

cc: SS
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PRIME MINISTER
MEETING WITH MR. RIDLEY

Mr. Ridley wishes to discuss with you how to play the Government's future housing and urban policies in the run up to the general election.

Mr. Ridley is considering a White Paper or Party document to describe the Government's plans. He feels they are election winners and that it is only proper for the Government to make clear, before an election, what it intends to do afterwards.

There is no doubt much in what Mr. Ridley says, and - if I may say so - all experience shows that however potty some of his ideas seem at first sight there is always good sense in them.

I would however be very doubtful about a White Paper if there is to be an election in June. A White Paper tends to be quite detailed (doubts will be raised if it is not) and committing. Yet it would need to be ready for publication within a fortnight or so, and most of the details of the policies remain to be worked out: the two meetings of E(LF) which you chaired gave only a very general blessing to Mr. Ridley's housing proposals. A hasty White Paper might raise more questions than it answered. It would also tend to pre-empt your Manifesto.

A Conservative Party document could be less detailed and would be less committing, but would in some ways even more clearly pre-empt the Manifesto.

One possibility would be for Mr. Ridley to make a substantial speech. But this must be before an election campaign starts. Otherwise it will be difficult to give it a full departmental scrutiny.

You could say you would be ready to look again at the idea of a White Paper if there is no election in June.

DKS

DAVID NORGROVE

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