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Dear Helen

Emerging Maidstone Local Plan

Thank you for your letter of 4th September in relation to the Maidstone Local Plan and for bringing these important issues to my attention on behalf of your constituents.

I have carefully considered the matters raised in your letter and I have decided not to issue a holding direction.

Wherever possible I want to allow local councils to take these important decisions without interference from central Government. Maidstone Borough Council have produced the plan and I believe it is important that they now take the final decision as to whether to adopt the plan or not. It is also right that the Planning Inspector should be responsible for the independent examination of local plans and for considering the representations made on these matters which were covered during the examination.

I am determined to ensure we support local authorities in bringing forward planned development rather than allowing the speculative development which causes communities such concern. The Maidstone Local Plan is the framework that provides a five year supply of deliverable housing sites and the best defence against unplanned development. If I were to issue a holding direction the plan

would have no effect while the direction is in place. I do not want to introduce this unnecessary delay in Maidstone's local plan being brought forward.

As I have decided not to issue a holding direction, it will now be for Maidstone Borough Council to decide whether to adopt the plan.

If the Borough Council decide to adopt the plan then the Woodcut Farm site, which you raised concerns about in relation to the impact on the important heritage asset of Leeds Castle and the setting of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, will be allocated for development and therefore the principle of development on the site would have been established. However, I note that the detailed matters such as landscaping, the siting, scale and design of buildings would remain to be determined and that the existing application is only for outline permission. I fully support both you and your constituents being provided with more information on these important details. I will have the opportunity to consider further requests to intervene in this planning application prior to its determination having regard to our policy on call-in. I attach a link to a House of Commons library briefing paper on the call in process which I hope may be of help.

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN00930/SN00930.pdf>

You have raised the important issue of investment in the local transport network. As I set out in my statement to the House on Local Housing Need it is vital that infrastructure is brought forward alongside the new homes we need to support the development. I understand the Inspector has been satisfied that appropriate provision is made through the Council's Infrastructure and Delivery Plan (which accompanies the emerging plan) and has looked in detail at the proposed sites. It will be important that the necessary contributions are brought forward. I also understand that Maidstone Borough Council have expressed an interest in bidding for monies under the Housing Infrastructure Fund. Should a formal bid be received we will consider this carefully.

In respect of air quality matters that were raised by Helen Grant MP I recognise this is an issue of concern for your constituents. I fully appreciate that these are important issues that are critical to public health. During the examination the Inspector considered how the proposed growth within the Maidstone Local Plan will impact on air quality and further consideration will be given through the assessment of planning applications.

Finally, you raise an important point about neighbourhood plans. I understand your concern that some local authorities may be restricting the scope for communities to bring forward neighbourhood plans, due to the extent to which they deem their own local plan policies to be 'strategic'. This is a matter that we intend to address through revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework, a draft of which we aim to publish for consultation early in 2018.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Javid', with a small comma at the end.

RT HON SAJID JAVID MP