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Dear Prime Minister,

Issues affecting East Hampshire that need your help

Congratulations on your appointment as Prime Minister.

I am writing to draw your attention to a string of challenges that successive governments have consistently failed to address.

Over the past few years, we have repeatedly raised these issues to your predecessors but, sadly, we have seen little or no action.

You have already claimed that you will be more collaborative with local leaders. Perhaps you will be the Prime Minister to grasp the importance of matters faced by councils up and down the country.

To help you get to grips with these intractable problems, I have laid them out for you, along with a recommendation of how you can help us.

Taken together these issues represent a serious block on your own government's ambitions for housing, economic growth and public service reform. In many cases they are the result of the mixed-up thinking and incoherent reasoning of previous administrations. But you now have the opportunity to strip away the mess and muddle of previous failures and free local authorities to deliver what the country needs.

Rethink unrealistic housing targets

East Hampshire has acknowledged the need for sustainable housing growth and understands the importance of maintaining an up-to-date Local Plan. However, in 2024 our housing targets were effectively doubled with no heed paid to the unique constraints presented by the South Downs National Park.

In East Hampshire, 57% of the district lies within the national park, yet the housing requirement applied to the district does not reflect this constraint. Our housing target has virtually doubled

while the amount of available land is more than halved. These figures are unprecedented and unrealistic.

We have raised these concerns with successive Ministers and through responses to Government consultations over several years. Yet nothing changes.

National policy and housing assessment methodologies must recognise these exceptional circumstances if they are to produce realistic targets.

Give us guidance on local plans and LGR

The government's handling of planning policy, particularly with respect to local plans and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), has resulted in confusion and frustration for councils and residents.

There is widespread uncertainty around the status of local plans being prepared by councils that will cease to exist in their current form. The introduction of a new plan-making system and the simultaneous implementation of LGR has fundamentally changed the planning landscape. Rather than creating certainty and accelerating housing delivery, the Government's overlapping reforms have created confusion, duplication and imposed unnecessary cost for local authorities and the taxpayer.

The Government has promised to provide guidance on transitional arrangements for councils facing LGR 'in due course'.

That's no longer good enough. Councils cannot continue to operate on vague assurances that clarity will appear at some unspecified point in the future. Give us that guidance now.

We need assurances on water capacity

We are increasingly concerned about water infrastructure capacity in East Hampshire. South East Water has made it clear that water resources across parts of East Hampshire are not expected to keep pace with planned growth. This presents a significant challenge for us as the local planning authority and is a real concern for our residents.

How can we approve developments without confidence in future water supply? What of existing residents who worry that new development will jeopardise the reliability of their own water supply? These issues have been fully detailed on our [website](#).

We ask that Government departments, regulators and water companies work together to provide investment plans and delivery timelines to reassure us that housing and economic growth will not lead to water shortages.

Tougher powers for planning enforcement

Councils need more powers to tackle unauthorised development quickly and effectively. Cumbersome legal procedures leave councils ill-equipped to deal with breaches of planning control.

Councils have to wade through lengthy and resource-intensive processes which ultimately result in inadequate enforcement measures. Meanwhile, unauthorised development remains in place while retrospective applications are considered.

We urgently need a review of enforcement powers to ensure that local planning authorities can stop and redress breaches of planning control, while maintaining fairness for all parties involved.

East Hampshire has previously called for strengthened planning enforcement powers and greater support for councils undertaking this work. You now have an opportunity to do this.

More support for local government reorganisation

We are working hard to deliver the government's objectives for local government reorganisation, but there remain significant concerns regarding its implementation. In particular, we know that the chosen option differs from the model recommended by officials to the minister. East Hampshire will be split between two different new authorities, despite this contradicting the government's own criteria. And on top of this, Hampshire represents the most complex local government reorganisation in the country.

The prospect of separating and restructuring vital functions in these parishes within an extremely short timescale presents substantial operational and financial challenges for councils. It risks unintended impacts on vulnerable residents and will divert resources away from frontline services at a critical time.

Because of these huge issues, we are supporting Hampshire County Council's decision to pursue a judicial review of the government's chosen model for local government reorganisation.

Support the hospitality industry

We have already warned the government about the potentially crippling impact the three yearly rate revaluation will have on local businesses.

Village and community pubs play an important economic and social role, particularly in rural districts such as ours. Given the acute nature of the challenges faced by pubs and live music venues you must bring forward the 20% rate relief planned for 2026-27, in addition to the 15% already announced. A business rate reduction of 35% over the next three years will go some way to saving businesses from the brink.

We also fully support the current national campaign to reduce hospitality VAT from 20% to 10% and ask you to implement this change urgently to ensure the industry is taxed fairly and in line with Europe.

The purpose of this letter is not simply to highlight challenges, but to seek constructive solutions.

East Hampshire District Council remains committed to working positively with the Government to deliver sustainable growth, efficient public services and thriving communities.

For years, these issues have held back local authorities and prevented the government's own ambitions being realised.

You have committed to 'rewiring the state' with a genuinely collaborative relationship between local and central government - I urge you to make good on that promise and resolve the issues your predecessors have failed to grasp.

You are now in the position to change this slipshod story of botched policies and muddy thinking and make the changes that will make a real difference to residents, not just in East Hampshire, but up and down the country.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters with you and to contribute to any work aimed at resolving these issues more quickly and effectively.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'R. Millard', with a stylized, elongated 'M'.

Councillor Richard Millard
Leader of East Hampshire District Council