

Sent by email to: planning.policy@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

21/11/2017

Dear Sir/ Madam

Response by the House Builders Federation to the Vale of White Horse Local Plan Part 2

Thank you for consulting the Home Builders Federation (HBF) on Part 2 of your Local Plan. The HBF is the principal representative body of the housebuilding industry in England and Wales and our representations reflect the views of discussions with our membership of national and multinational corporations through to regional developers and small local housebuilders. Our members account for over 80% of all new housing built in England and Wales in any one year.

We would like to submit the following representations on the Local Plan and we would welcome, in due course, participating in hearings of the Examination in Public.

Meeting Oxford's unmet housing needs

We are pleased to see that following the identification of Oxford City Council's unmet needs that the Council has looked to bring forward its part two Local Plan that will allocate the necessary sites to address these needs. The level of co-operation shown across Oxfordshire is to be welcomed and as such we consider the Council to be fulfilling its duty to co-operate in relation to meeting unmet needs in the HMA. As we mentioned in our response to Cherwell it is important that Oxfordshire continues to plan for this level of growth and continues to recognise the importance of delivering sufficient homes to meet the affordable housing needs that are the primary factor when considering the needs of Oxford City Council. Planning Practice Guidance establishes that the total affordable housing need should be considered in the context of its likely delivery as a proportion of mixed market and affordable housing developments and that an *"increase in the total housing figures included in the local plan should be considered where it could help deliver the required number of affordable homes"*

We are therefore supportive of the continuation of the approach taken by the Vale of White Horse and the Local Planning Authorities across Oxfordshire that promotes the County's economic strategy as well as the delivery of much need affordable housing within the HMA. The approach rightly supports Oxford City to meet its housing needs given the physical constraints it faces in delivering both market and affordable housing.

Additional sites and sub area strategies

The HBF does not comment on the merits or otherwise of individual sites therefore our representations are submitted without prejudice to any comments made by other parties on the deliverability of specific sites included in the overall housing land supply, the five year housing land supply and housing trajectories. Whilst we cannot make any further comments on the allocated sites and sub area strategies we do have some concerns regarding the development management policies which are set out below.

Development Policy 1: Self-Build and Custom Build

This policy is unsound as it is not consistent with national policy and is ineffective

The NPPF sets out in paragraph 17 that Local Plans should provide a practical framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made with a degree of predictability and efficiency. By setting out in the policy that such plots “may” contribute to towards affordable housing provision does not provide the required certainty for either applicant or decision maker. The Council needs to be clear as to when the custom and self-build housing will or will not contribute to affordable housing provision will need to comply with core policy 24. It could be argued that where plots for custom and self-build homes are provided on major development sites through a S106 agreement these homes should not be included when calculating the proportion of affordable homes required as they are part of the Government’s moves towards making home ownership more affordable. Such an approach would be a positive move to securing self-build plots whilst minimising the impacts on the viability of development.

Whichever way the Council chooses to treat custom and self-build plots it must be clear in policy as to the approach. As written the policy could be applied in a number of different ways that will confuse both applicant and decision maker, an approach that is inconsistent with national policy.

The approach taken by the Council as to how custom and self-build plots are considered against core policy 24 will affect how the Council treats plots that remain unsold. If these plots are considered as meeting an “affordable housing” and are not included when calculating the proportion of affordable housing to be provided on site then there may be some consideration given to offering these plots up for the delivery of affordable housing. However, we would consider that a period of 6 months following the initial 12 months period would be more appropriate to avoid plots being left undeveloped for any significant period of time. If self-build plots are considered as market homes within any calculation for affordable housing contributions then these plots should revert back to the developer after 12 months if they have not been sold.

Development policy 20: Public Art

This policy is unsound as it is not consistent with national policy

Planning Practice Guidance sets out the situation with regard to existing legislation on planning obligations. In particular it states that:

“Planning obligations assist in mitigating the impact of unacceptable development to make it acceptable in planning terms. Planning obligations may only constitute a reason for granting planning permission if they meet the tests that they are necessary to make development acceptable in planning terms, directly related to the development and fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind” (Ref: 23b-001-20161116).

The Council have not established within the plan or the supporting evidence base how it considers public art to meet any of these tests. Whilst we recognise that public art can play a role in making interesting and exciting public spaces if the Council is to require all major developments or sites over 0.5ha to have public art it must have evidence to show how this policy meets the required tests in relation to all such sites. Without such evidence this policy cannot be justified and cannot be shown to be consistent with either policy or legislation and as such is unsound and should be deleted.

Yours faithfully

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