

SODC ward councillor's report – 14th October 2019

The Emerging Local Plan 2034

As you are probably well aware, Cabinet met on 3rd October to make a final decision on the recommendation it would make to Council about the Local Plan. After several months of detailed investigations, negotiations and far-reaching discussions, Cabinet voted unanimously to recommend the withdrawal of the Plan.

The reasons for this have been circulated in a press statement, *as follows*:

(a) withdraw the emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2034 for the following reasons

- the uplift above the standard method from 627 homes to 775 homes a year is excessive, and the existence of the Growth Deal should not be used as a justification for this uplift
- the overall supply of homes in the Local Plan period is considered excessive as it is over 5,000 homes greater than the need identified for South Oxfordshire, even allowing provision for Oxford City's unmet housing need.
- the Local Plan does not give sufficient weight to responding to the climate emergency that we face as recognised by the decision of Council of 11 April 2019
- concerns about site selection issues including:
 - that the scale of Green Belt release is not justified
 - flawed site selection having regard to the sustainability and deliverability of strategic allocations
- concerns about the impact of the housing mix delivery and density policy

Note: The motion continued...

(b) withdraw from the Oxfordshire Statements of Common Ground linked to the emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2034

(c) agree to commence work as soon as practicable on a new ambitious Local Plan, to seek to address the above concerns

(d) request a report on the merits of a joint Local Plan with neighbouring authorities

(e) request the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to provide financial support to support a new ambitious Local Plan

(f) explore other opportunities for funding

(g) bring forward revenue expenditure on a new Local Plan currently estimated at £2 million into the next Medium-Term Financial Plan period, representing the most cost-effective option

(h) ask officers to prepare a new Local Development Scheme and work programme and bring this to Cabinet for approval.

Prior to this being debated by Full Council on 10th October, SODC received a letter from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Govt. Robert Jenrick MP. The letter placed a holding direction over South Oxfordshire District Council's Local Plan and effectively gagged any discussion of the above motion at Council. Therefore, the Council was not allowed to talk about the Local Plan in any form. We now await further news and SODC have sought legal advice. It appears that there may be unresolved questions about the legal references quoted - which would have the effect of declaring the emerging Local Plan unsound.

New Offices for SODC

The Council meeting was able to have confidential discussions around the planned move back to Crowmarsh after the fire which destroyed SODC's offices nearly 5 years ago. There is no controversy over the decision to rebuild the offices in Benson Lane, but there are some important decisions to be made in terms of how much the Council is prepared to invest to construct a sustainable, energy-efficient building that will be fit for the future. Such a build would set a good standard for commercial buildings in our district and will be an office of which we, the local community and the SODC/Vale officers can be proud. When completed the offices will house both SODC and the Vale of White Horse councils.

The new Climate Emergency Advisory Committee (CEAC)

The CEAC held its first meeting in public on 19th September with a wide-ranging agenda. In relation to the Local Plan, the committee has reported to Cabinet that it does not believe that sufficient weight is given in LP 2034 to responding to the climate and ecological crisis that we face. It will also recommend a much more ambitious zero-carbon target for the Council itself (2025) and for the District as a whole (2030) and has provided its recommendations regarding the construction and on-going maintenance of the new office building. These recommendations were approved unanimously at Full Council on 10th October.

Oxfordshire Resources and Waste Strategy

Oxfordshire County Council has launched a new countywide waste strategy that we have been actively involved in. South and Vale remain the two best districts in the county with over 60 per cent of our waste collections sent for reusing, recycling or composting. The strategy aims to help keep household waste growth to zero, increase recycling rates and to send less waste to landfill. You can read the full countywide strategy [here](#).

As a reminder, if any residents want to report a missed collection or fly-tipping, please make sure they go through the usual reporting process via Biffa. More information on reporting missed collections can be found on the South and Vale websites.

There is also a helpful 'What happens to all of my waste?' information sheet [here](#).

Oxfordshire Growth Board Review

The Oxfordshire Growth Board resolved at its meeting on 24 September 2019 to undertake a review of its role and functions. It has produced a short survey to canvas views which will help inform recommendations for how the Board will work in the future. They are asking for feedback on all aspects of the Growth Board, from how it is perceived, its priorities and membership, to the communication methods and meeting format.

Please access the survey by [clicking here](#) – the deadline is 26th November and there is a workshop on 18th November at 6.30pm for any members of the public who are interested in learning more about the review process.

You can read the full report concerning the review [here](#). You can also read more about the about the Growth Board in this [summary document](#) or at www.oxfordshiregrowthboard.org

Cutting congestion and improving public transport in Oxford

An interesting meeting at County Hall on 13th September presented a new joint initiative between OCC and Oxford City to address the problem of traffic congestion in the city. Traffic and transport in the city has a knock-on effect for our residents, so it is good to learn more about their plans. The two Councils have produced a new 'Connecting Oxford' proposal to improve air quality and the time it takes to travel into and around the city by:

- restricting car traffic
- introducing additional 'bus gates'
- reallocating road space to pedestrians and cyclists
- new high frequency bus routes
- charging for workplace parking
- discounts for new bus services for those paying workplace levy

The two councils are now asking for feedback to develop a more detailed project proposal.

You can find out the full details on the [Connecting Oxford proposal here](#). The deadline for submissions is 20 October, and we would encourage you to contribute to this exercise, since what happens in Oxford City matters here, too!

Cutting congestion and improving public transport in Reading

Reading Borough Council is a unitary authority and has consulted on a new transport strategy. This places great emphasis on reducing car traffic in Reading, introducing new car-free bus lanes and thoroughfares, park-and-ride centres, tolling at peak times, action to reduce noxious emissions and improvements for cycling. Because Wokingham BC don't agree with the idea of a workplace parking levy (WPL) and given the awkward boundary arrangements, Reading BC is not proposing one. To work well, the above arrangements would need to be joined-up and coordinated. SODC is expecting to engage with RBC on all the above. Such mitigations could improve commuting times and reduce cross-Thames volumes. Reading BC suggest that a third of the IDR traffic is through-traffic that does not need to come through Reading at all; the question being how to re-route such traffic. Smart tolling or restrictions could potentially discourage such traffic from Reading?

Reading BC is now part of the Transport for South East "sub-national" grouping. The grouping goes from Kent through to Hampshire including Berkshire. A 3rd Reading bridge features prominently on the wish list for TfSE and graphics illustrate the possibility of a new SRN road following the A329M and indicates a prospect to continue to "Oxford". Clearly any such proposition would, over time, generate a mass of new traffic from Bracknell Guildford and beyond.

The next summit meeting on the 3rd Bridge will be on 18th October and David, Sue Cooper and I will attend. There is much to discuss, but progress on mitigations could provide the fastest relief with least cost – appropriate to a Climate Change environment.

Councillor grants

Councillor grants are available and need to be claimed. The joint value for Shiplake could be £2,400 for an appropriate project. (Clearly the parish could top this up!)

Leigh Rawlins

District Councillor (Sonning Common ward)