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for Transport

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Thank you for your email of 7 February 2019 in which you asked me to confirm the position regarding the preferred corridor for the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway and its relationship with Otmoor.

I am aware of the attempts to misrepresent the Government's position on this subject and the comments I made in the House on 11 January, and I have expressed my disappointment about such scaremongering online. The situation is very straightforward and I am happy to set it out again.

The Government, recognising the public concern for the protection of Otmoor Nature Reserve, took the opportunity when announcing the preferred corridor for the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway to cease development of route options in this area. The Department deliberately narrowed the preferred corridor to exclude Otmoor from the study area.

At the debate, I made the point that route options are under development and no decisions on the road's design had yet been taken. I also explained that through the continuing public engagement and consultation on the project, participants could put forward proposals for alternative routes, and these could include areas outside of the preferred corridor. It is no more than a matter of good practice for public consultation that ministers should be open to considering what people say. Nonetheless, I reiterated that the Government would not itself develop designs for routes through Otmoor.

In short, Otmoor will not be considered further in the route design process and this position would only be revisited if local people demanded it, which seems unlikely.

As ever,

JESSE NORMAN