

VIA EMAIL

Dear Mr Jenrick,

I chair an Alliance of organisations opposing the Cherwell Local Plan Review in Oxfordshire, which together represent a considerable number of local residents.

I am writing to you regarding your letter of 26th August 2019 addressed to Cllr. Sue Cooper, the leader of South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC), in which you state:

*'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'.*

This statement, which underpins your response to Cllr Cooper, is factually incorrect because Oxford's unmet need has *not* been examined at the three examinations that you mention. What has actually happened is that, because the Oxford City Plan is – extraordinarily - being examined *after* the plans of the three districts mentioned, the Inspectors of the district plans had perforce to take a view on Oxford's unmet need in order to allow them to continue their examinations. In doing so they inevitably focused on process rather than the accuracy or soundness of any estimates.

The Inspectors of the first two plans therefore accepted what was termed by the Growth Board a '*working assumption*' of Oxford's unmet need. The third Inspector has yet to report, having only issued a post-hearing advice note. This working assumption of unmet need is a crucial point which is particularly relevant to SODC, which council`s Plan will be examined after the Oxford City plan. It makes a lot of sense to allow SODC to pause their local plan process until Oxford's unmet need has been fully and properly examined. This was a point acknowledged in the Cherwell Inspector's note when he says "*Indeed, it might be said that some means of looking at the housing and other needs of Oxford, and the surrounding Boroughs, simultaneously, in a strategic way, would be a good idea.*"

We also find it remarkable and contradictory that the District Councils are being pressured into proceeding with their plans on an unsubstantiated basis, while it seems to be acceptable that the preparation of the Oxfordshire-wide Joint

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Spatial Plan, also a condition of the Growth Deal, can be delayed for a whole year. Can you explain this?

In Cherwell, the council is pushing ahead with plans to build 4,400 homes *entirely* on the Oxford Green Belt and *solely* to meet the so-called unmet need of Oxford City. Yet Oxford`s unmet need is in fact neither credible, as was shown by new evidence from a major consultancy specialising in housing need assessments, nor has it been confirmed at examination.

In addition the City continues to understate its own capacity to build new homes within its boundaries. Oxford has been repeatedly criticised for not making use of brown field land and for reserving too much land for employment which could be used for housing. The local Conservative candidate James Fredrickson has recently written in the local press *'So why is Oxford City Council getting away with forcing housing into our countryside whilst significant plots of brown field sites in the City remain undeveloped?'*. This is a question many local people would like an answer to.

From a political point of view the impact of the local plans (and particularly the labour controlled Oxford City's unmet need) has had, and will continue to have, an adverse effect on support for the Conservative Party which lost many local councillors and which lost control of two district councils at the last local elections.

This was not a Brexit effect. It was due to a frustrated electorate voting to remove the Councillors who have supported the building of an excessive numbers of homes, many of them on Green Belt.

Yours sincerely,

Giles Lewis.

*Chair, Cherwell Development Watch Alliance.*