

Q4: Do you have information or views about why we can or cannot accommodate the highest level of housing need?

Air Quality

South Oxfordshire has three AQMAs where the pollution arises from traffic. For at least two of the AQMAs there is a significant level of through traffic, including HGV traffic, that aggravates the problem. The AQAP currently in preparation for the district does not offer any short term solutions to this problem (less than 5 years), and the County Council has no plans for relief roads that would reduce the level of through traffic for the AQMAs. Clearly an increase in the number of homes and businesses in the district will result in a higher level of traffic, at least some of which will add to the problems in the AQMAs. The continuing reduction in the level of occupancy of homes will to some extent mitigate the increase in numbers, but until such time as improved air quality can be achieved, it is clear that additional development should be limited by the net increase in through-traffic for the AQMAs. In practice this means that new development should be confined to areas where direct access to trunk roads is possible without passing through the AQMAs.

Sewerage infrastructure

Watlington Parish Council does not have district-wide information readily available, but in our area at least the sewerage plant is already inadequate, and is as much as 30% under-capacity for long periods of the year. This results in partially treated waste being released into our streams. We are aware of proposals to construct a reed bed to provide a degree of natural treatment for this excess waste, but with no indication of when this is likely to be done or even whether the land available for this purpose is suitable for a reed bed. The under-capacity of the sewerage plant is aggravated by the lack of rain water drains for the older parts of town so that much of run-off goes into the sewers.

Roads and road system

Several communities within South Oxfordshire already have unacceptable levels of congestion, resulting in part from the narrow streets not designed for carrying the present traffic burden, and from the use of minor roads as short cuts for through traffic. This is particularly evident in those places that are on the routes to focal points of traffic such as bridges over the Thames or M40 junctions 6 and 7. A significant increase in housing without improvements in the road system can only make matters worse at these focal points. The proposals for additional housing arising from the SHMA represent an increase ranging from 7% to 16%, while the total increase if the increases included in the Core Strategy are included range from 26% to 34%. While not all of this housing will contribute directly to the increase in congestion in at these focal points, the above numbers do point to a significant worsening of the present situation. In this respect it is regrettable that SODC has not yet commissioned an update to the 2009 Halcrow Evaluation of Transport Impacts report to assess the effect on traffic of the suggested options for location of the additional housing.

Other infrastructure needs

Improvements to other infrastructure will be needed, such as schools, but are county or district wide issues rather than being confined to our area.

Q6a: Please use the comments box to tell us what you like or don't like about the options, and where you think we should plan the housing?

It is recognised that the options presented aimed at clearly distinct choices, but this makes it difficult to select any single option as this requires agreeing with both a general approach to allocation of housing share as well as (in some cases) the fractions allocated to each type of settlement or area. For this reason we have selected several options from the list and it is necessary to explain the reasoning behind these selections. Our fear is that a count of the ticks in each of the boxes will be used as a simple preference vote without due consideration of the caveats and justifications for the selection made.

Option A: This approach has been applied and accepted for the current version of the Local Plan and for this reason is favoured for the additional allocation of houses. Oxfordshire County Council is at present consulting on its Local Transport Plan 4 which has as one of its objectives (Objective 4) to “influence the location of development to maximise the use and value of existing and planned strategic transport investment”. Instead of allocating housing numbers purely on the basis of the existing number of houses as was done for the larger villages last time, some weighting should be applied to employment opportunities either locally or within commuting distance by public transport. A measure for employment opportunities within commuting distance by public sector transport, cycling or walking would allow the housing allocation to minimise the increase in traffic. This measure could be used either on its own or in conjunction with the 55%:27%:18% for Didcot : Market towns : Larger villages suggested for Option A to achieve the LTP4 objective. Failing this, some debate or justification is needed for the ratios assumed in Option A.

Option B: Assigning new housing to the Science Vale area rather than to Didcot specifically makes sense as it provides for new homes near the Culham site in Culham village, Berinsfield, Dorchester, Clifton Hampden or Burcot, all of which are in easy cycling distance of the Culham site. At Berinsfield new housing would probably have to encroach on the Oxford Green Belt, while Dorchester is constrained by flood risk. Clearly the bulk of the development will have to go to Didcot if the other communities are not to be swamped, but some allocation to these smaller settlements would be sensible.

Allocation of new housing to the more sustainable settlements is a sensible approach, but is dependent on establishing accepted criteria for what constitutes a *less constrained sustainable settlement*. For the reasons given in our response to question 5 about the settlement hierarchy we do not believe that these criteria have yet been identified and can be applied in an acceptable way.

Option C: WPC does not agree with this option. Concentrating all the additional housing in one area will cause problems for that area in assimilating such a large growth and will serve to further unbalance the economy of the district with the majority of employment opportunities in the west.

Option D: WPC does not agree with this option. Creating a new town with a population similar in size to that of Thame within a few miles of Thame and/or Wallingford does not look like a sensible approach. The new town will compete with Thame/Wallingford for services and facilities such as schools, retail outlets and businesses. It will take many years for the new town to get established as

you have already recognised and this would threaten the 5 year land supply. Once established the new town would weaken both Thame and Wallingford. It would certainly weaken the larger villages of the Miltons, Watlington, Chalgrove and Chinnor by drawing services away from them. Depending on where it is located within the designated area, it is likely to be close to the M40 and would run the risk of being a dormitory settlement for people who wish to commute towards London.

Option E: This one appears to be an obvious choice to include. Since windfall and infill development will now be counted as part of the allocation, and since this development will inevitably happen in the small villages, we can so see no reason why this development should not be counted towards the total housing allocation for the district. There are already in place in the Core Strategy (CSR1) policies that will limit the size of development that would be permitted in these smaller communities. There needs to be some control over the number of these small developments that would be allowed in any one small village. This control could be based on a limit to the maximum percentage increase in the number of homes over the 20 year period. Under these circumstances there is little risk of these villages losing their identity through the addition of large new developments.

Option F: We believe the Green Belt around Oxford should be protected, and that development on the northern edge of Reading will result in the small villages there effectively being merged into Reading and ultimately being transferred to Berkshire for administrative convenience. Some new housing in these areas is acceptable, but putting the whole of the new allocation adjacent to Oxford and/or Reading will represent a loss to South Oxfordshire.

Option G: Mixed densities would be preferable. The highest densities (such as Perpetual House in Henley) would not be appropriate in the villages, but there is a substantial demand for small properties in places such as Watlington for both the older residents and for young people trying to buy their first home. One way of helping to make sure these smaller properties remain relatively affordable is by building at a higher density and so limiting the scope for extension in the future. There is also a demand for larger family homes (4+ bedrooms) for which the higher densities are not realistic. We would like to see a mix of densities to accommodate both of these groups.

Option H: A local choice of a higher level of development to achieve specific benefits is acceptable, but we would like to see this restricted to those communities where this approach has been accepted by a majority of the community in a referendum, such as those with a Neighbourhood Plan where this option was included. Because this is a specifically local choice that is in any case probably already feasible with the current planning environment, this should not be part of the general principles for Local Plan 2031. WPC has not responded to this choice.