



**Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government**

Agenda Item 5
Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
*Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and
Local Government*

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Cllr Sue Cooper
Leader
South Oxfordshire District Council
135 Eastern Avenue
Milton Park
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26th August 2019

Dear Cllr Cooper,

Thank you for your letter of 30 July 2019, regarding the South Oxfordshire Local Plan and for your warm words of congratulations on my appointment. I have followed the development of both the Housing Infrastructure Fund and Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal closely and am pleased that as Housing Secretary I will have now the opportunity to advance these policies and help to support areas like South Oxfordshire deliver much needed housing and infrastructure.

I have reviewed the letter the previous Housing Minister sent to you on 22 July 2019 and completely agree with the concerns he expressed over the impact of any delay to the South Oxfordshire Local Plan on wider strategic priorities for both Oxfordshire and Government. While I fully appreciate the democratic prerogative of your council to express its reservations around the Local Plan, it is important that we collectively have the best interests of local residents at the centre of all decisions, whilst being mindful of the impact on the wider County.

I welcome the importance that you place on the Housing Infrastructure Fund projects set out in your letter and your desire to protect the funding to ensure these can proceed. I believe that the infrastructure provided by these projects will be vital to creating the right conditions to bring forward new housing, ensuring more residents are able to have a place to call home. However, I would like to be clear that all funding provided through the Housing Infrastructure Fund is contingent on identified housing sites coming forward in an adopted Local Plan and, as the previous Housing Minister set out, the government expects progress on your Local Plan in order to access this funding.

I am also reassured by your confirmation that the plan remains at examination and that you have actively engaged your Planning Inspectors. Any action taken to address the council's wider concerns with the plan should rightly be done during the course of the examination process and with the consent of the Inspectors.

I note that your council resolution seeks to address concerns around your agreement to take unmet need from Oxford City Council, through a Statement of Common Ground, accommodating 4,950 homes of unmet housing need in South Oxfordshire. Whilst this figure, and the associated sites for accommodating that need, will be subject to the examination by your Inspectors, the assessment for Oxford's unmet need and the corresponding assessment of capacity in Oxford City undertaken by the Oxfordshire Growth Board have been found sound at two plan examinations in Oxfordshire and were recently described as 'robust' by an Inspector in the examination of a third.

Whilst this evidence will be tested again at the Local Plan Examinations of South Oxfordshire and Oxford City, I'm sure you agree that we would want to avoid any situation where a delay in the Local

Plan process might lead to more speculative development in the short term with limited impact, if any, to the respective housing requirements for these authorities in the medium term. The impact of these decisions would be felt across Oxfordshire; I am sure you would not want the unintended consequences of decisions in South Oxfordshire to be the erosion of Vale of White Horse's 5 Year Housing Land Supply and the associated speculative development that would bring.

The Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal has become the exemplar approach to working across local authority boundaries to deliver the right kinds of housing and economic growth residents rightly need. The Growth Board's work on the SHMA, OXIS and the commitment to develop a joint plan were key reasons in Government investing in Oxfordshire through the Housing Infrastructure Fund. Should local decisions undermine that framework, the Government would be less inclined to provide local infrastructure funding, both now and in the future.

I remain fully supportive of South Oxfordshire's ambitions to develop high-quality homes, jobs and communities for local residents, enriching their lives through much needed local infrastructure. I have asked my officials to continue to work closely with your officers and provide the right support to ensure these ambitions are achieved.

I have asked my Director General for Decentralisation and Growth, Tom Walker to lead on this issue, he would be happy to meet with you and your officers at a time of your convenience to discuss in greater depth. Due to your Local Plan being at examination, it would not be proper that myself or officials meet with your member responsible for planning, I would therefore ask you to be mindful of that when considering those members who accompany you to that meeting.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Jenrick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

RT HON ROBERT JENRICK MP