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Dear Bridget,

### **House building in South Cambridgeshire**

During the general election campaign last year, local residents expressed their concerns very clearly to me about the pace and scale of development in our area. It is essential that their voices are heard and taken fully into account as the new Greater Cambridge Local Plan (GCLP) is put together. I am writing to you about the extraordinary scale of housebuilding South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) is considering as part of the new local plan, which covers the period to 2040. The initial consultation undertaken earlier this year is rather opaque about the scale of the housebuilding being considered for the SCDC area, and I believe it is important for this to be set out clearly for residents.

In 2017, the start of the plan period, there were 65,486 dwellings in the SCDC area (based on SCDC's own council tax figures). Under the Government's target for housebuilding in this area, there would end up being 90,411 dwellings in the SCDC area by 2040, an increase of 38% from the start of the local plan in 2017. Roughly, that means for every three homes in South Cambridgeshire, another one will be built in the next 20 years.

However, the emerging draft GCLP is considering whether to go beyond that to 66,700 extra houses, based on an estimate that this is what is would be needed to meet the ambitions set out in the Cambridge and Peterborough Independent Economic Review (CPIER). The initial consultation on the next local plan does not spell out what share of that would be in the South Cambridgeshire area, but on the reasonable assumption that the ratio would be the same as in the Government's targets, then that would lead to a total of 107,006 dwellings in the SCDC area by 2040, an increase of over 63% above the 2017 figures. Roughly, that means for every three homes in South Cambridgeshire currently, you would be aiming to build two more.

An alternative way of looking at it is that it would be almost an extra 42,000 homes over a 20 year period. That would require building over 2,000 homes a year – three times the average rate of the last five year period.

I summarise the figures here:

Year	Scenario	No of dwellings	% increase from 2011 (start of current plan)	% increase from 2017 (start of new plan)
2011	Actual <sup>1</sup>	61,688		
2017	Actual <sup>2</sup>	65,486	6.2	
2020	Actual <sup>3</sup>	68,392	10.9	4.4
2040	MHCLG target <sup>4</sup>	90,411	46.6	38.1
2040	CPIER <sup>5</sup>	107,006	73.5	63.4



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Nationally, the government recognises the need to provide high quality, affordable new homes adopting a sustainable growth model. Housebuilding has been very rapid in recent years in South Cambridgeshire. Achieving just the government targets would mark a great uplift on that. But the scenario SCDC is considering, pursuant to the CPIER figures, is an extraordinary acceleration of housebuilding, beyond anything seen elsewhere in the country. It is simply unsustainable and would irreversibly damage the rural character of South Cambridgeshire, turning it into a more urban area.

Any growth must be sustainable. The biggest barrier to sustainable growth in our region is the creaking transport system. As our population has grown in recent years, increased demand has created longer and more stressful commutes for local people. It is, in my view, imperative that our transport plans are settled and necessary improvements have been made before we consider a significant uplift in house building.

It is essential that all new and existing homes are supplied with services, including power, digital connectivity and on a more basic level, water. My recent conversations with Rebecca Pow, DEFRA minister for water, have highlighted the challenges our region faces with the resilience of its potable water network. We must have total confidence that these basic amenities can cope with the increased demand from additional homes. The sequencing of local development is of critical importance to its success. When putting together the next local plan, SCDC must reflect upon these challenges and adopt a principle of 'I before E: Infrastructure before Expansion'.

Whilst the government is keen to encourage development to provide new homes, this is not a green light for inappropriate development. My fear is that the trajectory envisaged under the CPIER would put us on the course of unsustainable growth, fundamentally changing the character of South Cambridgeshire from rural to urbanised. I am therefore asking you for a clear commitment that SCDC will not seek to increase housebuilding levels beyond the government target, so that sustainable growth can be underpinned by the infrastructure improvements that residents and businesses in South Cambridgeshire so desperately need.

Yours sincerely,

Anthony Browne MP

1 Council tax base on 1st April 2011, SCDC figures

2 Council Tax base on 1st April 2017, SCDC figures

3 Council tax base 31st March 2020, SCDC figures

4 Figure for 1st April 2017, plus MHCLG figure for minimum local housing need for South Cambs of 24,955 for 2017-2040

5 The draft plan estimates that 66,700 houses for South Cambs and City are needed to meet the CPIER's forecasts, but does not specify how much in each. MHCLG apportioned housing need up to 2040 of 24,955 in S Cambs (62.2%) and 15,134 in City (37.8%). If you apportion the draft plan figures to the same ratio, you end up with 41,520 in S Cambs and 25,179 in City. That would add up to 66,699 plus 41,520 = 108,219 houses in S Cambs by 2040.