

Scrutiny Committee Report



Report of Head of Planning

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To: SCRUTINY

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Draft housing distribution numbers for the larger villages

Recommendation

Scrutiny Committee is asked to comment on the recommendation to Cabinet that the draft housing distribution numbers for the larger villages, as set out in Appendix A, is supported as a basis for taking forward neighbourhood plans in advance of the Local Plan: Sites and General Policies Development Plan Document.

Purpose of Report

1. To seek comments on the recommendation to Cabinet that supports the draft housing distribution numbers for the larger villages, which will inform the preparation of neighbourhood plans.

Corporate Objectives

1. Meeting housing need: bringing forward land at the larger villages to accommodate 1,154 new homes, to help meet our housing growth ambition to 2027, as set out in the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy.
2. Support for communities: supporting local communities who are preparing neighbourhood plans.

3. Building the local economy: supporting suitable proposals for economic growth in neighbourhood plans.

Background

4. The South Oxfordshire Core Strategy sets out in Policy CSH1, together with the accompanying table 7.3, that 1,154 new homes should be built in the larger villages of Benson, Berinsfield, Chalgrove, Cholsey, Chinnor, Crowmarsh Gifford, Goring, Nettlebed, Wheatley, Woodcote and a site at Bayswater Farm. Bayswater Farm is a single site lying outside the Green Belt in a sustainable location on the edge of Oxford. (For the purposes of this report, the term 'villages' includes these larger villages and Bayswater Farm)
5. In our next planning policy document, the [Local Plan: Sites and General Policies](#), we will set out how these 1,154 new homes should be divided between the twelve Larger Villages and Bayswater Farm. Specific sites will be identified in the plan to accommodate this allocation or in a neighbourhood plan where appropriate.
6. We have been working with the parish councils for the larger villages since last September to identify how best to distribute the housing number between the villages. We have sought to take account of local views when making an initial judgement on the capacity of each village to accommodate growth.
7. Our starting point, as required by the core strategy paragraph 7.20, was to split the 1,154 homes across the villages based on each settlement's current size. The village size is based on the number of dwellings shown in the 2011 Census. This proportional split was amended to include at least 500 homes in the Central Oxfordshire area of the district, as required in the core strategy in Table 7.3.
8. Working with the parish councils, we have assessed whether the proportional split needs to be modified to take account of factors such as the individual vision for a village, the Green Belt, the AONB and sustainability factors.
9. In one case at Wheatley the proposed allocation is less than its proportional allocation. This is because the village is entirely within the Green Belt and this limits the amount of land available. Our core strategy Inspector ruled out a localised Green Belt review for Wheatley.
10. We have reached agreement with all the parish councils concerned on a draft distribution of housing numbers. This draft distribution is included at Appendix A.
11. Subsequently we undertook a public consultation on the scope of the Local Plan and this included the draft distribution of housing numbers. This consultation initially closed on 5 August. However, as we were holding exhibitions in the villages to start the village housing site selection process after this deadline we agreed to extend the consultation deadline until 6 September. A summary of comments received to date is attached at Appendix B.
12. The distribution of housing numbers will be finalised and agreed by this council when the Local Plan: Sites and General Policies DPD is presented for approval

as our submission version to the planning inspectorate for independent examination in 2014.

13. In the meantime we need to use the draft distribution number for each larger village in order to carry out more detailed site investigation work. If this reveals that not enough suitable land to accommodate the proposed number of homes can be found at a particular village, then the distribution will need to be modified in consultation with the other villages.
14. At the same time, some communities will wish to press ahead with the preparation of their neighbourhood plans, ahead of this council agreeing the final distribution. They need to have some confidence that they are planning for broadly the right number of new homes.
15. Woodcote Parish Council, for example, is preparing its neighbourhood plan based on the draft distribution. They are likely to submit their plan to us for examination by the beginning of September 2013 and their examination is therefore likely to take place this autumn. Other neighbourhood plans may also be submitted for examination before the Local Plan: Sites and General Policies DPD is submitted or adopted.
16. When a neighbourhood plan goes before an independent Examiner, we will be asked to confirm that the neighbourhood plan proposals are in general conformity with our local strategic policy. In particular, we would expect to be asked whether we have a proposal to ensure that all of the 1,154 homes allocated to the larger villages will be built and that the distribution of the homes between the villages follows the guidance given in the core strategy. If we cannot do this then the neighbourhood plan may not be allowed to progress to the referendum stage.

Options

17. We have considered the following options;
 - a) Cabinet confirm its support now for the proposed distribution for the larger villages
 - b) Cabinet does not take a view on the distribution until it takes a decision to submit the Local Plan: Sites and General Policies DPD with the associated impact on the delivery of neighbourhood plans.
18. Endorsement now will provide communities with greater confidence in using the draft housing distribution numbers for the preparation of neighbourhood plans. To minimise the risk of neighbourhood plans failing the 'general conformity' test, because the distribution may have to be changed before it is finalised, we will encourage parishes to include contingency sites.
19. Conversely, withholding endorsement of the draft distribution may affect the confidence and willingness of communities to progress with the preparation of neighbourhood plans, for example, to expend effort and resources on community consultation or preparatory technical work. This may significantly delay their progress, and the delivery of housing through their plans.

20. Withholding endorsement also increases the risk that any neighbourhood plan that does proceed to examination may fail, if the Examiner is not confident that the neighbourhood plan will enable local strategic policy for housing delivery to be achieved.
21. We need to assure any Examiner that the neighbourhood planning groups and the council are working together on this issue and have an agreed approach as set out in Appendix A.

Financial Implications

22. There are no significant financial implications with this decision that cannot be accommodated within budget.

Legal Implications

23. There are no significant legal implications with this decision.

Risks

24. A decision now could raise expectations that the draft distribution is more certain than we can in fact guarantee at this stage. Later changes could lead to dissatisfaction with the process and create tensions with parish councils, local communities and landowners. We can manage this risk by providing clear information to district councillors and parishes about the weight and status of the draft distribution.

Other implications

25. There are no other significant implications with this decision.

Conclusion

26. The draft distribution follows the guidance given by the Inspector in the core strategy and has the support of the parish councils for each of the larger villages. Endorsement now by Cabinet of the draft housing distribution numbers will provide a formal position that can be reported to an Examiner scrutinising a neighbourhood plan. This should satisfy the Examiner that the neighbourhood plan is in general conformity with our local strategic policy.
27. As Scrutiny committee is likely to meet just before the new consultation closing date, the summary of consultation responses will be updated at the meeting. It should also be noted that the final report to Cabinet may change.

Background Papers

- South Oxfordshire Core Strategy adopted December 2012

Appendix A

Draft housing distribution for the larger villages

| Location | Proposed number of homes |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Central Oxfordshire area | |
| Benson | 125 |
| Berinsfield | 109 |
| Cholsey | 128 |
| Crowmarsh Gifford | 48 |
| Wheatley | 50 |
| Bayswater Farm | 40 |
| Sub total | 500 |
| Rest of District area | |
| Chalgrove | 80 |
| Chinnor | 159 |
| Goring | 105 |
| Nettlebed | 20 |
| Sonning Common | 138 |
| Watlington | 79 |
| Woodcote | 73 |
| Sub total | 654 |
| GRAND TOTAL | 1154 |

Appendix B

Summary of consultation responses on the proposed distribution of the 1154 homes to the larger villages.

This summary includes consultation responses received up to 13 August 2013. We are accepting responses up and until 6 September 2013 as a number of the larger village consultation events held, fell close to or after the initial closing date of 5 August.

The summary uses information from two sources; that taken directly from formal responses to the consultation and that from exercises held at consultation events to gain views on housing sites in the larger villages.

Headline information from formal consultation responses

| | |
|---|------------|
| Total number of responses received to two questions (13.08.13): | 202 |
| Total number of respondents (13.08.13): | 178 |

Breakdown of responses to the following question:

| Do you agree with the proposed housing numbers for each of the 12 larger villages? Please note that each village must accommodate a share of 1,154 new homes | | |
|---|--------------|-------------------|
| | Count | Percentage |
| Yes | 27 | 25.23 |
| No | 80 | 74.77 |
| Total responding | 107 | 100 |

Points raised by those agreeing with the proposed housing distribution

- Numbers seem reasonable in terms of the size of the settlements
- Will help with sustainability of the communities of those settlement, particularly if affordable housing is allowed
- Agree with the number but need to tackle traffic and infrastructure concerns

Points raised by those disagreeing with the proposed housing distribution

1. Allocations should be based on space available at settlements and proximity to existing services and facilities.
2. Some settlements have a much better range of facilities and development should be focussed there and their allocation increased.
3. Some settlements have fewer constraints and development should be focussed there and their allocation increased.
4. Some settlements have already seen large scale development and this should be reflected in their allocation.
5. Windfall sites should be taken into account to reduce the allocations.
6. The allocations should factor in proximity to places of work.
7. If the allocation has been adjusted for some villages due to green belt considerations, the same approach should be used for AONB villages.
8. Should be focussing on bringing into use houses that have long been empty and other brownfield sites.
9. Traffic issues in various settlements that the new housing will exacerbate.

10. The allocations will result in the loss of good agricultural farmland.
11. No logic presented on the reasons for the split. It seems to have been done only on a simplistic mathematical basis. The data and methodology need to be clearly presented and explained and sustainability factors justified.
12. Will the houses in the different settlements actually be for local people in those settlements?
13. Strong concern regarding the lack of infrastructure (schools, healthcare provision etc.) in villages and how they will cope with more housing.
14. Car parking provision for new housing allocations is a concern
15. The Strategic Housing Market Availability Assessment may give a higher objectively assessed need, which will need to be accommodated in the plan and trigger an early review of the core strategy. Agreement on any housing figures is premature.
16. The figure of 500 homes in the Central Oxfordshire region was not intended by the Inspector as a ceiling, which the council has used it as. Therefore the split is incorrect.
17. The housing numbers should be considered as a minimum not a maximum
18. Too many houses in the larger villages already. Additional allocations are not protecting their rural character. Villages are turning into towns.
19. The 1154 housing figure is incorrect and should be challenged.
20. The council's population data shows no need to build within the rest of the district area.
21. Villages cannot cope with this level of development. It should be focussed in the larger towns or have a primary focus on Didcot.
22. Some smaller villages should accommodate some of the housing.
23. The network of settlements should be changed.

Points raised on the housing distribution in the consultation exercises

Crowmarsh (36 attending event), **Cholsey** (105 attending event)

No specific comments on the numbers

Chinnor (183 attending event)

- Too many homes will make Chinnor like a town
- The community size and feel is right as it is, more housing will ruin this

Nettlebed (47 attending event)

- Leave Nettlebed as it is

Goring (175 attending event)

- Do not believe 100+ homes is appropriate for an AONB village

Watlington (125 attending event)

- Keep Watlington as a village not a town

Wheatley (147 attending event)

- Questions around the scale of the allocation changing the village feel of Wheatley or changing Wheatley into a small town
- Wheatley is big enough already.

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