



From the Leader of the Council

*Leader's Room,
The Town Hall, Wandsworth High Street
London SW18 2PU*

The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local
Government

Sent by email:

jenrickr@parliament.uk

TechnicalPlanningConsultation@communities.gov.uk

1 October 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

RE: Changes to the current planning system

In Wandsworth we have a strong record of successfully delivering the homes that our residents need alongside providing the necessary infrastructure to create places we can be proud of and where residents want to live and work. Our vision is that Wandsworth will maintain its special character, connectivity and neighbourhood distinctiveness, and achieve higher levels of growth in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way, bringing benefits and opportunities for all. On that basis we cannot support the proposals contained in this consultation insofar as they relate to changes to the standard method for assessing local housing need.

In Wandsworth the current system has proved very effective: in 2019, 91 per cent of the planning applications submitted were approved, which is amongst the highest in London. The Council has consistently delivered above the targets in its up to date Local Plan and in the adopted London Plan. Alongside this, the Community Infrastructure Levy has enabled the Council to deliver the infrastructure needed to enable sustainable growth with a keen eye to the challenge of Climate change and now an adopted Action Plan to ensure that we deliver against the targets in the Wandsworth Environment and Sustainability Strategy. The Vauxhall Nine Elms Battersea Opportunity Area has been a focus for much of that development in recent years, creating a new town centre and local community on previously developed land.

Land is a finite resource and we have sought to ensure that land is maximised for its potential to support our endeavour. Against that background the Council cannot see how it could realistically ensure that 3059 homes per year be delivered as derived from the proposed changes to the Standard Method; it would appear the formula is set up to penalise those who, like Wandsworth, have been successful previously and also to ensure in high value areas more housing comes forward with no consideration given to the environmental factors and the availability of land.

I support the intention behind the First Homes initiative, which is to help local people buy their first home. However, I do recommend reconsidering some aspects of this proposal to ensure continuing affordability of intermediate housing to meet identified local needs. There are also some concerns that First Homes, as proposed, may only be an attractive option for relatively few, high earning first time buyers. There is therefore a risk that the proposal could result in an increase in prices and in turn push up further the output from the proposed Standard Method. Coupled with the temporary lifting of the small sites threshold, there could be a number of unintended consequences arising out of the proposed changes.

In short, we consider that the proposed measures would not improve the effectiveness of the existing system but have potentially the opposite effect as evidenced in our comprehensive response to the specific questions asked in the consultation on 'Changes to the current planning system'.

I ask that further detailed consideration is given to the proposed formula for the Standard Method and request that Government then brings forward a further opportunity for comment through a consultation which should then inform the Planning White Paper proposals.

Turning briefly to the White Paper: both CIL and Section 106 has yielded dividend for the borough and are a key element of the resources needed to deliver development which residents support as they can see it improves facilities and amenities in their local area. The proposed changes will significantly alter the current arrangements working to our detriment.

This Council will be making detailed comment on the Planning White Paper proposals in due course.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ravi Govindia". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Councillor Ravi Govindia CBE
Leader, Wandsworth Borough Council