

CABINET – 18 DECEMBER 2012

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DRAFT LOCAL PLAN Consultation Response

Report of Deputy Director (Strategy and Infrastructure Planning) Environment and Economy

Introduction

1. It is recommended that Oxfordshire County Council informs West Oxfordshire District Council that in relation to the draft West Oxfordshire Local Plan:
 - a) It supports the overall strategy of focusing growth on the main three towns and other service centres;
 - b) In principle, it supports the four proposed Strategic Development Areas at Witney and Carterton provided that they are supported by the timely delivery of supporting infrastructure and services;
 - c) It encourages the District Council to give greater clarity as to how the barriers to employment land being developed might be addressed through the Local Plan;
 - d) It considers that the Local Plan should provide more detail on the distribution of housing within the sub-areas to guide the preparation of neighbourhood plans and the provision of infrastructure and services;
 - e) It will continue to work in partnership with the District Council to ensure that the investment requirements in support of planned growth are identified in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

Purpose of Report

2. To agree the County Council's response to the West Oxfordshire Draft Local Plan for consultation.
3. A further round of consultation will take place on the draft plan in May 2013 ahead of its submission to the Government, at which point the County Council will have a further opportunity to comment. A public examination of the draft Local Plan is then expected later in 2013, with the Plan to be adopted by March 2014.

Context

4. The Local Plan sets the framework for development across West Oxfordshire for the period to 2029. Growth is focused primarily at Witney and Carterton and to a lesser extent at Chipping Norton, with more modest growth at Eynsham, Woodstock, Burford, Charlbury and the larger villages.

5. Increasing emphasis is given to the importance of the planning regime facilitating and supporting sustainable economic growth in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF); facilitating economic growth is also a key County Council's strategic objective.
6. The County Council has worked closely with West Oxfordshire District Council in the preparation of this draft Local Plan for consultation. It will continue to work with the District Council as the policies in it are refined and the Infrastructure Delivery Plan developed further.

Overview of the Draft Local Plan

7. The Plan period runs from 2011 to 2029. The key policies and proposals set out in the draft Local Plan are to:
 - Meet the needs of communities without significant change to the character of the district
 - Focus primarily on housing-led growth; 5,500 homes to be built across the District in the period to 2029;
 - Seek to deliver at least 35% affordable housing at Carterton, 40% at Witney and 50% elsewhere in the district;
 - Provide for 60ha of land for business with the potential for up to 10,000 jobs; of this only 10ha is land not previously identified for employment.
 - Require development to deliver or contribute to supporting infrastructure, where necessary and viable. The draft plan is accompanied by a draft Infrastructure Delivery Plan
 - Support town centres as the focus for shopping, leisure, community facilities and services
8. In terms of the five sub-areas the key points to note are:

Witney sub-area:

- 1,900 new homes, including Strategic Development Areas (SDA) of 1,000 dwellings at West Witney and 300 dwellings at East Witney.
- 10ha of new employment land as part of the West Witney SDA with further employment opportunities realised through intensification of existing sites and development of previously identified employment land (10ha)
- Key transport schemes identified as being required to deliver the SDAs and support wider growth include:
 - A40 Downs Road junction – linked to the West Witney SDA
 - Shores Green slip roads – linked to the East Witney SDA
 - Improvements to the Ducklington Lane/Station Lane junction
- Route of the West End Link (WEL2) to be safeguarded
- Phased expansion of the town centre, potentially as part of the Woolgate shopping Centre and at Welch way

Carterton sub-area:

- 1,850 new homes, including a SDA of 700 homes at East Carterton and one of 400 homes at the REEMA (military houses) site in central Carterton (linked to MOD plans to redevelop substandard military homes for RAF service families).
- Development of previously identified employment land (5ha) at West Oxfordshire Business Park and Ventura Park
- Key transport identified as being required include:
 - Improved connections between the town and the primary road network: potential to upgrade to 'A' road classification
 - Construction of the Shilton Road Link
 - Land for a new link between B4477 Brize Norton Road and the Witney Road to be safeguarded
- Redevelopment of the south west quadrant of the town centre for new retail uses

Chipping Norton sub-area:

- 600 new homes, with 375 sites to be identified through the Chipping Norton Neighbourhood Plan
- Identification of 5ha of employment land east of the town
- Continued commitment to partnership working in order to identify a solution that reduces the impact of through traffic, in particular the impact of HGVs on the town centre.

Eynsham & Woodstock sub-area:

- 450 new homes mainly in Eynsham, Woodstock, Long Hanborough; with sites to be identified through Neighbourhood Plans
- Continued concern at peak hour congestion on A40 between Eynsham and Oxford and on the A44 corridor: acknowledgment of the County Council identifying improvements to the highway network to the north of Oxford as helping address this issue, together with the possibility of a Park and Ride at Eynsham
- Continued protection for the Green Belt and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Commitment to work with the County Council to identify opportunities for tourism and leisure development in the Lower Windrush valley

Burford and Charlbury sub-area

- 350 new homes concentrated in Burford, Charlbury and the larger villages; with sites to be identified through Neighbourhood Plans
- Continued protection for the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and support for the protection/enhancement of the Upper Windrush Valley and Wychwood Forest areas

General Comments

9. The County Council supports the overall strategy of focusing growth on Witney and Carterton and to a lesser extent, Chipping Norton; these are the district's main employment and service centres and so should form the focus for future growth. Carterton has an important role as a local service centre for both residents and military families at RAF Brize Norton.
10. The draft Plan's aspiration is to secure a better balance between housing and employment local jobs, provide an enhanced range of employment opportunities locally and remove barriers to future investment. It argues that this will require investment in transport and digital infrastructure, as well as investment in the labour force and the availability of business premises. The County Council will work with West Oxfordshire to ensure that the Infrastructure Delivery Plan supports this aspiration.
11. Whilst the draft Plan identifies a need for 60 ha of employment land, of this only 10ha is land not previously identified for employment. Emphasis should be given to identifying solutions that address the barriers to existing allocations of employment land coming forward for development. The County Council will work with West Oxfordshire to ensure that the investment in infrastructure and/or services required to support economic growth is identified within the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.
12. The County Council led procurement of a provider to roll out Better Broadband across Oxfordshire will make a significant contribution towards supporting the rural economy. This will support the draft Plan's ambition to support homeworking, farm and countryside estate diversification, tourism and the land-based sector. It will be important that small rural businesses wishing to expand are able to access grow-on premises in accessible locations.
13. The County Council is concerned at the reliance on Neighbourhood Plans as the means of determining the allocation of development in the Chipping Norton, Eynsham-Woodstock and the Burford-Charlbury sub-areas. This approach will make it more difficult to predict the likely quantum and timing of new housing provision. By extension this will make it difficult to identify the impact of growth on County Council provided infrastructure and services. This may result in the need for financial contributions not being identified and then secured through the planning system. The Local Plan should provide a specific figure for the main towns and villages in each sub-area.
14. A more detailed housing trajectory is required along with clarification of the proposed housing mix. This is necessary in order to provide clarity as to the likely implications of growth for County Council provided infrastructure and services. This is required in order to identify the most appropriate funding mechanism for delivery. That in turn will be a key input into the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.
15. The County Council will work with West Oxfordshire, Oxford City and Cherwell councils and other partners to assess the implications of planned growth on

the transport system to the north of Oxford so that these can be reflected in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

16. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan should form the basis for identifying the financial contribution to be sought through the planning system. This will need to be secured either through a continuation of the S106 regime or through the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy.
17. The County Council would like to work with the District Council to develop a vision and framework for a comprehensive approach to the future of the Lower Windrush Valley. The Local Plan should set out a framework within which the impact and opportunities for the after-use of mineral workings are considered. It should also set out a framework within for involving the local community with a range of partners to identify and then realise the economic and environmental opportunities within the Lower Windrush Valley. Such an approach may serve to act as a model for community engagement in rural areas.

Witney Sub-Area

18. The County Council supports the proposed SDA at West Witney in principle. The Local Plan should encourage the development of the proposed allocation of employment land in parallel with new housing development.
19. The requirement (core policy 27) that the mixed use development south of Range Road is phased in accordance with the timing of supporting infrastructure and facilities is supported. The requirement that the proposed A40 Downs Road junctions is delivered by the SDA as early as possible should be changed to require delivery prior to the completion of any housing on the site. In view of the current and projected capacities in the local primary schools the proposed SDA will give rise to the need for an additional primary school on-site. The County Council is seeking the early delivery of this school by the SDA.
20. The County Council has identified that delivery of the proposed SDA of 300 dwellings at East Witney could only be supported once improvements to the A40 Shores Green junction have been delivered; the inclusion of this in the plan is welcomed. The need for an improvement at this junction arises both from the proposed SDA and the impact of previous housing development on the eastern side of Witney development. As a consequence the County Council expects the improvement at Shores Green to be delivered at nil cost to the public purse.
21. Public statements from the land owner of the previous development have indicated an acceptance of the need to make a substantial contribution towards the cost of delivering an improvement to the A40 Shores Green junction: such a contribution would be in lieu of proposals previously promoted to offset the impact of their development.

22. Further investment in transport infrastructure is needed to relieve congestion problems in the town and to support the planned level of growth. The County Council supports the need for an improvement to the Ducklington Lane/Station Lane junction and will work with West Oxfordshire to ensure its early delivery. The County Council will also assess what improvements could be made to Bridge Street and the Staple Hall junction (the double mini roundabout) to relieve congestion and improve air quality.
23. The County Council supports the safeguarding of the route for the proposed West End Link (WEL2). However such a link is not considered to be essential to deliver the SDAs identified in the draft Local Plan.
24. The level of growth proposed for the Witney sub-area would not trigger a need for a third secondary facility for the town. However until the overall scale of growth is confirmed the County Council will continue to look for a site for a secondary school to be reserved within the proposed SDA at West Witney.
25. The County Council supports the focus within the draft Local Plan on maintaining and enhancing the role of the town centre. To that end it will work with West Oxfordshire to explore opportunities to use the County Council's property estate within the town to help realise the draft Local Plan's ambition.

Carterton Sub-Area

26. The County Council supports the draft Local Plan's focus on ensuring it meets the needs of both the local community and operations at RAF Brize Norton. Through the military covenant the local authorities will continue to work closely with the military to ensure that the additional demands on infrastructure and services are identified and addressed.
27. The draft Local Plan should encourage the development of employment land alongside delivery of new housing as a means of encouraging growth that is sustainable in the longer term. The County Council encourages further consideration to be given as to the measures required to realise the potential for existing employment land to be used by aviation-related businesses.
28. The significance of RAF Brize Norton increases the importance of ensuring that road access is at an appropriate standard for the traffic arising from by military activity. The draft Local Plan identifies the potential benefit to be derived from a new link between the B4477 Brize Norton Road and the Witney Road. However, the County Council will assess this in the context of the options for improving access to the strategic road network. In the meantime it is beneficial for the Local Plan to safeguard land for this potential new link.
29. The County Council supports the need for the Shilton Road Link (from Elmhurst Way to Shilton Road) in order to serve planned housing growth but expects this to be funded and delivered by the housing development.

30. The need to make provision for a new primary school as part of the Strategic Development Area at East Carterton is supported. In considering the requirements for a new school arising from growth, consideration would be given to the current school provision and most appropriate distribution for future. Any consideration of future school capacity in Carterton must take into account the implication of fluctuations in demand arising from military personnel.
31. Whilst the existing secondary school is expected to have sufficient capacity to accommodate the proposed levels of growth, its catchment area will need to be redefined to include any urban extensions to the town including the SDA.

Chipping Norton

32. Chipping Norton is to be the focus of growth in the northern part of the district. However, the reliance on the Chipping Norton Neighbourhood Plan to set out in detail the allocation of that growth makes its implication for County Council provided infrastructure and services difficult to assess.
33. There is potential for the town's two existing faith primary schools to accommodate some growth in pupil numbers. Provided the allocation of new housing is not heavily biased towards larger family-sized housing and is identified for delivery over an extended period of time, it is probable that the increase in pupil numbers can be managed within existing schools. However, given the lack of clarity on this issue at present the County Council advises that the Local Plan should make provision for safeguarding land for a new primary school in the town.
34. The County Council continues to support the need to work with West Oxfordshire and other partners in identifying a solution that addresses the impact of traffic on the town centre. The County Council is starting discussions with Gloucestershire County Council on this issue.

Financial and Staff Implications

35. The County Council will provide support using current staff therefore there are no staffing implications contained within this report. Financial implications on infrastructure and services for the County Council will be discussed as part of the on-going working relationship with West Oxfordshire District Council. At this stage this is a draft of the local plan, the financial implications of proposed growth levels will become clearer as the detail in the plan becomes firmed up and will be reported when there is a further consultation on the draft local plan immediately prior to its submission to Government in Spring 2013.

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to agree the County Council's response to the West Oxfordshire Draft Local Plan for consultation, as specifically outlined in paragraph 1 and described throughout this report.**

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Background papers:

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