

Neale Coleman
By email only

Councillor Maggie Filipova-Rivers
Leader of the Council
executiveupport@southoxon.gov.uk
Tel: 01235 422422
Textphone: 18001 01235 422422

Abbey House
Abbey Close
Abingdon
OX14 3JE

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Dear Neale,

Thank you for our introductory meeting on 21 January 2026 to discuss the work of the Oxford Growth Commission and the ongoing engagement of your team with our officers.

My Cabinet and I met informally to discuss the interim report and, more recently, the draft list of accelerated sites. Following those discussions, I agreed to write to you to set out some of our thoughts.

Firstly, the council strongly welcomes the support of the Commission in helping to tackle issues in South Oxfordshire. As your report identifies, many of the delivery challenges in the district, and across Oxfordshire more broadly, arise not from a lack of activity by local authorities but from wider systemic constraints and from the increasing misalignment between housing delivery, infrastructure provision, utilities capacity, labour-market needs and skills development across the wider functional economy.

In particular, infrastructure provision (including wastewater capacity, energy supply and utilities) alongside skills and delivery capacity, continues to act not only as a critical constraint on the timely delivery of development, but increasingly as a constraint on productivity and wider economic performance across Oxfordshire.

In our experience, the availability, timing and coordination of infrastructure is now one of the most significant risks to delivery. Oxfordshire is operating as a mature but capacity-constrained economy, in which future prosperity depends less on expansion in employment alone and more on how effectively housing, infrastructure, labour markets and skills systems function together. Where these systems are misaligned, for example

through poor sequencing between housing growth, employment growth, transport investment, utilities provision and skills planning, the result is increased congestion, weaker labour-market efficiency, reduced productivity and growing uncertainty for investors.

Delays relating to wastewater treatment capacity and the resourcing of statutory bodies, including the Environment Agency, are having a direct and material impact on the ability to bring forward allocated sites. We would welcome the Commission continuing to highlight these issues in its engagement with Government, particularly the need for increased capacity and investment in key agencies and infrastructure providers in high-growth areas such as Oxfordshire.

More broadly, we would encourage the Commission to consider whether infrastructure planning places too much emphasis on large, centralised facilities at the expense of more distributed and locally accessible solutions. Whilst strategic infrastructure will continue to play an important role, a greater focus on smaller-scale provision could improve resilience, support more sustainable patterns of development, reduce dependency on individual infrastructure projects.

It is important to note that many of the barriers to delivery sit outside the direct control of local planning authorities, including land ownership constraints, viability and funding challenges and the pace at which promoters and developers bring sites forward. In a number of cases, our strategic allocations remain promoter-led and have yet to secure development partners, illustrating that delivery challenges can arise well before the construction phase. If the promoters of such sites had adhered to the timetables they set out at the SOLP 2035 examination, we would have delivered 1,273 more homes up to 31 March 2026. Furthermore, these sites would have collectively delivered 4,769 homes in total between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2029 (i.e. the rough equivalent of the lifetime of this parliament) – now, due to delays, we are forecasting just 75 homes – a 98% drop.

While the council has taken a proactive approach to plan-making, site allocation and partnership working, delivery depends on a complex interaction between set of actors. It is therefore important that the Commission's work continues to reflect the structural constraints inherent within the current developer-led delivery model and avoids disproportionately attributing delivery challenges to local authority processes. If we are to succeed in our common goal of delivering sustainable growth across Oxfordshire, it is important that policy and intervention are grounded in a full understanding of these systemic pressures and the underlying market dynamics that shape delivery.

There was also recognition that current infrastructure funding recovery arrangements can, at times, create complex viability considerations that delay delivery. Issues associated with programmes such as the Housing Infrastructure Fund can lead to

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protracted negotiations and slow progress on key sites. We would welcome further consideration by the Commission of how these mechanisms could operate more flexibly to support delivery while maintaining appropriate value for money and ensuring the delivery of the infrastructure required to support these new communities.

As you will be aware, the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision sets out an ambitious vision for Oxfordshire that is not solely focused on housing delivery. As a council, we have invested strongly in masterplanning and place-shaping to ensure that both existing and new communities have access to the infrastructure and services they need, including health provision, which requires close working with partners such as the ICB. This reflects the importance of taking a genuinely integrated approach to growth, aligning land use planning, infrastructure provision and service delivery.

The council welcomes the collaborative approach that the Commission has taken with officers and partners across the district and was pleased to hear of the work, supported by Homes England, to help address blockages affecting the delivery of our allocated strategic sites. In particular, we welcome the additional support being secured to help unlock delivery and would encourage continued focus on practical interventions that can accelerate progress on the ground.

In considering potential future delivery models, including any proposals relating to a Development Corporation for Oxford, it will be important to ensure that any new arrangements genuinely support and accelerate delivery while strengthening coordination across the wider Oxfordshire's functional and polycentric economy. Any future arrangements should therefore focus on improving alignment, sequencing and accountability across the wider system, rather than assuming that structural consolidation alone will resolve the underlying constraints. It will also be important to retain clear democratic accountability and local legitimacy, recognising that successful long-term delivery depends on sustained engagement with locally elected members, communities and existing place-based partnerships.

I look forward to having further engagement with you on the proposals as they are developed.

In terms of wider economic development, we do not support the findings of the Volterra report referenced in your interim report and note the alternative "White Paper" evidence presented to you by the County Council and Enterprise Oxfordshire OCC subsequently. As presented in the draft white paper, we firmly believe that we believe that a viable Growth Plan for Oxfordshire should focus on growth in productivity and GVA per capita, not on crude growth of jobs, population and housing. High growth in demand for housing would only be harmful and exacerbate existing productivity challenges.

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We believe that there is a need to recognise the polycentric nature of the Oxfordshire economy and that different types of business have different locational needs. Not all agglomeration is driven or needs to be located within the city, as evidenced by the successful clusters operating throughout the Science Vale. If our challenges at strategic sites can be unlocked alongside affordable infrastructure improvements including active travel and public transport options, then South Oxfordshire's towns offer opportunities to closely locate jobs and homes providing a high quality standard of living and enabling residents to avoid car-based commutes that contribute to stagnating productivity.

Enabling productivity gains require active recognition of Oxfordshire's infrastructure constraints along with long-term skills and business support development programmes that enable Oxfordshire's businesses and resident workforce to adapt to the current pace of change driven by rapid technological advances.

There is real scope to place greater emphasis on the diffusion of productivity gains across the wider economy, including through stronger local supply chains, workforce skills and retention, SME capability and the resilience of foundational sectors that support the functioning of Oxfordshire's economy.

Oxfordshire is good at creating new ideas, technologies, and businesses but much of the financial return and long-term economic value doesn't stay in the area. Instead, that value is captured by others, especially when foreign companies buy local startups or intellectual property (IP) and then develop, scale, or profit from them elsewhere. Tackling this is key to driving economic growth for Oxfordshire and the UK, and emphasis should be given to building relationships that enable Oxfordshire's research and high growth businesses to commercialise innovation in other areas of the UK suited to large scale development. This includes both across and beyond the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor.

We are grateful for the work you are undertaking across Government to raise awareness of the challenges facing Oxfordshire and to seek coordinated support from a range of departments.

We look forward to continuing to work with you over the coming months to explore in more detail the key housing and employment issues in South Oxfordshire. We hope that South Oxfordshire's input will provide useful and robust evidence to inform your final report to Government in the autumn.

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Yours sincerely,



Councillor Maggie Filipova-Rivers
Leader of the Council

cc

Olly Glover MP

Freddie Van Mierlo MP

Leaders of Oxfordshire City, County and District Councils

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