



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Ms Lucas and Ms Wright
The Planning Inspectorate
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Temple Quay
Bristol
BS1 6PN

2 December 2024

Dear Ms Lucas and Ms Wright,

Draft Stroud District Local Plan Examination

I am the newly elected Member of Parliament for Stroud, having secured a victory in the May 2024 general election. As a doctor, I have thirty years' local experience on which to draw. The challenges that my community faces are not new to me.

We desperately need more homes that people can afford to rent and buy. I think that this is an issue that every family in the constituency is affected by in one way or another. There are more than 4,000 people on the waiting list at Stroud District Council – and the Council have done more than most over the last few years to try to keep up with demand.

At the same time, we need to address the shortage of new build housing more generally. The Government's target of 1.5m new homes in five years is very ambitious and has my total support. But we need to be careful that new builds are sustainable, built to a high standard by well qualified workers, including planners and planning inspectors, with proper infrastructure and in suitable locations.

Dr Simon Opher MP
Member of Parliament for Stroud
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The only way to achieve the Government's ambitions is through the delivery of local plans. You will be aware of the letter (Playing your part in building the homes we need, July 2024) the Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP sent to all local authority Leaders and Chief Executives in England. I fully support the approach set out in that letter:

I believe strongly in the plan making system. It is the right way to plan for growth and environmental enhancement, ensuring local leaders and their communities come together to agree the future of their areas. Once in place, and kept up to date, local plans provide the stability and certainty that local people and developers want to see our planning system deliver. In the absence of a plan, development will come forward on a piecemeal basis, with much less public engagement and fewer guarantees that it is the best outcome for your communities. That is why our goal has to be for universal coverage of ambitious local plans as quickly as possible. I would therefore like to draw your attention to the proposed timelines for plan-making set out in Chapter 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consultation. My objective is to drive all plans to adoption as fast as possible, with the goal of achieving universal plan coverage in this Parliament, while making sure that these plans are sufficiently ambitious.

This brings me to the draft Stroud District Local Plan. I have been following its progress and I am pleased to see Stroud District Council has positively prepared a draft Local Plan that looks to provide over twelve thousand new homes with many thousands being affordable. The successful adoption of the draft Local Plan will provide a clear framework for the long-term development of our district, ensuring that growth is managed in a sustainable and coordinated way. This helps balance housing, employment and infrastructure provision, and environmental considerations to meet the needs of local communities.

I have been following with interest your correspondence with the District Council and I understand the concerns you set out. You have clearly identified three areas of concern, with specific issues impacting the two proposed new settlements at Wisloe and Sharpness and wider concerns over the M5 Junctions 12 and 14. I am however reassured that, as set out in your correspondence ID 010, you believe, *'whilst we have a number of other soundness concerns with the Plan, we are confident that it is likely that these could be addressed by main modifications.'*

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I am also encouraged that you have allowed the Council and site promoters a pause in the examination to do further work with their partners at Gloucestershire County Council, National Highways and South Gloucestershire Council. I am informed that the authorities have worked well together to jointly deliver the designs and costings for M5 Junctions 12 and 14. Following a 6-week consultation, I understand that the Council will be submitting the work you requested to address the three areas of concern and reopen the Examination on 5 December 2024.

I fully recognise that there are still challenges in securing the total funding required for the improvements to M5 Junctions 12 and 14. However, it is important to understand that the local plan cannot directly address this funding gap, and the planning system does not require this of local planning authorities. The plan must first be adopted to ensure that there is a clear framework in place, demonstrating that the necessary homes, businesses and infrastructure projects requiring the funding are identified and planned for.

Based on the comprehensive information prepared by Stroud District Council, National Highways, and Gloucestershire County Council, it is clear that once the local plan is adopted, the appropriate developer contributions can be secured. This will give confidence to the development industry and infrastructure providers to invest in the district and enable the Council to move forward with the process of bidding for government funding.

I urge you to positively progress the draft Local Plan through to adoption. Doing so will enable me to effectively lobby for the necessary funding, working closely with the Department for Transport, the Transport Secretary and my colleague Minister of State for Housing and Planning, Matthew Pennycook. This is a critical step in securing the resources needed to improve the strategic road network at these junctions and support the wider growth of the region.

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While I understand that local plans and strategic development are not always popular, I fully support the progress and adoption of the draft Stroud District Local Plan, and the approach of the Government as set out by the Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP. I strongly believe that the successful adoption of the draft Stroud District Local Plan is required to meet the Government's ambitions for growth and to provide the homes, employment and environmental protections we desperately need.

I look forward to you re-opening the Examination on 5 December 2024 and progressing with remaining matters in Spring 2025.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Simon Opher". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Dr Simon Opher MP

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