

Questions and answers from the Parish and Neighbourhood Planning Group briefing on the Local Plan

11 October 2017, Didcot Civic Hall

Q. If the Government's new method of calculating OAN is made policy, then SODC will be building too many homes by using the figures in the SHMA, giving a large spare capacity. What is the reason for this?

A. The plan is being submitted before the transitional arrangements come in. The proposed new housing calculation is not yet policy, so submitting a plan based on the proposed figures would not be appropriate. The SHMA figures have been reviewed and tested, so they are the ones that have to be used-this is the evidence base that exists at this time. It has not been made clear how the government will treat the existing numbers, but SODC need to have a 5YHLS and getting a plan in place as quickly as possible seeks to achieve this.

The sites in the plan are still acceptable and we are planning for a much longer term. House builders deliver at the rate they want to. Developers need to be encouraged to build at a faster rate. Using the SHMA figures will provide some certainty. In the future, SODC might also be asked to provide for other authorities' unmet need, such as Aylesbury Vale and Reading.

Q. Can parish councils have a copy of the plan?

A. District councillors have a copy, which they will share. Copies can also be purchased for £55.00 if collected or £60.00 if posted.

Q. Can the consultation document be in a word format?

A. A word format document is not currently available. We will seek to provide a version in word.

Q. Where do windfall and Permitted Development Rights fit in the housing numbers?

A. Every single house created goes towards the overall supply in the District. We already have some of these numbers in the completion figures and others are in the commitments figures. Any from this point would all be counted. If Neighbourhood Planning Groups are hoping to rely on windfall or PDRs for a part of their housing numbers, then they would need to justify it based on evidence.

Q. Will any representations made during prior consultations be sent to the Inspector?

A. Yes, but to ensure that you have a right to be heard at the examination, they would need to be made again.

Q. The housing number for Chalgrove is now zero. Is this because of the Chalgrove site?

A. Yes, assuming the Chalgrove strategic allocation remains in the Plan, the Neighbourhood Planning Group do not have to provide an allocation because of the strategic allocation. However, the Neighbourhood planning group should carry on with their plan and it is advisable for them to allocate a site so that they can benefit from the provisions of the December 2016 ministerial statement.

Q. Are you including the 320 homes that already have planning permission [In Chalgrove] in the housing numbers?

A. Anything given planning permission in the last few weeks has not been included in the commitments figure.

Q. An aggressive application has been received from a developer, what should the Neighbourhood Planning Group do?

A. Speak to Ricardo Rios or Rachael Riach.

Q. Sustainable development is about the transport and infrastructure. Many people would like the council to ensure that infrastructure should be put in before or alongside the housing development.

A. Need to look at the IDP which contains lots of detail. The IDP is part of the consultation, so please respond on it. The IDP is not a fixed document, it changes all of the time. The point that infrastructure needs to be provided alongside the building is made in the IDP. Job growth is also needed, so the infrastructure ties in with all parts of the plan.

Q. Why is there a cap on the % growth for smaller villages without a Neighbourhood Plan, but not for those who have one?

A. Inspectors do not like to see a cap, numbers need to be approximate or 'up to'. The policy says at least a 5% increase, which is not a cap. The figure should not be used to curtail the village's ambitions.

Neighbourhood Plans are about positive planning and about making decisions for the good of the village.

Q. Does density have to be 30 per hectare? Can it be lower for rural locations?

A. Policy DES8 refers to a minimum density to ensure the efficient use of land. Lower densities would need to be justified as departing from the Policy. The Policy also encourages higher quality development and higher density will be supported.

Q. The council has stated that developers will be encouraged to have densities greater than 30 where suitable. What are the council doing to encourage them?

A. Developers are encouraged in their discussions with the council. It is down to individual sites. Developers cannot be forced to increase the density.

Q. The Government may soon amend the way that housing need is calculated. What would the council do to amend the plan if the requirement was higher or lower than the existing figure?

A. We cannot say what will happen, but we cannot sit and wait for the outcome of the consultation as we do not have a 5YHLS. The Inspector will no doubt ask us to comment on the figures if these are released through the course of examination and we will give our response. The buffer provides flexibility, so we have no reason to reduce the numbers. The numbers *could* be used to roll the plan forward past 2033. The consultation document does not address other factors such as affordability, so it's very likely that more work needs to be done to the basic calculation. If things do change significantly, the plan could be withdrawn, but we need to have a degree of credibility going into an inspection.

Q. Will there be enough surgeries and GPs? Where are we with CIL?

A. This is addressed in the IDP. It is a real challenge as there are not enough GPs nationally. It maybe that in a few years this may affect planning permissions.

CIL is in place. As soon as the Local Plan has been through EIP, it will be followed by a CIL examination. The charges may increase. This will need to go out to consultation.

Q. Oxford City plan has no numbers in it. There are now by-laws that restrict areas to employment use and not housing use. What are SODC doing to challenge the plan?

A. Response to the plan has been submitted. Everyone can raise objections. The Oxford City examination will test the extent to which they have looked at all potential sites.

Q. What has been discussed with Reading?

A. Meetings with Reading have been about the third Thames river crossing. Nothing has been discussed about housing. Reading have not asked for any help with meeting unmet need.

Q. Has SODC asked Reading to provide infrastructure-GPS, education etc?

A. Not directly, but people do not adhere to administrative boundaries. They may ask about CIL if development has an impact on Readings infrastructure, but this hasn't happened yet..

Q. What is the percentage of affordable housing and how does the council make developers adhere to it?

A. The council looks for up to 40% affordable housing on sites. 1 in 3 houses built since 2011 are affordable, which is 33%. The council would like to see a higher figure, but if we demand 40% and the developer says it's not viable, then it could go to appeal and the number could be reduced.

Q. Will the SODC Planning Officers support the Neighbourhood Plan in terms of planning applications that are in breach of it?

A. Neighbourhood Plans need to be planned positively. They will be taken into consideration in the determination of planning applications as they will form part of the development plan. Planning officers use all the policies of the development plan – including those in NDP's – to come to a decision and will need to find a balance between these policies.

Q. Residents need to have confidence that their Neighbourhood Plan will be taken into account by planners before it's been to a referendum.

A. Neighbourhood Plans have incremental weight from the moment they reach the publication stage. They achieve full weight as soon as they successfully pass their referendum.

Q. How will the Expressway impact on the plan and will the plan be withdrawn?

A. No decision has yet been made on the proposed route, but changes may have to be made to the plan once it is known.

Q. The Neighbourhood Plan may choose to allocate more affordable homes. Does SODC have any plans to stop existing affordable homes being sold as market housing?

A. Ricardo Rios and Rachael Riach to discuss with the Neighbourhood Planning group.

Q. The Local Plan gives a percentage increase in housing for those villages with a Neighbourhood Plan and those without. Are those preparing a Neighbourhood Plan being left open to speculative building between allocating sites and the plan being made?

A. Villages are already vulnerable as there will always be a gap between allocation and the plan being made.

Q. SODC are actively encouraging developers to have a higher density figure. What happens if the Neighbourhood Plan has a lower density figure?

A. If the lower density can be justified in the Neighbourhood Plan, then it will be supported by SODC. Any application will be judged against it.

Q. Why does there need to be 200+ new homes before the additional requirements in STRAT5 come into use?

A. The requirements have just been made clearer. The Neighbourhood Plan can have its own requirements. The figure relates to major development (large-scale).

Q. When is the best guess for when the Oxford City numbers will be examined?

A. They are looking at submission in Autumn 2018, so early in 2019, however, they may try to bring it forward to make use of the existing SHMA numbers.

Q. The Neighbourhood Plan and allocation of sites go through a democratic process and then is made by the council. An Inspector can then over-ride it.

A. This has not happened in SODC. The Neighbourhood Plan does not have to deal with everything, but should concentrate on what really matters in the short-term. There will be a Neighbourhood Planning Conference soon.