

**Protect
Care and Invest
to create a
better borough**



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Date: 25 March 2021

Our Ref: SD/nw

Your Ref:

Dear Mr Jenrick

I am writing in response to the government's recent Budget decisions of 3rd March 2021, which confirmed that Telford had been overlooked in its application for a £25m grant from the Towns Fund, and which categorised Telford as low priority for access to the new Levelling Up Fund.

As Leader of Telford & Wrekin Council and member of the Telford Towns Fund Board, I am deeply disappointed with both decisions, frustrated that our ambitions for growth in Telford will be thwarted and concerned that essential public and private investment will now be steered towards our neighbours.

With regard to our Towns Fund bid, there is an urgent need, not least as we have assembled £77m of private sector match funding to invest in Telford that requires public co-investment if it is to be unlocked.

Telford was recognised as a high priority town in the government's original Towns Fund selection process and partners assembled what we believe to be a strong bid. We are disheartened not to have been selected as yet for government backing and are working hard to rectify that situation. Our team is now working with BEIS officials to address the feedback on our bid.

We would like to take this opportunity to underline that Telford has a proven track record in partnership working and of successfully delivering high impact, value for money with public investment. For example, in the last 5 years, the Telford Land Deal alone has led to investment in excess of £189m – above and beyond all targets set by government with significant benefit to the treasury.

Our frustrations have turned to consternation with the further announcement that Telford has been categorised in the lowest priority group for the Levelling Up Fund.

We are profoundly concerned about the immediate impact on our growth plans and the long-term implications of the borough being identified as a low priority by the government.



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One quarter of Telford's 108 neighbourhoods are in the 20% most deprived nationally and, of those, 16% are within the 10% most deprived. This includes areas like Oakengates and

Wellington, both of which feature prominently in our Towns Fund bid and would be strong candidates for further Levelling Up Fund investment.

Our bafflement is further underscored when we look at our surrounding neighbours. Our Marches LEP partners (Herefordshire and Shropshire) are both Category 2, despite strong recognition by the LEP that Telford is home to the areas of greatest need and challenge. Indeed, many of the higher paid jobs in the Telford economy are taken up by people who commute in from our more prosperous rural neighbours. This masks the underlying challenge we face in creating good work for local residents and retaining local spending in our economy.

Our neighbours in the Black Country (Wolverhampton, Walsall, Dudley and Sandwell) have all been designated Category 1 for the Levelling Up Fund, despite having comparable (and in the case of Dudley, lower) overall levels of deprivation than Telford. To compound our sense of injustice, neighbouring South Staffordshire is in Category 2 despite having no neighbourhoods (LSOAs) ranked in the 20% most deprived in England. Our only neighbouring district also in Category 3 is Stafford, which has the lowest levels of overall deprivation. To contrast, Stafford's median deprivation (by decile) across its neighbourhoods is 8 while Telford is 4 (where 1 is the most deprived and 10 the least).

The council and our partners in the business community are extremely concerned about the implications of Telford not being able to progress its immediate plans and having to wait for an opportunity to bring forward its Levelling Up proposals. In the meantime, our neighbours will have priority access to resources. This risks drawing vital private sector investment away from our area despite the evident need and opportunity we represent.

We urge you to review this situation immediately and look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Shaun Davies
Leader, Telford & Wrekin Council

