

Dr. Howard Stoate
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

11 July 2007

Dear Dr. Stoate

Thank you for your letter of 1st June 2007. Following the publication of the SAGE report on 27th April, please see below a written contribution from RICS.

The decision to support the use of corridors for new power lines near existing properties and new properties near existing lines was only made after a great deal of consideration. SAGE was charged with instituting the precautionary approach. RICS's view has been substantially influenced by the statement on the precautionary principle adopted by the European Environment Agency and the United Kingdom Interdepartmental Liaison Group on Risk Assessment,

“Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage to the environment, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation. The precautionary principle permits a lower level of proof of harm to be used in policy-making whenever the consequences of waiting for higher levels of proof may be very costly and/or irreversible.”¹

This statement refers to the nature of the scientific **certainty**. It is suggested that this, might equally be termed the nature and extent of the scientific **uncertainty**. A particular point to be noted is that a lower level of proof of harm is permitted where the effects of waiting for more certainty may be irreversible.

The SAGE debates have been lengthy and at time passionate. It is apparent that there is disagreement within SAGE on whether there are significant risks to living near power lines above and beyond those risks now accepted as being linked to childhood leukaemia alone. It is apparent that those experts who believe there may be risks other than childhood leukaemia are of the opinion that there is currently insufficient evidence to come to any other conclusion. Consequently the passage of time would be expected to produce evidence to confirm or confound such fears removing some or all of the scientific uncertainty and thus moving towards greater certainty. This sentiment is mirrored in RICS' position statement where we recommended that the guidance be reviewed every five to ten years to reflect the results of any further research findings.

¹ **Sources:** European Environment Agency, General Environmental Multilingual Thesaurus, (2000). and United Kingdom Interdepartmental Liaison Group on Risk Assessment. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/aboutus/meetings/ilgra/pppa.htm> (accessed March 2007)

If the worst case scenario manifests itself and the evidence for greater health risks than childhood leukaemia alone becomes compelling, then the introduction of corridors would have been justified. If it does not, then no irreversible harm will have been caused and land within the corridors will again become available for development.

Should you have any queries regarding this contribution, please forward them to RICS Environment Faculty environment.faculty@rics.org or to the below address marked 'RICS Environment Faculty'.

Kind regards

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