

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

22 May 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

We welcome the measures that were announced to support the construction sector and housebuilding through continuing the planning process and guidance for safer building practices.

History has shown housebuilding contributes greatly to economic recovery and better housing supports better health and wellbeing. However, as representatives of councils across London, we have significant concerns that some of the measures announced could slow down the building of much needed affordable homes.

The Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately hit the poorest communities and shone a light on existing housing inequalities – with the homeless and overcrowded families at significant risk. This has reiterated the importance of the delivery of much needed affordable homes. We, as elected representatives, owe it to those communities to do all we can to help them access quality affordable homes.

Affordable housing obligations need to remain a national priority and must not be deferred.

Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments also contribute to much needed infrastructure and as well as opportunities for employment for local residents. Many councils have been using these funds to directly support the community sector to address Covid-19 and to fund some of the urgent and much needed transport changes due to Covid-19. These funds will be critical in supporting the post Covid-19 recovery.

In order to support the sector and continue housebuilding, we urge your Government, rather than relaxing requirements for affordable housing contributions and infrastructure payments, to instead support social and affordable housing building by expanding the grants for social housebuilding.

As well as our role as Planning Authorities, many of us are also significant house builders ourselves, and are ready to increase and continuing the supply of affordable homes if additional grant is available – boosting the economy, getting people back to work, and delivering the homes our communities need.

In addition, we ask the Government to rethink and relax additional restrictions likely to frustrate the delivery of genuinely affordable homes including:

- The First Homes Policy – allowing for a more regional approach to an intermediate housing product. As it stands the First Homes Policy would not deliver more genuinely affordable housing in London.
- Resetting the housing delivery test to take into account the pandemic period.

- Relaxing the time frames for existing affordable housing grant, to enable councils to get schemes back on track post pandemic and not have to reduce the affordable housing numbers in schemes due to grant cut off.
- Allow councils to retain all right to buy receipts, or at the very least extend the time for the receipts to be used.
- Relax artificial restrictions on combining the right to buy receipts with other forms of housing grant.
- To further reduce the Public Works Loan Board borrowing costs for house building with Government underwriting interest rates to zero for the next twelve months and setting a guaranteed interest rate ceiling after that in line with the current support packages available to the wider economy.

We have an opportunity to re-imagine the planning system to enable Councils to truly deliver affordable housing, support the health and wellbeing of our communities, support the construction sector and rebuild our economy after this national health crisis. We are ready to play our part with your support.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Darren Rodwell, Leader – London Borough of Barking and Dagenham & London Councils Executive Member for Housing and Planning

Cllr Cameron Geddes, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Social Housing – London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Cllr Muhammed Butt, Leader - London Borough of Brent

Cllr Eleanor Southwood, Cabinet Member for Housing & Welfare Reform – London Borough of Brent

Cllr Shama Tatler, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Property and Planning – London Borough of Brent

Cllr Danny Beales, Cabinet Member for Investing in Communities and an Inclusive Economy – London Borough of Camden

Councillor Paul Scott, Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport & Regeneration - London Borough of Croydon

Cllr Julian Bell, Leader – London Borough of Ealing

Cllr Peter Mason, Cabinet Member for Housing, Planning & Transformation – London Borough of Ealing

Cllr Nesil Caliskan, Leader – London Borough of Enfield

Cllr Gina Needs, Cabinet Member for Social Housing – London Borough of Enfield

Cllr Danny Thorpe, Leader – Royal Borough of Greenwich

Cllr Sarah Merrill, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration - Royal Borough of Greenwich

Cllr Guy Nicholson, Cabinet Member for Planning, Culture & Inclusive Economy - London Borough of Hackney

Councillor Stephen Cowan, Leader - London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

Cllr Andrew Jones, Cabinet Member for the Economy – London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

Councillor Joseph Ejiofor, Leader – London Borough of Haringey

Cllr Charles Adje, Cabinet Member - Finance and Strategic Regeneration – London Borough of Haringey

Cllr Keith Ferry, Deputy Leader of the Council; Regeneration, Planning & Employment Portfolio Holder- London Borough of Harrow

Cllr Steve Curran, Leader – London Borough of Hounslow

Cllr Dairmaid Ward, Executive Member for Housing & Development – London Borough of Islington

Cllr Jack Hopkins, Leader – London Borough of Lambeth

Cllr Matthew Bennett, Cabinet Member for Planning, Investment & New Homes – London Borough of Lambeth

Damien Egan, Mayor of Lewisham

Cllr Martin Whelton, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport – London Borough of Merton

Roksana Fiaz, Mayor of Newham

Cllr John Gray, Deputy Mayor & Lead Member for Housing Services – London Borough of Newham

Cllr Shaban Mohammed, Deputy Cabinet Member – Housing Services - London Borough of Newham

Cllr Jas Athwal, Leader – London Borough of Redbridge

Cllr Leo Pollak, Cabinet Member for Social Regeneration, Great Estates and New Council Homes - London Borough of Southwark

Cllr Johnson Situ, Cabinet Member for Growth, Development and Planning – London Borough of Southwark

John Biggs, Mayor of Tower Hamlets

Cllr Rachel Blake, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Planning, Air Quality and Tackling Poverty – London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Cllr Clare Coghill, Leader - London Borough of Waltham Forest

Cllr Simon Miller, Portfolio Lead Member - Economic Growth and Housing Development – London Borough of Waltham Forest