



SANDFORD ON THAMES PARISH COUNCIL

11th December 2018

To: Adrian Duffield,
Head of SODC Planning Service
By email: adrian.duffield@southandvale.gov.uk

Dear Mr Duffield,

Re the Draft Emerging Local Plan 2033

I am writing on behalf of Sandford-on-Thames Parish Council to object in the strongest possible terms to the inclusion of the Grenoble Road site in the updated draft SODC Emerging Local Plan published for consideration by the Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and Full Council on December 13, 18 and 20 respectively. The proposal is in complete contradiction of national Green Belt policy by mandating urban sprawl, will have a devastating effect on character and rural nature of the village and will completely overwhelm the already severely strained local infrastructure. We are concerned that this site has been added to the Emerging Local Plan without public consultation. I should be grateful if you could ensure that this letter is read at the above meetings and that it is recorded in the minutes.

This proposal clearly contravenes both the NPPF Green Belt policies and SODC's own Green Belt policies as set out in the Emerging Plan

NPPF July 2018

The NPPF states that *"the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open"* and that *"the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence"*. It goes on to set out in para 134 the five purposes of the Green Belt as:

- a) *to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
- b) *to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
- c) *to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
- d) *to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
- e) *to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.*

It is self-evident that a major housing development at the Grenoble Road site is completely at odds with points a, c and d, in that it will of itself constitute urban sprawl and will encroach upon the countryside. A development of this size in the parish of Sandford-on-Thames will completely overwhelm the existing settlement of 548 dwellings (2011 Census), having a major impact on village life by destroying its rural nature, having a detrimental environmental impact in terms of wildlife and added pollution. It will also have a detrimental effect on the setting and special character of Oxford itself, by impacting on the rural nature of the area, an impact that the Green Belt is designed to avoid.

SODC Emerging Plan

I have extracted below some vision and policy statements from the Emerging Plan that are particularly relevant, and made some observations on them.

- **Vision:** *Through careful management of the Oxford Green Belt we will have made provision towards Oxford city's unmet housing needs whilst protecting the important setting of Oxford and also making appropriate provision for housing, business growth and urban and rural regeneration.*

This statement is at best misleading as 'careful management' should not mean wholesale removal of land from the Green Belt.

- **STRAT1(vi):** *Meeting unmet housing needs of Oxford City on strategic allocations adjacent to the boundary of Oxford near to where that need arises.*

Whilst this appears at first glance to be a logical argument, national Green Belt policy, as noted above, is specifically designed to prevent urban sprawl at the edge of towns. The need is not arising in this specific area and local infrastructure is already at breaking point (more on this below).

- **STRAT1(viii):** *Supporting smaller and other villages by allowing for limited amounts of housing and employment to help secure the provision and retention of services.*

Clearly a development of 3000 houses plus extension of the Science Park goes way beyond limited amounts of housing and employment.

- **STRAT1(ix):** *Protecting and enhancing the countryside and particularly those areas within the two AONBs and Oxford Green Belt by ensuring that outside towns and villages any change relates to very specific needs such as those of the agricultural industry or enhancement of the environment.*

The plan fails to set out which specific needs for change are being addressed by the proposed Grenoble Road allocation.

- **STRAT11:** *To ensure the Green Belt continues to serve its key functions, it will be protected from harmful development. Within its boundaries, development will be restricted to those limited types of development which are deemed appropriate by the NPPF, unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.*

Removing significant portions of land from the Green Belt fails to meet this policy.

Infrastructure

Apart from the Green Belt and character of the village considerations, Sandford-on-Thames residents are very concerned about the impact on the local infrastructure and the quality of the environment, with particular reference to air pollution. Although on the boundary of Oxford city, where one might assume there is adequate infrastructure, this is not the case. The local road network, including the A4074, is frequently gridlocked, there is a very limited bus service and no safe cycling routes. The A4074 is a main route into Oxford from the south east of the city, and traffic has increased significantly over recent years. It is also questionable whether a site bounded on one side by a major sewage works and the other by a major electricity sub-station and crossed by 400kV power lines is a suitable site for housing and the associated infrastructure required.

Conclusion

Whilst our main interest is Sandford-on-Thames, we note that six of the seven sites selected for strategic housing are in the Green Belt. In 2017 SODC ruled out Grenoble Road and other Green Belt sites for major housing development, stating that there were not exceptional circumstances to release these sites from the Green Belt. This judgement was based on a sustainability assessment. Nothing has changed: these Green Belt sites remain inappropriate for large development and exceptional circumstances still do not apply.

Overall, it is particularly disappointing that the Oxford Green Belt, the first to be established in the country, should be treated in such a cavalier way.

Your sincerely,

Hilda Bailey
Chair, Sandford-on-Thames Parish Council

Cc by email to:

- Ms Holly Jones - SODC Planning Policy Manager Email: holly.jones@southandvale.gov.uk
- Mrs Jane Murphy – SODC Leader Bus.
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- Mr. Felix Bloomfield – SODC Cabinet Member for Planning, Bus.
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