

Maidstone Borough Council

Maidstone House,
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Maidstone, Kent ME15 6JQ

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Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities
and Local Government
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local
Government
4th Floor, Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Via post & email: PSRobertJenrick@communities.gov.uk

3 June 2020

Dear Secretary of State

Maidstone Local Plan Review and the Standardised Methodology for Assessing Housing Need

I wrote to you on 20th January 2020 raising several issues concerning the Local Plan Review process and its impacts for Maidstone Borough Council and putting forward some potential solutions. The letter was sent with the backing of a unanimously agreed motion that had been thoroughly debated at our Full Council meeting in December 2019 and was signed by the leaders of all 5 political groups at Maidstone Borough Council and our MP Helen Grant.

We did not have the courtesy of an acknowledgement or reply.

Helen followed up with your PS on 17th February 2020. She referenced the letter sent to your department on 20th January 2020 emphasising that housing targets have been a huge talking point amongst constituents and local media with the pressure mounting on the local infrastructure – mainly roads, GP surgeries and schools, and observing that the saturation of these services is having a detrimental effect on the quality of life on longstanding residents of Maidstone and the surrounding areas. She raised my request to follow up our letter with a meeting with yourself to discuss the contents in further detail. Again, unfortunately there was no response from your department.

MBC officers then contacted your department again on 2nd April by e-mail and we were advised later that day that your civil servants had not received the letter and “that could very well be a problem at our end – so many apologies”.

We were advised that the best way forward was for your department to reply to the issues raised in the letter and then offer us a conversation on the back of that to explore the issues that we had raised in more detail and that this approach would enable your team to share our letter with the relevant ministers and give them chance to engage. It was pointed out that much of your department's resources, were devoted to more pressing matters but given that this was an outstanding issue your staff would use their best endeavours to progress a response to us at pace.

Our e-mail in April raised some additional issues arising from the impact of the Covid19 public health emergency.

We recognised the current very serious situation which we find ourselves in as a country and indeed as a global economy and that this is set to have significant impact across all of our markets, not least the housing market which will, in every likelihood, suffer in terms of both market and consumer confidence. We committed that in Maidstone, we will of course continue to plan positively and pro-actively – but made it clear that equally, we feel very strongly that now is the time for a sensible conversation about both housing numbers and the timing of our Local Plan Review. We sought a conversation to find a practical way forward.

I can assure you that our motivations and aspirations as part of such a conversation will be around finding solutions which meet the Borough's housing and growth needs, but not at the expense of either good spatial planning or the environment.

We asked for a contact point via which to arrange such a meeting which, from the Maidstone side would, in the first instance, be with our Interim Local Plan Director and the Council's Chief Executive.

A month elapsed with no further contact from your department. So, we, and our MP followed up again at the beginning of May. We have again received apologies and a promise of a reply.

We have now been waiting since January for a response from your department. This topic is of very significant interest to not only MBC but the public across the borough and the media. The lack of any response is wholly unacceptable.

I appreciate that Covid19 has rightly consumed time and resources of your Department. We too have played our role in Local Government here at Maidstone borough council with uninterrupted service delivery in the context of significant increases in need and demand, supporting our community and businesses effectively and managed to progress key long-term projects, including our Local Plan Review, too.

Please can we have your assurance of a written reply to our letter of 20th January and our subsequent e-mail of 2nd April 2020 and a conversation as we have requested, and your civil servants have promised, no later than 30th June 2020.

Yours faithfully



Councillor Martin Cox

Leader of the Council

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cc: Helen Grant, MP for Maidstone and the Weald

Helen Whatley, MP for Faversham and Mid Kent

John Perry, Leader of the Conservative Group for Maidstone Borough
Council

Fay Gooch, Leader of the Independent Group for Maidstone Borough
Council

Malcolm McKay, Leader of the Labour Group for Maidstone Borough
Council

Eddie Powell, Leader of the Independent Maidstone Group, Maidstone
Borough Council