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3 November 2020

Dear Greg,

Thank you for your letter dated 16 October in response to my letter on the acquisition of the Benchmark Vaccines Limited Site in Braintree.

As noted in my last letter, the acquisition and repurposing of this manufacturing site was identified as a unique commercial opportunity to rapidly increase the UK's vaccines manufacturing capacity. As part of the site selection process, the Government consulted a number of expert groups, including the BioIndustry Association (BIA), Innovate UK, the Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult and the Office for Life Sciences.

The BIA manufacturing taskforce (made up of biotech industry experts) conducted a comprehensive, UK-wide mapping exercise. This identified the domestic capability available in the following 12 months. Analysis from the BIA's mapping was presented to the Vaccine Taskforce's Expert Advisory Board, which includes representatives from academia, industry and Government. The Board advised the Vaccine Taskforce to explore the different options presented by the BIA, including acquiring the Braintree site.

The Vaccine Taskforce commissioned external consultants to both conduct independent mapping and review the findings from the BIA. These exercises and the views of stakeholders mentioned above led the Taskforce to decide to progress with the acquisition of the Braintree site.

This acquisition was deemed a unique opportunity and no other sites have been acquired by the Government. However, we have made several other investments to utilise the UK's existing capacity for Good Manufacturing Practice manufacture. This has included supporting the upgrade of the Valneva site in Livingston for whole inactivated virus manufacture and securing Fujifilm Diosynth's site in Teeside to manufacture Novavax's adjuvanted protein vaccine. UKRI's investment in the Centre for Process Innovation will also enhance its capability to manufacture RNA vaccines. This has taken place alongside investments to accelerate the delivery of the Vaccines Manufacturing Innovation Centre and Rapid Deployment Facility.

Throughout this process and our wider response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the UK has been fortunate to be able to draw on the significant strengths and expertise of our life sciences sector, and we will of course continue to do so going forward.

The Government wants to listen to all parties with an interest in the development and manufacture of a Covid-19 vaccine. The Taskforce will continue to engage with a wide range of groups to ensure the UK has the best possible chance to deliver a successful Covid-19 vaccine as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of fluid, overlapping loops and curves, characteristic of a cursive or semi-cursive style.

THE RT HON ALOK SHARMA MP

Secretary of State for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy