

XX January 2021

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP  
Secretary of State  
Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government  
2 Marsham Street  
London, SW1P 4DF

Dear Secretary of State

### **Community Housing Fund**

We write as Chairs of the Oxfordshire Growth Board and Oxfordshire Growth Board's Housing Advisory Sub Group to offer the Growth Board's support and encouragement for the extension of the Community Housing Fund.

This vital means of support for community-led housing (CLH) groups has been crucial in strengthening the community-led housing sector and we call on Government to continue its commitment to this community-led approach to housing delivery.

CLH enables communities to develop local, affordable housing that meets their needs and our experience in Oxfordshire is that CLH typically is of a high quality both in terms of design and construction. It is supported by the community and builds on local expertise to unlock pockets of land, often overlooked by larger developers. We acknowledge however, that this is a growing sector which currently delivers at a small scale. CLH groups, coordinated by volunteers, need support to access finance, land and technical assistance. Oxfordshire Councils work hard to encourage schemes to come forward, identifying potential sites, engaging and offering advice but ongoing support through the Community Housing Fund is essential keep projects moving forward.

The benefits of CLH, however, go far beyond the provision of housing. We find that long-term stewardship of the properties and resident engagement enhances wellbeing and the majority of groups aim to deliver additional amenities to communities such as access to green space, renewable energy infrastructure or community venues such as sports facilities, shops or workspaces. We are also aware of broader health benefits associated with CLH, stemming from reduced overcrowding and hazards such as cold and damp.

The Oxfordshire Growth Board (the Board) actively supports the development of the local community-led sector and is keen to see community housing solutions scaled up within the County. Through the Oxfordshire Growth Deal, a partnership of all Oxfordshire councils commissioned a review of the current barriers and opportunities for growing delivery of CLH in the region. This research was funded by the Community Housing Fund and identified a range of recommendations focusing on the key areas of access to funding, land supply and technical support. These recommendations have been accepted by the Board and form the basis of ongoing work throughout the councils. All councils are currently engaging with and supporting community-led housing groups to achieve their goals in bringing forward new housing to Oxfordshire. Our local authority housing teams also work with Collaborative Housing, the hub operating across the area, providing expertise and advice to support the development of a pipeline of community-led housing projects.

CLH represents excellent value for money. Recent research into the sector, by Capital Economics, shows that, over a ten-year period, each pound of public investment delivers £1.80

of benefit. This figure rises further when health and benefit savings, wellbeing and income distribution and are factored in. This level of return is recognised as delivering high value for money for public funding.

The significant investment from HM Government in establishing the Community Housing Fund for community groups has had a positive impact on the whole sector and there is now a pipeline of 23,000 community-led homes throughout the country – four times the estimate from 2017 (National Community Land Trust Network). This includes more than 10,000 units in live application on Homes England’s system. This success is echoed across Oxfordshire where the research identified 80 units at various stages of development. This, despite the fact that the fund was only open for 18 months; it is imperative that the momentum built is not lost. Indeed, given the benefits, it is more important than ever to focus on local, small-scale delivery, unlocking challenging sites and engaging with SME builders and developers to diversify the housing market.

In conclusion, the Board and the associated Housing Advisory Sub Group, are calling for the renewal of the Community Housing Fund for a further five years to mirror the recently announced Homes England Affordable Housing programme. We believe this will provide security and certainty for the growing CLH sector and provide a route to delivery for thousands of new, community-based affordable homes.

Yours Sincerely,

**Councillor Emily Smith**

Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council and Chair of the Oxfordshire Growth Board

**Councillor Susan Brown**

Leader of Oxford City Council and Chair of Oxfordshire Growth Board Housing Advisory Sub-group