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Rt Hon Peter Lilley MP
House of Commons
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Dear Peter,

Thank you for your letter of 10 October to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on behalf of Mr R F Norgan of 4 High Street, Graveley, Hitchin, SG4 7LD about his concerns regarding immigration and the security of the Green Belt. Your letter has been transferred to the Home Office and I am replying as Immigration Minister.

I would like to reassure Mr Norgan that reducing the number of migrants coming to the UK will be a priority for the negotiations to leave the EU. We are also committed to reducing non-EU migration across all visa routes in order to bring net migration down to sustainable levels as soon as possible. It is not going to happen overnight, but a sustainable level means tens of thousands each year, rather than hundreds of thousands.

Significant steps have been taken since 2010 to reform the immigration system, both to cut abuse and to ensure that non-EU migration is restricted to those who benefit the UK. The figures show that these reforms are working. Non-EU net migration is below 2010 levels. We are removing more foreign national offenders than ever before and we have legislated to stop illegal migrants operating under the radar. However, we recognise public concern that immigration remains too high and we are committed to further reform, in the best interests of our country.

The precise way in which the Government will control the movement of EU nationals after Brexit is yet to be determined. However, the Prime Minister has been clear that, as we conduct our negotiations, it must be a priority to regain more control of the numbers of people who come here from the EU. There is clearly no mandate for a deal that involves accepting the free movement of people from Europe. The UK needs a fair and controlled immigration policy and that is exactly what this Government will deliver.

On non-EU migration, we have already acted to clamp down on abuses such as bogus colleges and sham marriages. We have slashed student fraud and struck off more than 920 institutions from the register of permitted sponsors of international students. Student visa numbers are continuing to fall, and are over a third lower than in 2010. At the same time, our top universities continue to attract the best students from around the world: since 2010 there has been a 39 per cent rise in international students applying for visas to study at our elite Russell Group universities.

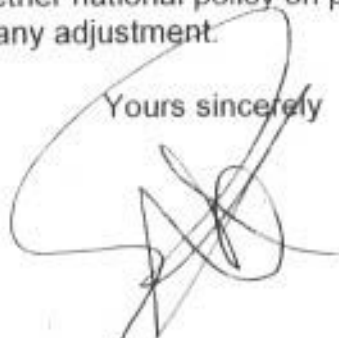
We have reformed family migration rules, to establish clear rules for British citizens looking to bring their non-EU spouses to this country, including introducing a minimum income threshold and an English language requirement. Since these reforms were introduced, family-related visa grants have fallen by a third.

In the non-EU work migration routes, we have raised standards and applied numerical limits. In March, we announced a package of measures to reform the routes for skilled workers (Tier 2) to ensure only those who make a real economic contribution can come here. We are setting higher salary thresholds; extending the immigration health surcharge, which is payable by temporary migrants in recognition of their ability to access NHS services while in the UK, to intra-company transfers; and introducing a £1,000 per worker per year immigration skills charge, payable by employers of Tier 2 visa holders, to boost funding for training for resident workers.

The scale of the challenge is significant and it will take time to deliver because until we leave the EU we will still be affected by free movement rules. However, we are doing everything we can now to ensure that numbers come down and we will be bringing forward further reforms in the months ahead.

I would also like to reassure Mr Norgan that in preparation for the forthcoming Housing White Paper, the Department for Communities and Local Government has been considering whether national policy on planning issues, including Green Belt policy, needs any adjustment.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Robert Goodwill', written over a large, loopy scribble.

Robert Goodwill MP