



# Elmbridge Borough Council

... bridging the communities ...

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Rt. Honourable Robert Jenrick  
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7 May 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing further to our letter dated 27 January 2020. I fully appreciate that the Covid-19 pandemic will (quite rightly) be the focus of your Ministry's resources. However, my queries relate to the pandemic and how Local Authorities should seek to reflect the long-term changes to the way our residents will live and work because of the virus.

As people take stock and reflect on how and where we live during this time it has highlighted several key issues and objectives that need to be reflected in the NPPF, the upcoming White Paper and emerging Local Plans. Most notably the importance of good design, of space standards and well-designed homes that function for its occupants - allowing for home working with good quality outdoor amenity space. It has also made us aware of the importance and the impact of the wider environment that we live in, our well-designed streets and public spaces. How lucky we are in Elmbridge to have parks, commons, heaths and woods to take our daily exercise. Most of these assets are located in the Green Belt and are under constant threat of development. Yet they are providing the lifeline for residents to endure the social distancing restrictions, helping to sustain our resident's health and mental well-being. The closing of our town and village centres has reinforced our desires to protect them as valued hubs for our community. The benefits of working closer to home, living more sustainably along with the importance of our existing businesses to our local economy have also been reinforced.

The pandemic has also impacted our timetable for the production of the Local Plan. Most of our consultants and infrastructure providers have either furloughed their staff or redirected resources. I have therefore asked officers to use this time to review the Local Plan evidence base documents and policy directions to ensure the plan will enable us to future proof our local communities. We are also exploring the positive impact the reduction in travel has had

**Chief Executive**  
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on carbon emissions and the wider environment. We need to capture ways to foster these benefits to help achieve the ambition to be carbon neutral.

Do you foresee any changes to NPPF in light of the pandemic? The current guidance on social distancing could not be more at odds with the previous Government messaging to build and live in increasing densities to accommodate a disproportionate amount of growth within the urban areas. All to meet an arbitrary target given to local authorities without consideration for their individual characteristic, opportunities or constraints.

As raised in my earlier letter I am increasingly worried by the Inspector's application of Duty to Cooperate. I am watching with interest the outcome of the Sevenoaks examination and I am concerned by the link the inspector has made between not meeting the Government's housing target and Duty to Cooperate. The Duty to Cooperate and Statements of Common Ground are the processes we go through to explore the cross-boundary issues that need to be addressed and agree on a plan for doing so. We cannot fail because there is no immediate solution to an issue.

The Planning for the Future paper issued on 12 March 2020 has given us a preview of some of the ambitious changes to the planning system in the White Paper. I urge you to review these changes in light of the pandemic to ensure local communities are supported in future proofing their local environment.

I also ask that you take the opportunity to review the guidance around Duty to Cooperate. In the heavily constrained authorities caught between London and the Green Belt the soundness of a local plan cannot rest on the ability to find other authorities to accommodate unmet housing need.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Stuart Selleck  
Leader, Elmbridge Borough Council

cc Rt. Hon. Dominic Raab, MP  
Dr Ben Spencer, MP