

# Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

## Scrutiny Committee

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2017 AT 6.30 PM

THE AUDITORIUM, CORNERSTONE ARTS CENTRE, 25 STATION ROAD,  
DIDCOT, OX11 7NE

### Present:

Richard Pullen (Chairman)

Elaine Hornsby, Toby Newman (as substitute for Ian White), David Turner, John Walsh, Steve Connel, Anna Badcock and Ian Snowdon (as substitute for Anthony Dearlove)

### Apologies:

Ian White and Anthony Dearlove tendered apologies.

### Officers:

Adrian Duffield, James Gagg, Hannah Guest, Holly Jones and Ron Schrieber

### Also present:

Councillors Felix Bloomfield, John Cotton, Elizabeth Gillespie, Sue Lawson and Jane Murphy

## 9 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 July 2017 were agreed as an accurate record and were signed by the Chairman.

## 10 Declarations of interest

None.

## 11 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

None.



Listening Learning Leading

## **12 Public participation**

The list showing the members of the public who had registered to speak was tabled at the meeting.

## **13 Local Plan**

The committee considered the report of the head of planning services on the key proposed changes to the emerging Local Plan for South Oxfordshire. The report and addendum provided details of petitions received in respect of proposed developments at Chalgrove Airfield and Culham.

Councillor John Cotton, Leader and Cabinet Member for the local plan, introduced this item. Also present to answer questions were Adrian Duffield, head of planning services, Holly Jones, planning policy manager, James Gagg, transport planner and Hannah Guest, planning policy team leader.

Councillor Cotton reported on the extensive consultation undertaken on the Second Preferred Options version of the Local Plan which had resulted in approximately 7,666 responses. He also stated that the proposed developments of Chalgrove Airfield and Culham would provide approximately 6,500 new homes. Removal of either site from the Local Plan, as requested by the petitioners would require alternative sites to be identified causing further delay.

The report identified a number of key issues upon which most of the consultation responses were focussed. Accordingly, the committee heard registered speakers as part of its consideration of each key issue.

### **Duty to co-operate**

Michael Tyce, representing the Campaign for the Preservation of Rural England addressed the committee. His points included:

- The figure of 3,750 homes to meet Oxford City's unmet housing needs was unsound and unsupported by evidence and so should be removed from the Local Plan;
- There was a requirement for the council to demonstrate that it had worked with neighbouring authorities on cross boundary issues, including unmet housing need. This would be one of the first tests that the Inspector will consider in their examination of the Local Plan; and
- High density housing enables more affordable homes to be built. Rather than having a minimum density of 30 homes per hectare, the Local Plan should include a target density of 60 homes per hectare.

Geoffrey Botting and Robin Pierce representing Woodcote Neighbourhood Plan Group/Parish Council addressed the committee. Their points included:

- Whilst the total allocation of housing for larger villages had increased by 12% from the original figures, Woodcote's allocation had increased by 90%;
- Woodcote had been treated unfairly compared with other large villages such as Goring; and
- The Neighbourhood Plan should determine the level of housing development.

In response to these comments the Leader and officers stated that:

- The figure for Oxford City's unmet housing needs was an assumption based on the best evidence currently available. This number could change in the future.
- 30 houses per hectare was the minimum density so higher density developments were possible. However an amendment to this wording could be considered.
- The number of houses required in larger villages was for guidance. It would be for the Neighbourhood Plan to support a higher or lower number based on an assessment of capacity.

Members of the committee expressed support for higher density housing developments, where appropriate.

### **Proposed strategic allocations**

#### **a) Chalgrove Airfield**

Ian Goldsmith, representing Cuxham with Easington Parish Meeting, addressed the committee. His points included:

- There was massive local opposition to this proposed development;
- The road through Cuxham was narrow and the increase in traffic generated to and from the development would constitute a danger to pedestrians, cyclists and to the environment; and
- The site should be removed from the Local Plan.

Jamie Lewis, representing the Haseley Brook Action Group, addressed the committee. His points included:

- The Chalgrove Airfield site was not a sustainable or deliverable location;
- The development was not necessary as the housing provision set out in the Local Plan was approximately 3,000 dwellings greater than the required number;
- There were a significant number of objections to this proposal; and
- There were suitable alternative sites closer to Oxford which could meet the city's unmet housing needs.

Christian Lewis, representing the owners of properties directly north-west of the airfield, addressed the committee. His points included:

- The location was not sustainable;
- There were physical and deliverable constraints on the site;
- The development and supporting infrastructure would be hugely expensive and there was no information as to how much funding the Homes and Community Agency (HCA) would provide; and
- There was no confirmation that the site's tenant had agreed to the proposed use of the land.

Paul Boone, representing Chalgrove SHIELD, the organisers of the petition, addressed the committee. His points included:

- The HCA agreed that the process was flawed;
- The proposal had been rejected overwhelmingly by the local community;
- Oxford City Council and Cherwell and West Oxfordshire District Councils do not support the proposal;
- The site cannot be developed without the support of the tenant;

- Building homes next to a runway would create a risk to residents; and
- The site should be withdrawn from the Local Plan.

Jacky Nabb, representing Chalgrove Parish Council and the Neighbourhood Plan Group addressed the committee. Her points included:

- The proposed development was unsustainable and undeliverable;
- The infrastructure required to support this development was massive;
- The local school was already at capacity; and
- The development would generate a significant increase in traffic on narrow, rural roads.

In response to these comments the Leader and officers stated that:

- The allocation of sites was based on planning policy rather than the number of residents for or against specific proposals;
- More information on funding was awaited from the HCA but it had expressed a strong commitment to funding offsite infrastructure;
- Commercial negotiations were ongoing between the HCA and Martin Baker;
- Details of the supporting infrastructure including traffic management measures were not included in the Local Plan. They would be considered as part of any planning application and proposed S106 agreement;
- Withdrawing this site from the Local Plan would only make sense if it were to be replaced with an alternative site.

The committee considered the proposed Chalgrove Airfield development. Following further discussion, a motion to recommend to Cabinet the withdrawal of Chalgrove Airfield from the Local Plan was moved and seconded. Upon being put to the vote, the motion was lost.

## **b) Culham**

Caroline Baird and Toby Pejkoivic, representing the petitioners, addressed the committee. Their points included:

- The proposal represented the largest single housing site in Oxfordshire and would have a massive environmental impact;
- The Government's 2017 White Paper reinforced the protection afforded to the Green Belt and the Council had failed to demonstrate the exceptional circumstances to justify the removal of this land from the Green Belt;
- The site was surrounded by flood plain; and
- The Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) lists many other sites which should have been considered.

Lucy Dalby, representing Culham Parish Council, addressed the committee. Her points included:

- Consultation on this proposal was inadequate with insufficient notice provided for local residents;
- There was insufficient evidence of exceptional circumstances to justify the use of Green Belt land; and
- Brownfield sites were available and housing should have been provided there rather than in the Green Belt.

Councillor Sue Lawson addressed the committee. Her points included:

- This and other proposals in the Local Plan were putting the Green Belt at risk and failing to protect rural communities;

- The proposal constituted ribbon development;
- Large strategic sites such as this did not develop communities; and
- The development would fund a third river crossing whereas the bridge and associated transport infrastructure should be in place before houses were built.

In response to these comments the Leader and officers stated that:

- Alternative sites had been considered and rejected. This was detailed in the sustainability appraisal;
- It was accepted that the consultation at Culham could have been better. However, overall there had been extensive consultation on the Local Plan and the Council was committed to effective consultation.
- Many of the sites listed in the HELAA had now been allocated and were no longer available.
- Through the plan making process, the boundaries of the Green Belt could be reviewed where exceptional circumstances existed. These were set out in the Local Plan and included the contribution towards housing need, including affordable housing, the location within the Science Vale and relationship with adjacent employment uses and the railway station. It also provided the opportunity to support the delivery of significant strategic infrastructure

#### **Oxford Brookes University, Wheatley**

Roy Gordon, representing Wheatley Neighbourhood Development Planning (NDP) Group, addressed the committee. His points included:

- There was an urgent need to provide housing to meet the unmet need;
- In order to provide additional housing, the Wheatley Neighbourhood Planning Group was proposing the removal of land from the Green Belt in order to enable new development to take place;
- However, planning officers had decided that the land could not be released from the Green Belt. He requested that this decision be reconsidered.

In response to these comments the Leader and officers stated that they were willing to look again at this matter. Officers had met with the NDP group and requested that the evidence to support the exceptional circumstances and the allocations be provided to make the change to the Green Belt boundary. Committee members agreed that the release of an area of Green Belt at Wheatley should be investigated further.

The committee considered other aspects of the Local Plan.

In response to members' questions, the Leader and officers stated that:

- The 40% affordable housing requirement, as set out in the Local Plan, was necessary given the need for affordable housing in South Oxfordshire. If a developer was unable to meet this figure then it needed to produce a viability statement setting out the reasons why.
- The 2% target for self-build housing could be reconsidered with a view to increasing it.
- There was a considerable amount of traffic modelling being carried out with a view to providing sustainable transport links and improvements in public transport provision.

**RESOLVED:**

a) to make the following comments to Cabinet on the Publication version of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan and supporting documentation:

- (i) consideration should be given to amending the wording on housing density in order to encourage high quality, high density development which minimises land take.
- (ii) the release of an area of green belt at Wheatley as detailed in the Second Preferred Options should be further investigated in order to support the aspirations of the Wheatley Neighbourhood Planning Group.
- (iii) consideration should be given to increasing the 2% target for self build housing in order to promote this as a route to home ownership.
- (iv) further work should be carried out to develop a high quality cycle network and improvements in public transport provision across South Oxfordshire

(b) to note the petitions received in respect of the proposed developments at Chalgrove Airfield and Culham and to **RECOMMEND** to Cabinet that both these strategic allocations remain in the Local Plan.

**14 Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale scrutiny meetings**

The work schedule was noted.

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm

Chairman

Date