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Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Levelling Up,
Housing and Communities
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Contact: Cllr Jason Zadrozny
Direct Line: 01623 457506
Email: cllr.j.zadrozny@ashfield.gov.uk
Our Ref: JZ/MG01
Your Ref:
Date: 8th January 2024

Dear Mr Gove

RE: ASHFIELD LOCAL PLAN

I am writing in response to your letter regarding the Local Plan for Ashfield District Council.

I was disappointed to receive your letter and for you to name Ashfield in your speech earlier that day. We here feel that your rhetoric and actions are wholly unnecessary.

Ashfield already has in place a timetable for developing a new Local Plan within our Local Development Scheme (LDS). Officials in your department are fully aware of this, and indeed even you reference in your letter that we are currently conducting our Regulation 19 consultation. Our LDS was approved in August 2023 and we are fully on track with its delivery. I have enclosed a copy of the LDS with this letter for your reference.

The latest draft of our Local Plan has rightly taken on board local feedback through the consultation process. The Council has twice previously (under a previous Labour administration) taken a proposed plan through to examination. However, these plans have not had the support of local communities. This has been democratically reflected at the local ballot boxes which is why they were not taken forward. Indeed, Lee Anderson MP voted with us to withdraw the previous iteration of the plan while an Ashfield Councillor in 2018, he agreed with us that Labour's plan caused significant harm to our district.

Our approach has not been helped by continual changes in Government planning policies and targets. As you know, we are bound by the processes determined by your department which make plan-making a ponderous endeavour.

Our draft Local Plan sets out an incredibly positive vision for the future of Ashfield district. If approved, our plan will facilitate significant economic growth and also housing in the most sustainable and deliverable manner that is possible. Our LDS reflects our level of confidence in our current programme. The timetable we have set is ambitious, and it has been constructively challenged by Councillors on our Local Plan Development Committee to ensure it has been streamlined for the earliest delivery date.

Officers have tried to programme realistically in respect of the examination process and the capacity of your Planning Inspectorate. We are entirely on track to submit our draft

Address: Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby in Ashfield, Nottingham, NG17 8DA

Tel: 01623 450000 **Fax:** 01623 457006 **Web:** www.ashfield.gov.uk

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Local Plan to the Secretary of State in May 2024 – as already agreed with your department. The remaining dates in our LDS will be in the hands of whomever you appoint as the Inspector.

We would like to proceed based on our published timetable, enclosed for your reference. I would be grateful if you could confirm that this LDS is acceptable or suggest where amendments could be made. I hope this demonstrates that your intervention is not necessary and I invite you to reconsider your direction.

I would like to highlight to you that the development of a new Local Plan has not hampered our ability to drive economic growth and build new homes. Since 1st January 2019, 2,324 new homes have been approved, which is above our annual housing target of 445. In the last five years, we have also approved more than 32 hectares of new employment land which will create over 5,200 new jobs within the district. I'm sure you will agree that this is incredibly positive for Ashfield and the wider Nottinghamshire region.

We have also continued to develop new policies to shape and guide development in the district. In the last few years we have adopted masterplans for our three principal town centres of Hucknall, Sutton and Kirkby; supplementary planning documents including for retail to residential conversion; planning guidance on climate change, biodiversity and nature conservation; and designated new conservation areas.

I trust that this demonstrates to you that the new Councillors in Ashfield, who now lead the District, following years of negligence in this area from previous Labour administrations, are now enabling and shaping investment in the district where it is appropriate in scale and design to the local area, and that we are adapting to changing local and national priorities.

I am happy to make officers available to liaise with your officials, and in particular, we would welcome their input into the timetable post-submission to you so that we can ensure that there are no delays from the Planning Inspectorate in taking our plan through public examination.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Jason Zadrozny
Leader of Ashfield District Council

Enc. Ashfield District Council's Local Development Scheme, adopted August 2023