



**Guy Opperman M.P.**  
**House of Commons**  
**London**  
**SW1A 0AA**

15<sup>th</sup> December 2010

Dear Mr. Opperman,

The Government's "econsultation" website, whereby planning applications and the information relating to them may be accessed on-line by any organisation or member of the public, has been closed down from the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2010. We understand from Northumberland County Council that this follows an instruction from Whitehall.

This means that community organisations such as the Ponteland Civic Society (and the public in general) can no longer obtain early notification of possible developments in their area, and are reliant upon notices in the local press (often up to two weeks late) or information passed on by the good grace of their local council. Viewing of plans or proposals must then take place using paper copies in the offices of the council, instead of on-line.

It is appreciated that the Government may wish to remove certain "domestic" matters out of the planning system, but what has now been done leaves a number of important questions unresolved. There are, in particular, issues relating to development proposals in a Conservation Area and any proposals for Regeneration which may impinge upon these. It is also necessary to consider development in "garden city" housing such as Darras Hall, Ponteland, where landscaping, frontages and wild life corridors have always been important (and jealously guarded) issues.

In a modern society it seems particularly perverse to remove timely access to information such as this through the medium of the internet, and leaves the Government open to charges of trying to turn the clock back, in technological terms, and even trying to block access to information which, in the so-called "Big Society", should be easily available to the general public.

On behalf of the Ponteland Civic Society, I would ask you to put these points as forcibly as you can to the Department of Communities and Local Government and seek to obtain a revised approach which will be more favourable to the needs and concerns of local communities.

Yours sincerely,

**Philip Ham.**  
*Chairman, Ponteland Civic Society.*