

This document is strictly in draft form and has not yet received formal endorsement.



DRAFT

Secretary of State Robert Jenrick

Dear Secretary of State,

Planning Reforms and the Role of Strategic Planning

The 2017 Housing White Paper – *Fixing our broken housing market* – heralded a new approach to strategic planning across local authority boundaries which has since been supported through various government announcements and funding allocations. In response to this, Oxfordshire committed in its Housing and Growth Deal with Government to the preparation of a joint statutory spatial plan – the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.

In common with other areas pursuing this approach, we are aiming to provide a high level, vision-led plan to help transform our areas over the next 30 years (and beyond), providing a clearly articulated ambition for growth and a robust framework for investment prioritisation. However, developing this Plan against a national policy framework that only recognises the current local planning system has proved to be extremely challenging. For example, Strategic Plans generally cover longer timeframes than local plans which present challenges for the level of evidence required as demonstrated in recent Inspectors decisions in Essex.

Oxfordshire Plan 2050 has significant support from across our communities and at such a time of tremendous upheaval, and opportunity, the case for needing it has never been greater about what our future will look like. Our current commitment offers the greatest chance of delivering a long-term sustainable solution to growth by ensuring that we maximise the strategic opportunities available across the wider spatial canvas. However, our members and wider stakeholder community are concerned and rightfully so about our ability to deliver due to the lack of any emerging national policy support for strategic planning.

Effective strategic planning can play a significant role in delivering national priorities, especially the Government's ambition for clean growth and the journey to carbon zero. If done properly and with the right level of resourcing and government commitment, it could play a major part in the post Covid-19 recovery, helping to rebuild investor and public confidence across large areas.

We can offer our insights as to how the system could change to accommodate strategic planning whilst also continuing to support local communities and neighbourhood planning and also seek to work together with others to find solutions that could apply to other areas currently delivering or considering statutory cross boundary strategic plans. We would welcome an invitation to discuss this with you and your officers at the earliest opportunity so that our extensive, combined experience can feed into your plans for the Planning White Paper as well as any strategic planning related proposals in the anticipated Future Economy (Devolution) White Paper.

Yours

Cllr Emily Smith

Cllr James Mills

Chair Oxfordshire Growth Board

Chair OxPlan 2050 Sub Group