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**Councillor Emily Smith
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2nd October 2019

Dear Sue,

I note that the papers for a meeting of your council's Cabinet have now been published relating to the options for the South Oxfordshire Local Plan. Clearly the decision about your Local Plan is for your council to make, but I am increasingly concerned about possible unintended consequences for the Vale of White Horse District and would like to be sure that your councillors are all aware of the precarious situation withdrawal of your plan could leave the Vale's five year housing land supply in.

The letters that my council and your council have received from government outline a very real and immediate risk that a decision of your council to withdraw your plan puts on the funding that both existing and planned development for both of our communities rely.

If your plan is withdrawn there is a very real risk that the County Council and MHCLG decide not to sign the Housing and Infrastructure Fund package for the road and cycling infrastructure around Didcot. As you know, without this infrastructure in place, the County Council are also saying they may object to the housing at Valley Park in Didcot – which would mean that Vale losing our 5 year land supply.

I am grateful for the time that you and your officers have spent exploring the ways in which the Housing and Infrastructure Fund could be protected. However, it is clear from my reading of the letter you have received from the Rt. Hon Robert Jenrick MP that the HIF funding is contingent on identified housing sites coming forward in an adopted Local Plan and that he expects progress on your Local Plan for this to be enabled.

The letter from Robert Jenrick also picks up on this and refers to 'the erosion of Vale of White Horse's 5 year Housing Land Supply and the associated speculative development that would bring'. As you know, without a housing land supply in place it is harder for councils to ensure developers provide the infrastructure and affordable housing that we require and the effects of increased housing without sufficient

transport infrastructure in the Vale will be felt by our neighbours as well as Vale residents (as set out in Cllr Hallett's letter to you of 9 August)

I appreciate that we, like you, currently benefit from a three year housing land supply test (whilst the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 is being produced) that the Growth Deal has afforded, but there is a question mark over the future of the Growth Deal as well so I do not believe we can take this buffer for granted. It is a buffer we would be dependent on if Valley Park could not be brought forward.

Your letter from Robert Jenrick emphasises that the Government would be less inclined to provide local infrastructure should a decision of your council undermine the framework that we, and our wider partners have collaborated on. A further letter from the Director General, Decentralisation and Growth at MHCLG makes it plain that a decision to withdraw, 'will not be without consequences' and has taken steps to identify options within the letter aimed to assist your council.

I am conscious that this complex situation is not of your making and that you and your cabinet members have worked to minimise any negative consequences and the risks associated with withdrawing the plan. I do not envy the very difficult situation you find yourself in.

I know that you will be carefully weighing up all of the above when your cabinet and then council decide whether to proceed with your local plan and the likely consequences of each option for residents in South Oxfordshire. But I ask that you ensure that your councillors are fully informed of possible unintended consequences for Vale residents and businesses as part of your decision making.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Emily Smith
Leader of the Council