

Draft note to the inspector on behalf of Vale of White Horse District Council

Background

At the examination of the Vale of White Horse local plan part 1 under Matter 4: Unmet Housing Needs the Vale highlighted the areas it proposes to release from the greenbelt, the capacity in the SHLAA, completions in recent years and the number of homes under consideration in planning. The council also highlighted that whilst its annual housing requirement is 5,140 homes during the first 5 years of the plan, given the 20% percent buffer applied it will contribute 8,047 homes to the needs of the HMA (Table 4.1 of TOP04 Housing).

The City Council and Vale of White Horse were asked to discuss the information further outside of the examination and the potential for these sites to contribute to Oxford's unmet housing need. This note sets out the discussions that took place and the outcomes.

Sophie Horsley, Planning Policy Manager, Vale of White Horse met with Matthew Bates and Lyndsey Beveridge, Principal Planning Officers of Oxford City Council on Thursday 24th September. The meeting focused on explaining the background to the information supplied to the examination and explaining the five year housing land supply position.

Cllr Matthew Barber, Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council met with Cllr Bob Price on Thursday 24th September to discuss the same matter. The Vale of White Horse set out its position in a letter to Cllr Bob Price on Friday 25th September (attached at Appendix 1).

Leader of the Council
Cllr Matthew Barber



Cllr Bob Price
Leader of the Council
Oxford City Council

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25th September 2015

Dear Bob,

Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Examination in Public (EiP)

Thank you for taking some time yesterday to briefly discuss the Examination of the Vale's Local Plan. I thought it would be helpful to set out our position for clarity in the hope that there may be a way forward.

The first point of discussion was our draft Core Policy 2 (CP2). This policy sets out how we will work within the duty to cooperate in order to meet any unmet need in Oxfordshire. Along with all other authorities this has been in place since the first draft of the plan in line with the Oxfordshire Statement of Cooperation. Following the decision of the Inspector in the Cherwell Local Plan Examination amendments have been proposed to strengthen CP2.

The Vale has presented a draft amendment to our Inspector committing us to reviewing our plan and submitting that revision to the Secretary of State within two years of adoption of our Local Plan Part 1. Oxford City Council has proposed an alternative amendment which propose the timetable is truncated to eighteen months and that if this deadline is missed that our entire plan would be deemed out of date. Your alternative suggestion is not acceptable to us, but our Inspector has asked us to discuss this bi-laterally in the hope of finding common ground. I should be clear that we have not been asked to agree a new CP2 between us, but to explore whether this is possible. The Inspector was clear that he reserves the right to make his own recommendations whether or not we reach a common position.

We acknowledge that an acceptable policy may need to incorporate some type of penalty for not achieving an agreed timetable. I have therefore asked officers to explore the possibility of drafting an alternative CP2 which gives a two year period between adoption of our Local Plan Part 1 and submission to the Secretary of State of a revised plan, but importantly includes such a penalty. I would welcome your agreement that a two year timetable would be acceptable to you if the penalty was clearly established. This would also allow us to properly combine the unmet need review with our planned Local Plan Part 2, an approach the Inspector appeared to endorse.

Whilst we will need to discuss the detailed wording, and indeed the Inspector will have the final say, I would suggest that the inclusion of an element of Oxford's unmet need in our five-year housing land supply target would be a suitably severe penalty. This penalty, if brought into play by the Vale missing the two year deadline, would of course only last until that situation were corrected (ie a revised plan was submitted). From our discussions you did not rule out this option subject to detailed wording, and it is certainly something which I hope to put forward to our Inspector. If we can agree on this then it will no doubt ease the workload of the Inspector and may indeed form a model that other member of the Growth Board may wish to adopt.

The most complex aspect of this is of course defining, for the purposes of the policy wording, that element of Oxford's unmet need that is referred to in the penalty. All Oxfordshire authorities including the Vale and Oxford City have signed up to the Growth Board process for establishing both the scale of unmet need and an appropriate apportionment across the rural districts. This process should generate recommendations in March 2016. This process and timetable have both been endorsed by your representatives at our EiP. In order to retain the primacy of this process I believe that the element of unmet need that should be met by the Vale through a revised plan (and be factored into our housing land supply calculation if we miss the proposed deadline) should be that figure agreed following the recommendation from the Growth Board. This recommendation will take into account both the overall net quantum of unmet need and its appropriate apportionment between districts. Our proposed two year timetable will provide necessary (but not unlimited) flexibility should the March 2016 Growth Board deadline be missed.

Clearly if we are to stick to the agreed process that we have all signed up to we must allow the Growth Board to do its work within its agreed timeframe. It is therefore not possible or appropriate to put a figure on the scale or distribution of unmet need at this stage. The wording of CP2 must therefore describe the process that will generate that output.

That brings us on to the second point of discussion resulting from the EiP, namely can an element of unmet need be met in advance of a plan review? As discussed yesterday I do not believe this is possible. Whilst we intend to meet our obligations to accommodate unmet need we do not have (a) agreement through the agreed Growth Board process on the quantum that we would need to plan for or (b) options for site allocations that could be brought into the emerging plan without causing undue delay and uncertainty. This is precisely why we have proposed and committed to an early review, and we are also exploring options to accommodate unmet need as set out in our Cabinet paper of 7th August. Some of those sites and options have been assessed and been subject to consultation, but many have not. The process of properly identifying, assessing and consulting on adequate sites to meet our share of Oxford's unmet need and the Vale's Local Plan Part 2 is considerable. This needs to be done properly as part of a robust plan preparation process in accordance with the government regulations to ensure we achieve the most appropriate and sustainable outcomes. Accordingly we have proposed a realistic two year timetable for this work.

I found our discussions yesterday very helpful. Once drafted we will share our proposed revision of CP2 with you in the hope that we can present it to the Inspector with your support. It is clearly not possible to agree to take an element of unmet need before that quantum is known. If nothing else the way in which one would plan sustainably for new development will vary dramatically depending on the scale of that

development. I welcome our shared commitment to the Growth Board process and hope that agreement on an improved CP2 can address Oxford City's concerns and allow us to move forward both with this plan and our early review.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M Barber', is positioned above the typed name. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial 'M' and a long, sweeping underline.

Cllr Matthew Barber
Leader of the Council