An open letter to:

Rt Hon. Eric Pickles MP (Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government)

Rt Hon. Sajid Javid MP (Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport)

On house building by 'Old Oswestry'

"one of the greatest archaeological monuments of the nation" – English Heritage

"the outstanding work of Early Iron Age type" – Professor Sir Cyril Fox (1934)

Dear Sirs,

We write to express on-going concerns within the heritage community over Shropshire County Council's proposal for housing development OSW004, a site for 117 houses, less than 300 m from the scheduled ancient monument, Old Oswestry Hillfort.

We understand that an 8,000 signature petition exists in opposition to the development, as held by the local Hands off Old Oswestry Hillfort campaign, and that concerns have been raised by the Society of Antiquaries of London, The Prehistoric Society, RESCUE (British Archaeological Trust), Campaign to Protect Rural England, and Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

As Senior Academics in British Archaeology, we would like to give our perspective.

In our view: 1) Old Oswestry hillfort is one of the greatest Iron Age hill forts in Britain; 2) OSW004 would claim an important area of the hillfort's hinterland; 3) this would cause irreparable harm to the hillfort's setting; 4) this is contrary to planning legislation established to protect the historic environment; and 5) this would set an unacceptable precedent.

Old Oswestry is a Scheduled Ancient Monument statutorily protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979). Development within the hinterland of this extraordinarily significant hillfort runs counter to the National Planning Policy Framework (2012), English Heritage's *The Setting of Heritage Assets* (2011) and *Good Practice Advice on Setting and Decision-taking* (2014) and ultimately, the Valletta Convention (1992).

The NPPF (paragraphs 126-141) is explicit in its steer that the setting of heritage assets should be afforded protection proportionate to their significance. Yet, despite Old Oswestry's demonstrable importance, and despite concerns previously raised by those within the heritage sector, alongside very significant local opposition, OSW004 somehow remains in Shropshire's Site Allocations and Management of Development plan.

If the bar for acceptable development under the NPPF does not protect the setting of even our most significant heritage sites, then we set a potentially calamitous precedent for the greater part of the nation's historic environment.

Yours Sincerely,

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Emeritus Disney Professor of Archaeology, University of Cambridge

Professor Sir Barrington Windsor Cunliffe CBE, FBA, FSA
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Professor Niall Sharples FSA
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Professor of Archaeology, University of Bradford

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Dr Alison Sheridan FSA, ACIfA
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