

Rt. Hon Steve Reed MP
Secretary of State, Ministry of Housing,
Communities and Local Government
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By email

**The Leader's Office
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Councillor Liz Leffman
Leader of the Council

27 November 2025

Dear Secretary of State,

Local Government Reorganisation – One Oxfordshire

Congratulations on your appointment. I am eager to work with you, your Ministerial team, and the department to deliver the bold reforms our country urgently needs.

Oxfordshire is a place of national and global significance; it has the power to change lives. Our county is a 'thinking hub' fuelling economic growth and job creation across the UK. Its talent, entrepreneurial spirit, research and pioneering DNA is creating opportunities that will transform the UK economy.

Oxfordshire now stands at a pivotal moment. As the western gateway to the UK's Silicon Valley, we are home to world-leading science and technology clusters, businesses and capabilities and, with that, the consistent and welcome attention of government. None more so than the re-alignment of the government's policy agenda around the Oxford-Cambridge Corridor and the Oxford Growth Commission with which Oxfordshire County Council has been a full and active partner. Our county is uniquely positioned to drive the government's ambitions for growth; what happens in Oxfordshire changes the world for the better, every day. But this potential will only be realised if we have robust, future-proofed local government. Without decisive action, we risk undermining our mutual ambitions.

Today, I present One Oxfordshire – our proposal for a single unified council for Oxfordshire. This is not just an administrative change; it is a transformational step demanded by residents, MPs, public sector partners, businesses and investors. They are clear – fragmented governance is holding us back. A single council will deliver stronger, simpler services, better connect our vibrant economy with our communities, and provide the strategic leadership Oxfordshire needs to compete on a global stage.

We are also ready to accelerate the creation of a Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA). Our proposal demonstrates that a single council is the only decisive platform for unlocking the full benefits of devolution. By uniting Oxfordshire's interests

under one financially resilient authority, we will speak with one voice at the MSA table – essential for securing devolved powers, funding and responsibilities at scale. This model will anchor regional initiatives, both within and outside of the Thames Valley, enable integrated planning for transport, housing, skills and economic growth, and provide a single front door for government and investors. Subject to cabinet approval next month, we will submit a devolution expression of interest by year end, in step with our reorganisation timeline.

The evidence is overwhelming. Oxfordshire's economy is an integrated whole, not a collection of isolated areas. Nationally and globally significant assets – Harwell, Milton Park, Culham, the Ellison Institute, Oxford University, Bicester Motion – are spread across the county. Only a single council can plan strategically for the entire area, ensuring we connect opportunity with need and avoid artificial divisions that stifle growth. Only a single council can optimise its collective resources to drive plan making and housing delivery for the whole county to benefit from. But we must go further.

The growth of Oxford is highly dependent on increasing the effective functioning of a set of interlinked areas and corridors. Our approach to reorganisation must therefore involve a wider area than the current boundaries of Oxford city, whilst also facilitating the interaction between a growing city and the growth areas and corridors around it. There is a very real risk that, if we split the county – on whatever boundaries – structures will be locked into inevitable conflict, whatever the ambitions for cooperation are, as we have seen historically.

It is recognised that Oxford and Oxfordshire (as part of not only a potential strategic authority, but a key driver of the Oxford-Cambridge Corridor) needs a delivery approach that is able to leverage, to greatest effect, the full benefits of consolidating local governance and resources. This delivery approach needs a clear spatial focus; an infrastructure strategy that maximises connectivity within and outside of our county, a wider and inclusive approach to housing (including its density in the city) and all land use types that recognise the reality of travel to work areas and social demands on where people want to live and raise a family.

To make the most of our global potential, we need to embrace a strategy that brings housing and employment closer to the city, while ensuring sustainable development across the county. That means investment in the infrastructure that connects our market towns and villages as well as the strategic release of development land in and around Oxford and our wider county. Releasing land selectively, linked to clear sustainability and design standards, and an infrastructure-first approach, can enable the homes and jobs we need without sacrificing our countryside. We will share an opportunity case with government in the new year on how we can maximise our inclusive growth and housing delivery ambitions across Oxfordshire without the delays and risks of disaggregation getting in the way of the progress we need to realise.

We are not waiting for change to occur. The County Council's identification and release of land for the Oxford United FC Stadium near Kidlington demonstrates a reasoned and

proportionate release of appropriate land for the benefit of current and future generations. We have taken big decisions where it is in the interests of our place and our people. We need the tools provided by One Oxfordshire to shape our places faster and more effectively.

Our proposal is the only one that delivers the scale, resilience and savings that Oxfordshire requires – £63 million annually, including £30 million from the outset. No other option comes close. We cannot allow a generation of adults and children to lose out from service stagnation or decline caused by the cost, risk and disruption of unnecessary disaggregation. The same applies to our Fire and Rescue Service. We urge the government to back a plan that builds on Oxfordshire's strong foundations, protects our financial health, and unleashes innovation through reorganisation and a future MSA. With ambition and decisive leadership, we can deliver the homes, prosperity and services our people need – at pace and at scale, leaving no one behind.

Two areas require your urgent attention. First, the Local Planning context. Oxfordshire's current patchwork of plans is failing. The collapse of the Joint Statutory Spatial Plan, agreed as a requirement of the previous Growth Deal with government, came about as neighbouring areas were unable to agree on housing numbers. The withdrawal of Oxford City's plan, and the request to South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council to withdraw their plans, were all based on failing the Duty to Cooperate, leaving the majority of the county and its population with increasingly out of date local plans, and subject to speculative development. Only a single Oxfordshire Council can deliver the fresh start and strategic plan-making we desperately need in concert with the proposed MSA. We seek your explicit support to accelerate an Oxfordshire Local Plan as part of this reorganisation.

Second, West Berkshire. While we recognise the financial, operational and service challenges facing this authority – predominantly because it is too small as a unitary – our focus is on the residents of Oxfordshire. We cannot risk and do not need to risk our county's stability by absorbing external financial shocks. Our proposal protects Oxfordshire, especially vulnerable districts like Cherwell, home to your government's proposed New Town of Heyford Park, from the impacts of national funding reforms. Berkshire, a county of 992,000 residents, will find its own sustainable solution or solutions to local government reform and we remain fully committed to forging a new, exciting and productive relationship with the county through the proposed Thames Valley MSA.

We are ready. Oxfordshire County Council is fully prepared for the next phases of local government reorganisation and devolution. We look forward to your department sharing a prompt decision with Oxfordshire following the conclusion of the statutory consultation so we can move forward with our safe, legal and confident transition at pace. Waiting risks hindering workforce stability and retention as well as stalling our own and our system's wider transformation opportunities. It also risks undermining investor confidence in our amazing county.

We have waited over half a century to reimagine the way in which we govern and are governed across Oxfordshire. With you, we are determined to lead transformation that will provide prosperity, equality and opportunity for all our communities for the next 50 years and beyond.

Yours sincerely,



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