

Mr E Mian  
Director General, Decentralisation and Growth  
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Fry Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

10 January 2020

Dear Emran,

### **South Oxfordshire emerging Local Plan 2034**

I write as part of our positive and ongoing informal dialogue following the letter, 7 January 2020, from the Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. Please note that this is not a formal response to the Secretary of State's letter, 7 January 2020.

As you know our emerging Local Plan 2034 (the Plan) remains at examination, however, over three months ago on 9 October 2019, the Secretary of State exercised his power under Section 21A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and directed my Council (temporary direction) not to take any steps in connection with the adoption of the emerging Local Plan 2034 while he considers and decides on the next steps.

My Council has acted and continues to act in accordance with the temporary direction, which prevented the Council on 10 October 2019 from considering its Cabinet's recommendation to withdraw the emerging Local Plan 2034, and of course the direction has prevented the Council from taking any other action in respect of the Plan since then.

Recognising that the Council has not formally considered or decided to withdraw the emerging Local Plan 2034 I would like you to clarify please the express purpose that is intended to be served by the Secretary of State in keeping the temporary direction in place, and his reasons. It would also be helpful to explain the rationale for further intervention that the Secretary of State may be considering. To reiterate, the emerging Local Plan 2034 is at the examination stage and it is clear from statements made by the Secretary of State that he wants the Plan to proceed (through the examination process) without the need for formal Government intervention. The present situation that the Secretary of State has brought about would therefore appear to be at odds with what he seeks to achieve.

I also seek clarification as to whether the Secretary of State is requesting communication from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Sue Cooper, who can in her formal capacity only reflect the position of Council or, and I think more likely, is he seeking to understand the individual views, rationale and concerns of Cabinet and its chair, Councillor Sue Cooper, that led them to make their recommendation to Council to consider withdrawing the Plan.

The current position of Council remains as outlined above, stalled on account of the Secretary of State's temporary direction, with the Council unable to consider any steps in connection with the adoption of the emerging Local Plan 2034, since to do so as requested would place us in breach of the temporary direction. For the Council to breach a direction of the Secretary of State would be regarded I'm sure as a very serious matter, and if there is any aspect of the factual/legal position that I have outlined above that you feel able to take a different view on then please do let me know, as we remain keen to work with you.

We continue to keep our Planning Inspectors informed of our ongoing dialogue and recognise that we have three sets of questions from the Inspectors that remain outstanding due to the temporary direction.

The Council remains committed to delivering a sound local plan and considers it of the utmost importance to uphold the vital principals of local democracy.

It may be beneficial for the Secretary of State to meet personally with Councillor Sue Cooper to discuss these matters in an informal setting.

I would welcome a meeting as soon as possible with you and your officials to progress matters and I would be grateful to understand your availability to meet with myself and my officers. Again, just as a reminder, this letter is not the Council's formal response to the Secretary of State's letter, 7 January 2020.

Yours sincerely



Mark Stone  
Chief Executive Officer