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Our Ref: BH/JG/JL-210

16 May 2023

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State
Dept of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

Gareth Davies
Comptroller and Auditor General
National Audit Office

By email: Ministerial.Correspondence@levellingup.gov.uk

Dear Secretary of State

I'm writing in my capacity as the Chairman of the South Tees Development Corporation (STDC).

You will be aware that a number of weeks ago I asked Government to explore the possibility of an independent review by the National Audit Office to carrying out a further detailed review of STDC, Teesworks and Government funding of these projects. In your response to this request, you stated that such a review would not be possible as it was outside the NAO's remit.

I made the request as Teesworks is the single biggest redevelopment opportunity in the UK. The scale of the work undertaken to regenerate the site has been relatively successful to date. It has gone from having liabilities, for which the taxpayer was responsible, of £482million to already attracting £2billion of private investment and more than 2,725 jobs. However, it is increasingly becoming a political football. Recent unfounded allegations have been made, which are having a significant and worrying impact on investor confidence which directly impacts jobs and investment in an area relying on this flagship project to bring sustainable long term development.

You may now have read the letter from Lisa Nandy MP, the Shadow Secretary for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, calling for a comprehensive, independent investigation into Teesworks.

I would like to wholeheartedly add my support for such a review. A review of the evidence would go some way to restore confidence in the professionalism, integrity and objectives of the Government, STDC, the TVCA and Teesworks. It is unfair that the officers of these transformational organisations should have their work undermined by these continued unfounded, incorrect and salacious attacks.

While we continue to do everything that is appropriate and expected of a public body, in line with our reporting, scrutiny and transparency obligations, as we have since the start of this project, such grossly unfounded and inaccurate statements are now clearly impacting investor confidence at this site – and this is negatively affecting Teesside and UK plc. So we would also ask that such a review is done quickly to avoid investment and jobs being lost from Teesside and the UK.

Without a swift, decisive conclusion to this situation, Teesside will miss out on thousands of jobs and billions of pounds of foreign direct investment. These are the jobs of the future, sustaining future generations, which are sorely needed by people of an area desperately in need of investment after decades of neglect by Governments of both colours.

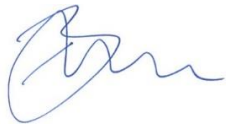
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To conclude and resolve this matter once and for all, I would welcome the relevant body to review this matter, with the full compliance and cooperation of the National Audit Office. The STDC, Teesworks and TVCA have nothing to hide.

I hope you will recognise that while you have previously stated that such a review is outside of your remit, given the cross-party request and importance of the site to Teesside and the UK as a whole, an exception will be made.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ben', written in a cursive style.

Ben Houchen
Tees Valley Mayor