



Open Letter from Oxfordshire Green Party

To:

Robert Jenrick,

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Dear Mr Jenrick,

Your recent move to block South Oxfordshire District Council from taking action on its draft Local Plan is draconian, anti-democratic and flies in the face of localism. Now we note, from comments by the leader of Oxfordshire County Council in today's local press, that no decision will be taken until after the General Election. This is unacceptable.

Residents and environmental groups across the District have expressed their deep concern over South Oxfordshire's draft Local Plan, which has suffered from a democratic deficit throughout its many iterations. They are concerned about overall housing numbers, the release of sensitive green belt sites and the Plan's insufficient recognition of the climate and ecological emergency. This was a major factor in the change of control of South Oxfordshire District Council in May, from Conservative dominance to a Liberal Democrat – Green partnership.

Following a period of discussion, research and investigation, South Oxfordshire Cabinet unanimously recommended that Council withdraw the draft Local Plan 2034 from inspection and immediately start work on a fresh plan, but Council was prevented from discussing or voting on this recommendation after you intervened. This also meant that 35 members of the public, many of whom had travelled long distances to speak at the meeting, were silenced.

The government's vision for an Oxfordshire covered in concrete and blighted by traffic and un-needed homes is an affront to the wishes of local residents and neglects the vital need to address the climate crisis. The decision on what to do next on South Oxfordshire's plan should be for that district's elected local representatives. That's how democracy works. The "duty to co-operate" is not a duty to agree, and we would expect the same freedom for our own councils.

Given this government's other recent actions, a central government minister preventing a local democratic process taking place is less surprising than it should be, but still sets a dangerous precedent. Your own departmental website states:

"The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's job is to create great places to live and work, and to give more power to local people to shape what happens in their area."

We Greens are proud to stand up for residents' concerns about over-development and will continue to strive for a greener, fairer and more representative Oxfordshire for all residents. Whatever your view on this particular Local Plan, the decision-making powers over it should be returned to South Oxfordshire's elected local representatives immediately.

Sincerely,

Ian Middleton – Green Councillor for Kidlington East, Cherwell District Council
Dick Wolff and Craig Simmons – Green Councillors for St Mary's, Oxford City Council
Sonja Francis – Green Party Councillor, Thame Town Council
Andrew Prosser – Green Party Councillor, Witney Town Council
Robert Nixon – Green Party Councillor for Bicester East, Bicester Town Council
Fiona Mawson – Yarnton Parish Councillor
Chris Henderson – Radley Parish Councillor
Elaine Hatton – Carterton Town Councillor
Kate Robinson – Chair, Oxfordshire Green Party