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CC. Simon Gallagher MHCLG.

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP,
Secretary of State for Housing & Communities
Dept of Housing, Communities and Local Government
4th Floor, Fry Building,
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1st July 2020

Dear Secretary of State

Oxfordshire Growth Deal

Yesterday the Prime Minister delivered a major 'landmark' speech urging the development industry to 'Build, Build, Build' as part of the solution to the looming economic recession which has been triggered largely by the Coronavirus crisis. This is obviously extremely welcome.

Coincidentally, earlier this week the Land Promoters & Developers Federation (LPDF) wrote to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and yourself, stressing the importance of building and development in triggering a resurgence to support the economy and promoting a package of incentives to stimulate growth. We stressed that, one cannot build homes without land and one cannot release land without planning. Our members are therefore likely to be at the forefront of any recovery.

LPDF Members undertake the vital work of land assembly, infrastructure delivery, negotiation of planning agreements, public engagement and securing of outline planning permissions to provide 'ready to build' sites. In the last 10 years, the industry has responded to a rapidly changing business model where housebuilders tend to specialise in building new homes but source their land from land promoters and developers who take the risk of bringing forward land and undertaking all the 'heavy lifting' required to gain planning consents and bring homes to the market.

Back in February 2018, all the local authorities in Oxfordshire signed a Housing and Growth Deal, whereby the authorities would receive up to £215 million of central government funding in return for delivering 100,000 new homes between 2011 and 2031 (thereafter called the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal) subject to a set timetable. The essence of this arrangement is that the individual Councils (through the County Council) are committed to producing a Joint Strategic Spatial Plan (JSSP) for Oxfordshire (the Oxfordshire Plan 2050) which will include the planned delivery of new homes and economic development, including supporting infrastructure, for the foreseeable future. We warmly support this approach as a positive move towards strategic planning and delivery.

The programme for producing the Strategic Plan was ambitious but achievable and the authorities were given the additional incentive that if they stuck to the target they would be effectively 'shielded' from un-planned development provided they maintained a 3 year supply of housing land (as opposed to the normal 5 year housing land requirement), giving them ample time to pursue a plan-led approach towards housing land release.

You will be aware that the path to this objective has not always been smooth, indeed you have only recently been required to intervene when South Oxfordshire DC (following a change of Council) threatened to reverse their commitment to the Joint Deal strategy and withdraw their Local Plan. However, there is now a further concern in that the Oxfordshire Growth Board has recently resolved to defer and delay the Strategic Plan programme so that the Adoption date (even on an optimistic outlook) is likely to slip by over 18 months. This is very disappointing.

There are serious implications arising from this. Unless land is secured it cannot be consented and unless it is consented, infrastructure cannot be delivered and houses cannot be built. The prospects of therefore achieving the County Council's original 100,000 dwelling target within 20 years will be compromised and the chances of the Government achieving its annual 300,000 dwelling target will also be undermined. Instead of 'build, build, build' – we will have 'delay, delay, delay.'

The Oxfordshire Growth Deal was originally submitted and approved by Government as a comprehensive package. The Government's award of £215 million of public funding was dependent upon achieving the new homes within a specific timescale and the concession given to the Council's to allow them to limit their housing land supply to 3 years (rather than 5 years) in the meantime (until adoption) was specifically linked to the strategic plan programme.

Whilst the Coronavirus crisis has caused a degree of hiatus throughout the business world, Government Ministers have made it abundantly clear that the forward planning process should continue regardless and that most planning procedures should continue 'remotely' and through 'virtual contact' measures – indeed the Government's Emergency Coronavirus Act introduced powers for this to be achieved. These powers are being supplemented by further measures within the Planning & Business Bill. There is therefore no justification for a delay of this magnitude.


If local authorities are effectively protected (through the concession of a 3 year supply) from the promotion of suitable alternative sites by developers prepared to bring land forward, it merely holds back housing delivery, denies local people the chance of a new home and undermines the Governments objectives to meet their target of 300,000 new homes per year. It also potentially jeopardises the chances of Oxfordshire authorities meeting their 20 year, 100,000 dwelling target.

On behalf of our members (and aspiring home buyers) we would therefore simply ask you to review the Oxfordshire Growth Deal either to apply more stringent sanctions to encourage the authorities to move more swiftly or to return to a 5 year supply requirement. The Growth Deal funding was inextricably linked to the original strategic plan programme, so if there is to be a delay the LPDF feels that the concession for a 3 year housing land supply should be removed. Instead, we would suggest a return to the normal 5 year housing land requirement, to incentivise authorities to act quickly, and/or enable other suitable sites to come forward sooner – hence meeting everyone's objectives.

Should you wish to discuss the matter, please don't hesitate to contact me, or invite your civil servants to do so on your behalf.

We look forward to your early reply.

Yours faithfully



John Acres

Policy Director

Land Promoters & Developers Federation