

# NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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05 June 2020

The Rt. Hon Robert Jenrick MP

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities  
and Local Government

By email

Contact Officer: Ian Fullstone, Service  
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Dear Mr Jenrick,

## **North Hertfordshire Local Plan Examination**

This month marks the third 'anniversary' since North Hertfordshire submitted its new Local Plan to the Secretary of State for Examination in June 2017.

We fully understand and accept the need for robust and transparent public examination of local authorities' proposals. However prolonged examinations such as ours result in local communities living with years of uncertainty, undermining trust in the integrity of the system.

More than 80 plans have been submitted for examination and subsequently found sound since the start of 2016. The average length of these examinations is 15 months. Our examination is entering its 37<sup>th</sup> month.

As a tightly constrained authority, with Green Belt surrounding many of our main towns and villages, there are limits to which North Hertfordshire can increase the delivery of new jobs and homes – to the benefit of residents and the economy – in advance of the examination's outcome.

In turn, this leaves North Hertfordshire open to unplanned development, contrary to the most basic principles of the planning system. We are presently unable to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply. Under the National Planning Policy Framework's Housing Delivery Test we are currently shown as being one of the ten worst authorities in the country.

However, this apparent poor performance is significantly at odds with the reality of our new Local Plan. At the point of submission our Plan sought to meet North Hertfordshire's objectively assessed development needs in full despite the significant challenges of doing so. It also proposes positive contributions, under the statutory Duty to Cooperate, towards unmet housing and employment needs from the constrained neighbouring authorities of Luton and Stevenage respectively.

Resumed hearings were due to be held in March 2020. These were rightly postponed by the Inspector, with the support and agreement of this Council, due to the impacts of Covid-19.

Following your recent announcement, urging the the use of digital technologies to drive the planning system forward, it is imperative that North Hertfordshire's Local Plan Examination is progressed to its conclusion as soon as is practicable so this authority can turn its focus to delivery to meet the needs of its residents and assisting in the post-Covid recovery.

We note that South Oxfordshire is being used as the pilot Authority for virtual Local Plan hearings and assume this priority status is linked to your Direction that their Plan must be examined and adopted by the end of the year.

Our latest Housing Delivery Test Action Plan is due to be reported to our Cabinet at the end of this month. It identifies the progression and adoption of our Local Plan as the single most important measure for increasing delivery in North Hertfordshire.

We would welcome your reassurance that you are aware of our own circumstances and see the progression and conclusion of our own Examination as an equally high priority.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Clark', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Paul Clark  
Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Planning and Transport  
North Hertfordshire District Council

Cc

The Rt Hon Sir Oliver Heald QC MP for North East Hertfordshire  
Mr Bim Afolami MP for Hitchin and Harpenden  
Mr Stephen McPartland MP for Stevenage  
Councillor David Williams, Leader of Hertfordshire County Council and Chairman of Hertfordshire Growth Board