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FAO Joanne Key
Director General, Regeneration, Housing and Planning
Will Garton
Director General for Local Government at the UK's Ministry of Housing, Communities
and Local Government (MHCLG)

Tuesday 30th June 2026

Dear Joanne and Will,

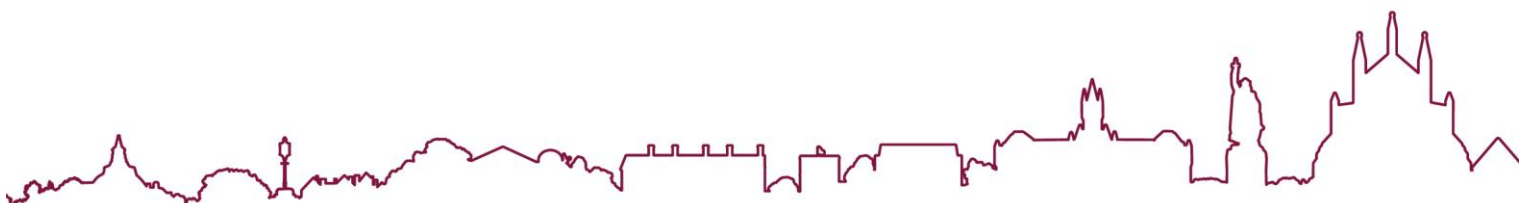
Commencement of Local Plan Preparation under the New Plan-Making System

I am writing further to my letter of 5th June 2026, in which Winchester City Council sought clarification on the Government's expectations regarding plan making in the context of the new Local Plan system and the proposed local government reorganisation in Hampshire. A copy of that letter is attached for ease of reference, as to date we have not received a response.

Whilst we recognise the importance of the 30th June 2026 milestone for commencing plan preparation under the new system, the Council remains concerned that, in the absence of clear transitional arrangements for authorities affected by local government reorganisation, there continues to be significant uncertainty regarding how these requirements should be applied in practice.

The Council remains fully committed to maintaining an up to date planning framework and to supporting the Government's ambitions for housing delivery, economic growth, infrastructure investment and sustainable development. As demonstrated by the adoption of our Local Plan 2040 in March 2026, Winchester has a strong track record of plan making and remains committed to ensuring that the area continues to benefit from an effective and up to date planning framework.

Given the current legislative requirements, and to remain legally compliant with the new plan making regulations, the Council intends to publish a Notice of Intention to Commence Plan Preparation by 30th June 2026 based on the current Winchester administrative geography. This approach reflects the fact that the Structural Changes Order has not yet been laid and, at present, no transitional arrangements have been



published by Government setting out how authorities affected by Local Government Reorganisation should proceed.

The Council recognises that, once published, the geography covered by a Notice of Intention cannot subsequently be amended. We are therefore mindful that future Government guidance, transitional arrangements or the Structural Changes Order itself may indicate that a different approach should be taken. Should this be the case, the Council would review its position and consider the most appropriate course of action considering the revised legislative or policy framework.

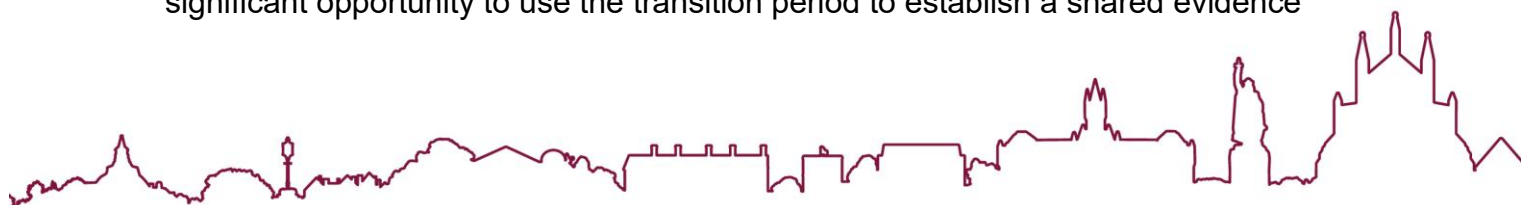
However, we remain concerned that progressing a future Local Plan solely based on the existing Winchester geography could result in significant public resources being committed to a process that may not align with the future planning authority area, governance arrangements or strategic priorities of the proposed Mid Hampshire Council. Such an approach risks duplication of effort and undertaking work that may subsequently require substantial revision as local government reorganisation progresses.

The Council has also received legal advice indicating that, in the absence of transitional arrangements, there remains uncertainty regarding the interaction between the new plan making system and local government reorganisation, particularly where future local planning authority boundaries will differ from existing administrative boundaries. This further reinforces the need for clarity regarding the Government's expectations during the transition period.

Rather than progressing work that may ultimately require replacement or substantial amendment, we believe there may be potential merit in exploring opportunities for collaborative plan making across those authorities expected to form part of the proposed Mid Hampshire Council area.

Section 28 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 enables two or more local planning authorities to prepare a joint Local Plan. In this context, a collaborative approach would provide the opportunity to commission shared evidence, make more efficient use of specialist resources and address strategic cross boundary issues from the outset. It would also help ensure that work undertaken during the transition period can be carried forward into future planning arrangements and support the preparation of any future Spatial Development Strategy. The above approach was agreed this morning at our Cabinet Meeting.

The Council is keen to ensure that plan making activity undertaken over the next two years directly supports the delivery of homes, infrastructure, employment growth and investment across the future Mid Hampshire geography. In our view, there is a significant opportunity to use the transition period to establish a shared evidence



base and strategic planning framework that can accelerate, rather than delay, plan preparation following vesting.

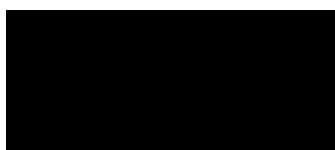
The Council will explore, with neighbouring authorities, whether opportunities exist for collaborative working and shared evidence gathering across the proposed Mid Hampshire geography as local government reorganisation progresses. The Council will also continue to engage with authorities within the proposed South East Hampshire geography to better understand how future planning arrangements may evolve in relation to the Parish of Newlands.

The Council is also mindful that elections to a Mid Hampshire shadow authority are expected in May 2027. Decisions taken through the new Local Plan process during 2026 and 2027 could therefore pre date the establishment of the body that will ultimately be responsible for adopting and delivering the plan. We believe there is merit in ensuring that work undertaken now can be effectively carried forward into successor arrangements and provide a strong foundation for the new authority from vesting day.

Our objective is not to delay plan making, but to ensure that the work undertaken during this period is proportionate, makes effective use of public resources and provides the strongest possible platform for future planning arrangements. We would therefore welcome urgent clarification from Government regarding the intended approach to plan making in areas subject to local government reorganisation, including any transitional arrangements that may apply.

Given the significance of these issues, and the requirement for authorities to progress work under the new planning system, we would be grateful for an early response and would be happy to meet with you to discuss these matters

Yours sincerely,



Cheryl Headon
Strategic Director

