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Date/Dyddiad: 4th September 2019

Julie James AM
Minister for Housing and Local Government
Welsh Government
5th Floor
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Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Email: Correspondence.Julie.James@gov.wales

Dear Minister

Thank you for forwarding a copy of the draft National Development Framework. A thorough response will be made within the consultation period but in advance of that we think it necessary to share some preliminary views with you.

From a Monmouthshire perspective, the draft NDF requires some adjustment if our County is to play its part in energising the Cardiff Capital Region. Delivery of circa 70,000 new homes in our region is a fundamental challenge and with our county accounting for some 28% of the land mass we fully expect to make a contribution and we expect the NDF to enable this.

Monmouthshire is actively developing its next Local Development Plan. Council is considering the LDP in October. We are likely to consult the public on a proposal to significantly extend the settlements in the south of the County. One interpretation of the draft NDF is that the potential area is proposed to be part of the Green Belt and that we should not therefore consult on such a proposal. Another interpretation of the draft NDF is that it proposes a Green Belt north of the M4 on a boundary which will be determined as the strategic and local development plans are developed and agreed. We would support the second interpretation and we ask that you clarify that this is also your interpretation. If you are willing to provide this clarification it would allow us to continue to test our proposals through the Local Development Plan process. It would be helpful to have the opportunity to meet with you during

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September to discuss this matter. This position carries cross party support, hence the Leader of the Labour Party co-signing this letter.

This is important to us because in Monmouthshire house prices have risen to a level beyond that which is affordable to many local people. The average house price is currently £301,901 (Source: Hometrack 30th April 2019). The Monmouthshire average house price compares to a Wales average house price of £185,529 and the lower quartile affordability ratio is 9:1. Therefore, the provision of affordable housing is one of the Council's more pressing concerns, in both urban and rural areas.

The number of applicants on the Common Housing Register was 3269 at 31st March 2019. This has risen steadily since 2014/15 when the number was 2,867. Our Housing Options Team received 835 enquiries from households threatened with homelessness last year of which 551 households satisfied either a Section 66, a Section 73 or Section 75 duty to act.

The housing market in Monmouthshire is not stable and is not balanced. The story that these statistics tell is a need for fundamental uplift and refresh. This opportunity presents primarily in our south east corner. This is an area that your initial draft map could be interpreted to jettison. Hopefully this outline will help you to understand why we cannot support this perspective.

The UK Competitiveness Index 2019 confirmed Monmouthshire as having the second most competitive economy in Wales and being best placed for growth in the whole of Wales. We have a median workforce age of 49 years (this needs to be younger). We have 4 railway stations - Abergavenny, Caldicot, Chepstow and Severn Tunnel Junction with Llanwern being built right on our Magor boundary. We are the primary motorway access to Wales with the M4 and M48. Birmingham is barely an hour by road from Monmouth. Monmouthshire is the gateway to economic South East Wales but it is not a place that people just pass through. It's a place that people want to live.

Your officials have advised against promoting new settlements in our Local Development Plan. We will take that advice but we seek flexibility to promote town extensions. We expect to work with registered social landlords and deliver affordable housing exceeding your desired 50% threshold. We can do this at scale through making available land in our ownership, an interest in rental streams rather than capital receipts and because we are establishing a development vehicle to take this ambition forward. We will not be selling our land to volume house-builders, we will be developing it with RSL partners for social good.

We want to see Newport thrive and our ambitions support this agenda. We are aware that the conclusion of Newport's current LDP will see their remaining brownfield capability deliver circa 3,000 additional homes. Most of this land will be in private ownership so the likely capability to deliver affordable homes will be in line with current market expectations. We have ambition of closer to 10,000 new homes. We have the capability to deliver without large grants that others look to you for. With 97% of Monmouthshire currently un-developed, we can achieve this whilst maintaining custodianship of environmental beauty and habitat diversity.

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We believe the draft NDF can be nuanced without being compromised. In very practical terms if reference to the M4 being a southern boundary for a 'green belt' were to become the A4 and 'green belt' were to become 'green wedge' we would be able to advance our shared agenda and leave a better, more flexible planning environment for those that follow us. We can generate population growth that can help boost the regional credentials of Newport.

I hope you will be willing to see Monmouthshire as the place that it is and can be – a dynamic county providing fantastic homes for many more local people who want to live here in sustainable, resilient communities.

Yours Sincerely

**County Councillor Peter Fox OBE
Leader of the Council
Monmouthshire County Council**

**County Councillor Dimitri Batrouni
Leader of the Labour Group
Monmouthshire County Council**

