

Matter 8: Housing land supply, viability, delivery and monitoring

8.2 Do the provisions of the LPP2 make the necessary contribution towards meeting the stated housing requirement for the District as a whole and the Science Vale ring fence area over the full plan period to 2031?

We have concerns that the allocations proposed in the LPP2 will not deliver in the manner envisaged. This is as a result of unrealistic lead-in times, annual delivery assumptions being used by the Council and the quantum of development being proposed in very narrow geographic areas. In relation to the latter point, we are concerned that the quantum of development will lead to market saturation and will certainly not deliver the number of houses envisaged and at the point in time expected.

We are concerned that without a reconsideration, the LPP2 cannot be considered to be positively prepared, justified, effective or consistent with national planning policy. Consequently, it will be an unsound proposition.

Our concerns relating to each issue are outlined below.

Lead-In Times: Work undertaken by Chamberlain Walker¹ indicates that the development pipeline takes approximately 6.6 years to provide first legal completions. Further research² indicates that:

“...in combination, the planning approval period and subsequent time to first housing delivery reveals the total period increases with larger sites, with the total period being in the order of 5.3 – 6.9 years. Large sites are typically not quick to deliver; in the absence of a live planning application, they are, on average, unlikely to be contributing to five year housing land supply calculations.”

The above analysis only relates to the time between the approval of the first application and the delivery of the first dwelling. It would not include the preparation of Supplementary Planning Guidance, which is required on some sites identified within the LPP2. This would increase the lead-in time on some of the Council's identified allocations and push back the identified delivery until later in the plan period.

Having regard to the above and the LPP2's evidence base, unrealistic lead-in times are being proposed by the Council. More realistic lead-in assumptions based on the analysis provided above, should be used.

Looking at the Council's housing trajectory for the LPP2 allocations (the Housing Trajectory Paper Update, February 2018), we have concerns with the lead-in times for Dalton Barracks, where an application has not yet been submitted. Consequently, first completions are unlikely to occur until 2025/26. This would mean the loss of 225 dwellings from the Council's housing trajectory.

Delivery Rates: We are concerned that the delivery rates assumed by the Council in their Housing Trajectory Paper Update (February 2018) are unrealistic and will not deliver in the manner envisaged. Recent research³, which assessed over 70 large sites, indicates that on average:

1. Delivery of sites of up to 1,499 units will 'barely exceed' 100 units per annum and none of the sites considered in the research achieved a rate of 200 dwellings per annum;

¹ Page 5, https://cweconomics.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CWEconomicsReport_Land_Banking.pdf

² Page 8, <https://lichfields.uk/media/1728/start-to-finish.pdf>

³ Page 14, <https://lichfields.uk/media/1728/start-to-finish.pdf>

2. Sites with a capacity for 2000 units will deliver at an average rate of 161 dwellings per annum.

Whilst it is acknowledged that there could be peak years where there could be an overlap between outlets and phases, it is considered that a robust position would be to adopt each of the average rates of development indicated above, particularly in the South East sub-area where market saturation is a genuine concern.

On this basis, we have concerns relating to the delivery rates for Dalton Barracks, where the proposed delivery is projected to rise to 225 dwellings towards the end of the Plan period, which is significantly higher than the research indicates is likely.

Consequently, in order for the proposed allocations to be considered as being effective, there is a need for the delivery assumptions for Dalton Barracks to be reduced.

Market Saturation: We are concerned that the number of new dwellings proposed, particularly within the South East sub-area, cannot be delivered within such a narrow market area.

These concerns were raised to the LPP1 Inspector, who did not agree that there was an issue at that point in time. However, the LPP2 seeks to increase the quantum of development within the South East sub-area, by a further 1,400 dwellings, from just two sites.

Combined, the LPP1 and LPP2 therefore place a significant quantum of development (some 13,362 dwellings), in this narrow area. Alone, the South East sub-area needs to deliver an additional 11,829 dwellings over the remaining 14 monitoring years of the Plan. This equates to a rate of development of some 844 dwellings per annum over this timeframe, when the area has to date only delivered an average of 256 dwellings per annum since 2011. This is also a higher annual rate of development to that delivered across the whole District in the period 2011-2015. Additional growth adjacent to the sub-area, but within South Oxfordshire is also planned within their emerging Local Plan Final Publication Version – some 6,500 units in Didcot alone (October 2017). We question whether this rate of development can be accommodated within this small housing sub-market, over the plan period.

There are already strong indications that the South Eastern sub-area cannot accommodate this level of planned growth. Most notably, the Appeal at Mather House and Greensands, White Road and Reading Road, Wantage (Appeal Ref: APP/V3120/W/16/3145234), where the Inspector concludes that the Council are already unable to demonstrate a 5-year supply of housing from within the 'ring-fenced' area of the District, which is located within the South Eastern sub-area.

We are also aware that a national house builder has already raised concerns with the Council's delivery assumptions concerning their site at the Grove Airfield, which was allocated in the Part 1 Plan (the developer has indicated that 846 dwellings of the 2,500 dwelling allocation will be delivered outside the Plan period).

Given these new circumstances, it is necessary to reconsider whether the market can reasonably accommodate this level of development and in the manner envisaged.

At present, the revised LPP2 strategy, risks the delivery of the Vale's housing needs and its apportionment of Oxford City's unmet needs in full. In such a circumstance, it is likely that the housing land supply will reduce to below 5-years once again, which will encourage speculative planning applications.

In our view, it is essential that a realistic geographic strategy is adopted, which reinstates the distribution of housing to the Western Vale and considers its role in accommodating Oxford's unmet housing need in line with the spatial strategy defined by the LPP1. The role envisaged for it in the LPP1 needs to be reflected in proportionate terms in the LPP2. The delivery of the overall housing need must be afforded more importance than the pursuit of a strategy which is contrary to the adopted Development Plan (which is by definition the most appropriate strategy when considered against reasonable alternatives) and which in all likelihood, is likely to fail in any event.

8.3 Are the figures for completions and known commitments (both overall and in each sub-area) accurate? Should any allowance be made for the non-implementation of commitments?

We believe that a non-implementation rate should be allowed for.

It is highly unlikely that all existing commitments will deliver in full over the Plan period and that a portion of the Council's existing commitments will lapse. The reasons planning permissions lapse are well known and are not repeated in this representation.

Research⁴ indicates that nationally, there is a gap of between 30 and 40% between planning permissions granted and the commencement of development. Of this figure, 10-20% lapse, with the residual being subject to a fresh application.

In the absence of more local information, a 10% lapse rate should be employed. This would reduce the number of commitments in the LPP2 by 306 dwellings. For the Western Vale, there would be the need to find a site / sites to accommodate a further 77 dwellings. In this regard, we draw attention to my Clients application (P18/V1363/0).

8.4 Is the revised calculation for windfall sites in the LPP2 (both overall and in each subarea) compared to the LPP1 supported by proportionate evidence and consistent with national policy?

No.

Our concerns relate to the new approach taken with regard to windfall development are two-fold, as follows:

1. Reassessing the level of windfall is beyond the scope of the LPP2; and
2. The information provided by the Council falls short of justifying the proportional split of windfall provision between each sub-area.

Each of our concerns are outlined below.

Scope of the LPP2: The issues to be covered by the LPP2 are established in the LPP1. Its role is to establish policies and locations for housing for the Vale's proportion of Oxford City's unmet housing needs; provide policies relating to the Didcot Garden Town; provide detailed policies to complement the LPP1; and it may allocate additional development site for housing and other uses.

In terms of housing supply, its role is only to allocate additional land. By its very nature, windfall development is unexpected and does not constitute an allocation. It therefore cannot be considered as forming part of the LPP2's role of allocating specific sites for development.

⁴ DCLG Presentations to the HBF Planning Conference (September 2015)

It is acknowledged that the housing requirement for the Vale is to increase in order to accommodate Oxford City's unmet housing needs. However, these additional housing needs are to be met solely within the Abingdon sub-area and therefore any reconsideration of windfall provision should be solely a matter for that sub-area.

Certainly, the Western Vale, where it is proposed that the sub-area makes no contribution to meet Oxford City's unmet needs, there can be no justification for an increase in its windfall provision.

Distribution of Windfall Development: Para. 48 of the NPPF requires local planning authorities to include windfall development in their housing supply where they have compelling evidence that such sites have consistently become available in the local area **and will continue to provide a reliable source of supply.**

The Council's revised evidence is provided in para. 4.22 of Topic Paper 2 (October 2017) and at para. 2.13 of its Addendum (February 2018).

There are two fundamental issues with the Council's evidence as follows:

1. It falls short of the necessary evidence to demonstrate that windfall provision will continue to be a reliable form of development in the local area, particularly with the number of larger strategic sites likely to come forward over the Plan period; and
2. The evidence only relates to the number of windfalls over the entire district. No information is provided to justify the increase for each sub-region.

In the Western Vale, the level of windfall provision is anticipated to rise from 240 dwellings to 308 dwellings (an increase of 28%). No evidence has been provided to justify this increase. Moreover, windfall development is now proposed to form 8% of the Western Vale's supply, which is a significantly higher proportion than either the South East (3.6%) and Abingdon (4%).

Whilst we acknowledge that there is likely to be a justification for windfall development within the Western Vale, the increase in the proportion of the Western Vale's supply, particularly where it is not making any contribution to meeting Oxford's unmet housing needs, is unjustifiable.

At most, a 4% windfall allowance should be provided within the Western Vale, which would equate to 152 dwellings. This would accord with the windfall rate in the other sub-areas of the district.

Consequently, there is a need to identify a site or sites within the Western Vale sub-area to accommodate an additional 156 dwellings. In this respect we draw attention to our Client's current application on land at Fernham Gate, Faringdon (P18/V1363/0). The Council's latest HELAA work confirms that the site is suitable, available and achievable to be developed for housing within the next five-year period (Site Ref: FARI15 refers).