

MAYOR OF LONDON

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and
Local Government
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local
Government
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

Date: 19 March 2021

Dear Robert,

Following the publication of my London Plan, I am writing to follow up, as promised, on matters raised in your correspondence that fell outside your powers of direction. My London Plan includes many new policies and innovative planning developments, many of which were in my 2016 manifesto and were endorsed by Londoners at that election.

I want to begin by setting the record straight on claims regarding London's housing delivery. I am very proud of my success on London's housing delivery, with almost 50,000 more homes built during my first four years than the previous term under the former Mayor of London, an uplift of over 45%. This includes a record-breaking 41,718 homes in 2019-20, higher than any year since the 1930s.

That said, we aren't complacent about the task at hand. Our ambition to deliver more of the homes that Londoners need is clear in my new London Plan, which increases housing targets by 23% compared to the previous plan, or 10,000 homes a year. Despite the unhelpful delay of over a year to approval, we have continued to be proactive and to work with boroughs to increase delivery.

These record levels of housing supply have borne down on prices and rents in London after years during which they soared out of reach. But London's homeless and overcrowded households cannot wait for the market to bring rents down to a level they can afford, and it is crystal clear that London needs far greater investment in homes for social rent, which would not just meet their needs but also help you to meet your national housebuilding targets.

The industry is responding positively to the Plan. The Home Builders Federation pipeline report shows that in the 12 months leading up to the first national lockdown in March 2020 there were 87,149 homes approved in London, the highest figure on record. Of these over 50,000 were approved in the six months leading up to lockdown. Despite the pandemic, a record number and proportion of affordable homes have been secured in strategic applications in 2020, averaging 40 per cent by scheme, and exceeding every year since we started keeping records in 2011. This is testament to the impact of my draft London Plan, which, now it is formally published, provides the certainty and clarity needed for the industry to invest and build.

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I would now like my officers to explore with MHCLG at the earliest opportunity how the concept of “gentle density” can be applied in the London context and particularly alignment with delivery of homes through the small sites approach set out in my London Plan.

Turning to other land uses, this government has yet to grasp what is required to deliver a strong economy and support business. My new London Plan promotes an innovative framework to intensify industrial land capacity, whilst ensuring London has the workspaces required to service and support this global city. The pursuit of housing numbers at all costs is mistaken. As we emerge from this pandemic, the success of our towns and cities will, more than ever, be intertwined with the availability of suitable, affordable workspaces, so that business, culture and entrepreneurship can flourish.

You raise a number of detailed matters to which I respond in turn:

- **Small sites:** The Planning Inspectorate considered my innovative approach to small sites to be the right one, but one that, in their view, went “too far too soon”. I will continue to work with boroughs to increase delivery from the sites as they evolve their own local approach.
- **Family housing:** You refer to a “tilt towards one-bed flats”. This is inaccurate. My Plan empowers local authorities to establish the right proportion of different sized homes at a local, and often neighbourhood, level. This is good planning and ensures that the right homes are delivered in the right locations.
- **Detail of policies:** At the same time, your letter questions the level of detail set out in the Plan, suggesting instead that I should mimic your “pro-development stance”. As I noted in my response to your Planning White Paper, I unashamedly take a pro-*Good Growth* stance. Regulation guards against creating the degrading living conditions created by this Government’s permitted development rights. I work with the industry to deliver high quality homes that outperform any other English region, as shown in last year’s Housing Design Audit. My environmental policies are at the cutting edge of international best practice. My draft London Plan has delivered homes and places we can be proud of, and this will be enhanced now it has full statutory weight, ensuring a level playing field for those developers who want to do the right thing.

Next Steps

- Now the London Plan is finally in place, it should be implemented and monitored for the benefit of London. Industry needs certainty and stability, especially at this time, and further uncertainty in the planning framework is deeply unwelcome.
- My officers will continue to work constructively with your officials as we have done throughout the London Plan process.
- I will continue to exercise my devolved powers which include identifying sources of housing supply and setting housing targets in the London Plan, subject to public consultation, Examination in Public and taking account of national policy.
- My powers clearly do not extend across the Wider South East (WSE). If the Government believes this is the vehicle for delivery of housing, it is incumbent on


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you to put in place the structures and mechanisms to achieve this, as demonstrated through your proposals for the Oxford Cambridge Arc. This includes the “production and delivery of a new strategy” for the Wider South East as referred to in your letter. We would welcome a return of constructive, joined-up, strategic planning with all of our WSE partners, but it is not the responsibility of London to impose housing numbers on the WSE because the Government is not prepared to take difficult decisions themselves. We will continue to work with your officials to make practical suggestions as to how you could work better together.

- Modifications to the OPDC Local Plan have been submitted to the Inspector. These will support delivery of the 25,500 homes, as set out in the London Plan, over the lifetime of OPDC, with a forecast 13,800 homes in the first ten years. OPDC is working closely with Homes England and MHCLG on developing a business case for infrastructure funding.
- We continue to have a productive working relationship with Homes England, but with its expertise and knowledge of the city, the GLA is best placed to coordinate and steer the development of bids for funding from across councils and the GLA family.
- My officers make a range of data available in accordance with statutory requirements. You may also note that we recently implemented the London Planning Hub, digitising planning information for London. Live data feeds from the hub are imminent. This will provide a level of reporting on housing delivery that surpasses any other across the country and as such should suffice for Homes England’s needs.

I hope that our commitment to collaboration will be reciprocated and that any future reviews of the London Plan will be dealt with in a timely way. Having prepared, consulted on, and submitted my new London Plan within 21 months, a 30 month period of deliberation and delay in approving the Plan falls well short of the needs and expectations of industry and Londoners; and indeed fails to accord with the Government’s own ambitions for a responsive planning system as set out in the *Planning for the Future* White Paper. It also demonstrates how devolved administrations are more efficient in responding to the needs of their local areas than central Government.

Yours sincerely,



Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London

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