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RT Honourable Robert Jenrick
Secretary of State for Housing,
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27 January 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

In 2016 Elmbridge Council undertook to produce a new Local Plan for the borough. The progress of the Local Plan preparation has been directly influenced by changes in Government policy, most notably the publication of the White Paper Fixing Our Broken Housing Market and the two updates to the NPPF including the publication of a standard methodology for assessing housing need. After carrying out two Regulation 18 consultations to take account of these changes the Council is preparing to publish and submit its Draft Plan (Regulation 19) later this year.

Elmbridge is made up of several small towns and villages nestled within the Green Belt located between the River Thames and the M25. Development sites and opportunities are therefore scarce and after three years of assessing all possible options for development it is clear to us that the only way to meet the Government's need figure would be to release our treasured Green Belt land or to build at such density in the towns and villages that their character and appearance would be destroyed.

Through our Regulation 18 consultations, our residents have made it very clear to us that neither of these options are acceptable to them. During the most recent consultation (September 2019) 85% of residents supported a growth strategy that would optimise development within the existing urban areas whilst protecting their character and appearance. This approach would deliver approximately 50% of housing need target from the standard methodology.

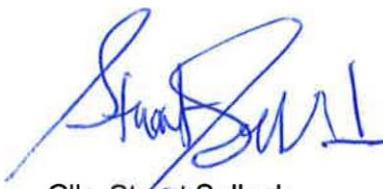
At a meeting in Elmbridge during his party leadership campaign in June 2019 the Prime Minister appeared to support the primacy of local authorities in setting its own growth targets when he stated housing numbers must be left to the local authority to accommodate appropriate levels of development. This was reported in the local press and welcomed by residents and by us as the Group Leaders for all the parties that comprise Elmbridge BC.

However, the reality of the decisions made by the Planning Inspectorate in similar Local Plan examinations suggests that the views of residents and the protection of the character and appearance of urban and rural areas, including Green Belt, are being outweighed by the application of the standard methodology and the Duty to Cooperate. It appears to us that the Planning Inspectorate decisions do not reflect the Government's desire to facilitate local democracy, decision making and accountability.

The recent examinations of East Heffordshire, St Albans and Sevenoaks' Plans suggest that a reduced housing target will only be accepted if, through the Duty to Cooperate, we identify where our unmet housing need will be met by another authority. Realistically, it must be acknowledged that this will be impossible in Elmbridge as it, and its surrounding areas, are heavily constrained.

In light of this, as well as the Prime Minister's statements in June 2019 and in the knowledge that your department is working on an ambitious Planning White Paper, we would urge you to consider changes in current policy with regard to unmet housing need, and the pressure to build on the Green Belt, should Duty to Cooperate fail to identify that need can be met elsewhere?

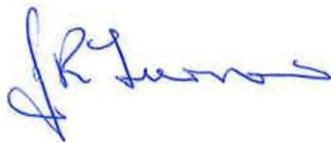
Yours sincerely,



Cllr. Stuart Selleck
Leader of the Council
Residents' Association Group



Cllr. Andrew Davis
Deputy Leader of the Council
Liberal Democrats Group



Cllr. Janet Turner
Leader, Hinchley Wood
Residents' Association Group



Cllr. James Browne
Leader, Conservative Group

cc The Rt. Honourable Boris Johnson, MP
The Rt. Honourable Dominic Raab, MP
Dr Ben Spencer, MP