

## **SODC A Conservative District Councillor's View - January 2021.**

We wish everyone a Happy New Year and hope that you will all stay safe.

We have been asked a number of questions about the Local Plan 2034/5 (LP) which was adopted by the Council last month, so this article is to help people understand the situation. It may also help to relieve insomnia!

Firstly, please remember that the Plan covers the period from 2012 to 2035, so much of the housing in it has already been delivered; around 15,500 homes to date. (Numbers are being rounded.) The LP seeks to deliver 23,500 homes during that time so there are now 8,000 to provide during the remaining term of the Plan. you have probably heard the number of 29,000 homes referred to and this is the 'site allocations total'. We know that some of the sites we allocate in LP will not be delivered for a variety of reasons; the landowner changes his mind about selling; the land is unsuitable or there may be environmental issues. To prevent 'under-supply' from rendering the Plan 'out of date' we include a headroom of 20%. In this instance, some 5,000, which, when allocated to the planned homes of 23,500 gives the total 28,500, which gives the allocation total, (remember I am rounding these figures for simplicity,)

We do not plan to deliver all these 'allocations'. The headroom is there to provide a buffer against allocations found to be undeliverable.

Specifically, for Chinnor Ward, so long as the LP remains 'up-to-date', with Neighbourhood (Development) Plans (NDP) in place, we should not see unplanned, speculative development as was happening from 2015. Chinnor in particular is in a very strong position as its allocations have all been delivered, and the recent review of the NDP carried out by the community, which will go to referendum in May, supports this position. This doesn't mean that no more houses will be built, but they will be very small developments that are referred to as 'windfall' and come from in-filling and such like.

You will be aware that the Secretary of State (SoS) had to intervene, effectively compelling the current Administration of the Council to adopt the LP, and some are saying that this is an attack of Local Democracy.

To understand this, we must look at the way that our democracy works. Subject to international law, all power and responsibility in this country is vested in Parliament. As it would be impossible for Parliament to deal with every aspect in fine detail, Parliament, through the ministers, delegates some of these responsibilities to local councils (one being planning) and the councils are responsible for managing these matters. To enable our system to work, councils operate within well-defined boundaries which are set by Parliament through law and regulation.

One such requirement is that planning authorities like SODC must have up-to-date LPs in place and that these should be up-dated every 5 years. In SODC's case, the first plan was Core Strategy 2012 (CS) and the LP builds on this. We know from the results of a number of Planning Appeals, that CS was considered out of date in 2018 and this was driven home by the Wheatley Brooks Appeal in 2019. We had expected that the LP would have been examined and in place by late 2019, but the change in administration, who had stood on a platform of withdrawing it, meant it was delayed.

The fundamental issue is that the new Administration had no alternative plan to offer and intended to rely on out-of-date CS while they developed an alternative, which would have taken 3 to 5 years. The District would have very little control of its destiny until, at the earliest, the end of 2022 and during

that period, developers would have been able to build pretty much where they wanted. The Appeal Decision at Wheatley Brooks, and the findings of the Inspector when examining the Oxford City LP make it clear that we had to meet some of the Oxford Unmet Need for homes, and that the Green belt provided very limited restriction in this case. In a nutshell, as well as being able to build pretty much anywhere they liked in the District, developers would also be able to build unplanned housing in the Green Belt.

The question then is, should an administration be allowed to ignore the requirements set by Central Government and legislation? This is the dilemma faced by the SoS. Allow an Administration to ignore its legal responsibilities, effectively inflicting unplanned development on its communities, or intervene, overriding an unrealistic election pledge?

We hope that this helps and if you want to know more, please do read Local Plan 2034/5 and the supporting documentation which is available on the Council's web site

We have other matters on the go including Corona Virus work, but this is enough for now!

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