



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

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17<sup>th</sup> April 2026

Dear Residents,

I am writing to you regarding the deeply disappointing decision by Berkeley Homes to withdraw its planning application and end its long-standing commitment to rebuild The Howard of Effingham School.

I know that many across the community will feel shocked, frustrated, and let down. For over a decade, the expectation of a new school building has shaped decisions across the community. Pupils have passed through the school believing that improved facilities were on the horizon. Families have made plans based on that expectation. The school itself has postponed essential maintenance and investment, acting in good faith on repeated assurances that a full rebuild, including the King George V playing field site, would be delivered.

Berkeley Homes have stated that this decision was not taken lightly. They have cited rising costs, changing economic conditions, and increased uncertainty as the reasons why they now consider the development, including the school rebuild, to be financially unviable. They have indicated that costs increased significantly and that wider global and economic pressures ultimately led their Board to conclude that the project could not proceed as originally intended.

However, while these explanations have been offered, they do not diminish the very real impact on this community. The school and its wider community acted in good faith, relying on consistent and repeated commitments over many years. It is therefore entirely reasonable for residents to feel that those commitments should have been honoured.

Looking ahead, Berkeley Homes have confirmed that they intend to pursue a revised planning application for the site under so-called "Grey Belt" policy. **Crucially, this proposal will not include a new secondary school.** Instead, it is expected to focus on housing delivery, including a significant proportion of affordable homes, alongside financial contributions through the planning system. This inevitably raises serious questions about fairness and accountability. Many residents will understandably ask how a development can proceed without delivering the key piece of community infrastructure that was central to the original proposals.

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The strength of feeling locally cannot be overstated. At a recent school assembly, a Year 8 student asked what would happen now after years of waiting, and whether anything could be done. That question reflects the uncertainty now facing so many pupils and families.

It is precisely why I want to be clear with you about the steps I am taking as your MP to provide answers, secure support for the school, and ensure the community is not left without a path forward. I have no formal power in shaping the planning process, but my immediate priority is to ensure that the school and community are supported through what happens next.

I have made clear to Berkeley Homes that:

- They must engage openly and directly with the community, including the Parish Council and school leadership.
- They should meet with students and staff to explain their decision transparently.
- They must explore all possible options to support the school, including interim financial assistance for urgent repairs.
- They should work with local authorities to ensure that any future development delivers meaningful benefits to the community, particularly for education provision.

I have also asked that they urgently consider whether funding can be provided now, ahead of any planning application or formal agreements, to address the immediate needs of the school. This is particularly important given that essential works have been delayed for years in anticipation of the rebuild.

I have already raised this issue directly in oral questions to the Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government with the Secretary of State for Local Government Steve Reed. I was disappointed by the Minister's response, which did not adequately address the concerns around developer accountability or the impact on communities when long-standing infrastructure commitments are withdrawn. I will now be following this up formally in writing to press for clearer answers and stronger action.

In parallel, I am writing to Bridget Phillipson, the Secretary of State for Education, to seek urgent support for the school, particularly given the immediate funding pressures and the constraints around accessing capital funding. I will continue to work closely with the school, local authorities, councillors and residents to ensure that your voices are heard and that the community's interests are protected at every stage.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to share your views or concerns.

Regards



**Zoe Franklin**  
**Member of Parliament for Guildford**