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Leader of the Council

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Agenda Item 5



**WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Councillor Sue Cooper
Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council
135 Eastern Avenue
Milton
Abingdon
Oxfordshire
OX14 4SB

Our Ref: JM/MS

31 July 2019



Dear Sue

I am grateful for the helpful update that we received from Holly Jones on the progress of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan, which sets out the key points resolved by South Oxfordshire District Council on the 18th July.

I know from our experience in West Oxfordshire how important it is to maintain a housing land supply and avoid inappropriate speculative housing development. While our Local Plan was in preparation we suffered a number of appeal decisions that approved highly controversial housing schemes in sensitive locations. Now that we have an adopted Local Plan in place, and we are benefitting from the three year housing land supply associated with the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, we are experiencing far fewer speculative applications and much greater success at appeal.

South Oxfordshire District Council has expressed its continued support for the Housing and Infrastructure Fund (HIF) funding and the infrastructure projects that could be delivered by it. This is a very important position to take both to ensure that long-standing infrastructure issues are addressed and also to help protect your housing land supply. I would also ask you to consider how South Oxfordshire can continue to contribute to the delivery of the Housing and Growth Deal? Ultimately housing land supply relies on evidence of deliverability and without HIF and Growth Deal funding for infrastructure it could well prove more challenging to evidence that deliverability.

I am concerned about the potential impact on West Oxfordshire if a solution cannot be found to enable your Council to make amendments to its emerging Local Plan while retaining Housing and Infrastructure Fund (HIF) funding. As you know we are waiting for Government decisions on the A40 HIF bid, which plans £102 million investment in public transport, cycling and roads along the A40 corridor. Although the Didcot Garden Town HIF bid and the A40 HIF bid are technically separate in terms of evidence, I am very concerned about the risk of undermining confidence in Oxfordshire as a place which can be relied upon to deliver. The loss of our current good reputation might well have significant implications in terms of our long term ability to attract the necessary Government investment.

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I hope as well that we can work together on climate change. As you are aware West Oxfordshire District Council passed a motion recognising the Climate Change Emergency in June. We are embarking on a major project to identify what the Council can do about this critical issue and as part of this work we will be setting up a Residents' Panel and Citizens Assembly. It would be great if we could share knowledge and ideas as the work of our two Councils moves forward. The Oxfordshire Plan could also provide a key vehicle for strengthening policy across the County in support of our individual efforts.

Is it possible for us to meet to talk through these issues?

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Mills', written in a cursive style.

JAMES MILLS
Leader of the Council