

Vale of White Horse Local Plan Examination in Public Stage 1 Hearing Statement from North Abingdon Local Plan Group (NALPG)

One of the 'Topic reports' submitted by the group was under the heading 'Is the Strategic Housing Market Assessment Right?' The main points that made are:

- ³⁵₁₇ The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) figures are based on just one view of the future;
- ³⁵₁₇ So the predicted need for 1,028 extra houses per year until 2031 could be too high;
- ³⁵₁₇ The forecast looks too far into the future to be reliable;
- ³⁵₁₇ The assumptions about changes in the numbers of jobs may be incorrect;
- ³⁵₁₇ Builders may not be able to build as many houses as quickly as planned;
- ³⁵₁₇ The housing market may not function properly; and
- ³⁵₁₇ We are concerned that the SHMA target might be arbitrarily raised to meet Oxford City's needs; so
- ³⁵₁₇ Given the uncertainty, it would be better to have rolling forecast and plan.

This note links our 'Topic report' (TR) to the particular questions for Stage 1 of the EIP. The questions follow in italics, followed by our comments:

Matter 4 – Unmet Housing Needs

4.1 Is the approach to meeting within the District any housing needs which cannot be met elsewhere in Oxfordshire, as set out in policy CP2, soundly based and does it accord with national policy?

Chapter 4 of the plan (page 39, note a) says that if needs arise elsewhere in the housing market area, this will be addressed by timely and effective co-operative working in accordance with CP2. Chapter 1 (page 7) gives some more explanation.

It is clear that Oxford city will have great difficulty in finding the land it needs to expand. The city has a long history of incremental expansion. A review of Oxford's green belt is underway as a result and we await the result with interest. It is difficult to deal with issues of this sort at the district council level. There is a need for a wider view. It is clear that Oxford could extend most easily to the East and along Grenoble road, which is on the southern edge of the city. Only district council boundaries have delayed, but perhaps not prevented, this obvious solution.

4.2 What is the likely timescale for agreement being reached between the relevant authorities on (i) the scale of unmet needs in Oxford City (and any other district) (ii) the most appropriate way of any unmet needs being provided for?

The Vale faces three serious pressures:

1. We don't have enough houses for the existing population;
2. Oxford does not have enough space for its needs; and
3. Some think that very rapid growth can also be accommodated

The first pressure is sufficiently difficult to deal with given the existing constraints. That should be the only priority for this plan. We consider that room for the expansion of Oxford can best be found to the East of the city, and beyond Grenoble Road – so it is not a Vale issue. We have many concerns about the third pressure, it will have serious and in some cases damaging consequences for the Vale.

4.3 Is it likely that the spatial strategy, policies and allocations proposed by the plan to meet the district's own housing needs would need to be significantly altered if unmet needs from elsewhere in Oxfordshire are to be accommodated in the Vale of White Horse district?

We think that the existing plan will result in over development of the Vale, damaging AONB, green belt, vistas and the existing pattern of settlements and green fields. It has been described as a 'least worst option'. We would prefer a 'best possible' plan.

Existing overcrowded infrastructure, notably the A34, will be clogged up on a more or less permanent basis. Air pollution problems will increase and the quality of life generally will fall. There is a clear possibility of a housing boom leading to bust, leaving a plethora of bankrupt builders and half developed sites sprawling across the district...

We do not think that there would be any capacity at all for future growth beyond that proposed in the plan. The prospect of having additional growth on top to cope with extra demand from Oxford is difficult to contemplate.

4.4 If you contend that the approach set out in policy CP2 is not soundly based should the Local Plan be delayed pending agreement on 5.2 (i) and (ii) above or could modifications to the plan be made to make it sound?

Further delaying the plan will lead to further unplanned and illogical developments being permitted by the minister against the wishes of the Council and most local people. Difficulties with CP2 should not be allowed to delay things yet further, extending the window for centrally imposed damaging, random and chaotic planning.

The government would be well advised to consider the effect of some of its own policies on the housing market and house prices in particular, rather than, as usual, blaming the local planning system.