and specification of the second staircase is an important step to help mitigate the risk of starting construction.

Whilst the forthcoming publication of Approved Document B is an important step, the introduction of a second staircase will require amendments to an existing planning permission. As well as design changes, these amendments may include changes to add additional areas and/or alter the mix, size and layout of homes to maintain viability. Clear guidance must be produced urgently to support and enable Local Planning Authorities to approve proportionally and expeditiously these, and any other changes needed as a result of Approved Document B. Without such guidance, there is a danger that the planning system will not be able to cope with the demand for revisions to schemes.

We share the Government's desire to build high-quality and well-designed new homes that meet the highest safety standards but until the uncertainty is removed, the industry cannot deliver the scale and pace of new homes this country so desperately needs.

Yours sincerely,



John Dickie
Chief Executive