

Council Meeting on 26 February: Submission of the Partial Review of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Oxford's Unmet Housing Needs

We understand that you will be asked to approve the Local Plan Part 1 Review for submission to the government Planning Inspectorate. At the same time, you will be asked decide whether or not to endorse the Housing and Growth Deal for Oxfordshire. The Growth deal proves that much of the County's supposed housing 'need' is in fact intended to meet external growth aspirations that have not been tested in a public and transparent way.

We urge you to reject proposals to build an additional 4,400 dwellings in the Green Belt. This plan would create a massive urban conurbation linking north Oxford to Kidlington and engulfing rural Begbroke, Yarnton and Water Eaton. This is completely counter to the aims of the Oxford Green Belt which exists to resist urban sprawl and protect Oxford's historic open setting. Cherwell's current approved Local Plan recognised the importance of preventing Kidlington and neighbouring other settlements from being absorbed into a greater Oxford mass. The 'Review' proposes a massive change in current policy and hence is inconstant with the Local Plan proper. It risks setting a very damaging precedent if approved by both Council and government.

We do not object to sustainable levels of development such as in Cherwell's original 2014 submission document. We do object strongly to the numbers proposed in the current Local Plan. These are far in excess of what the Government has said is the correct level of need for Cherwell, even after affordability has been taken into account. The District has both an approved Local Plan and ample housing supply already in place.

It is premature to consider accommodating an additional 4,400 houses to meet Oxford's 'unmet need' since the City does not have an approved Local Plan in place. Cherwell must challenge Oxford City to prove the size of the housing need and maximise the number accommodated within its own boundaries. Oxford has large amount of land available for development – see OCC's Brownfields sites register¹. Oxford could and should provide for most of its housing need before calling on neighbouring councils to meet any shortfall.

The Green Belt has enabled our historic village, with its many listed buildings, to maintain a distinct identity despite massive growth. It has kept development within the natural boundaries of the canal and railway to the west and the open countryside of the Cherwell valley to the north and east. Kidlington is already one of the largest villages in Europe. It has very few internal open spaces for recreation. We treasure the Green Belt for exercise and fresh air, activities which are essential to good physical and mental health.

The extensive Green Belt landscape setting is as crucial to our villages as it is to Oxford City. This is landscape that will be spoilt and lost for ever if so huge a development is allowed to proceed, not only through the encroachment of housing, roads and other infrastructure, but through the traffic, light pollution, loss of natural habitat, and loss of public amenity that would follow. The Green Belt along the Cherwell Valley is as important to Oxford as are its 'dreaming spires'.

Removal of land from Green Belt remains the highest test of 'exceptional circumstances' in planning. Cherwell has not - indeed cannot – demonstrate a need to take Oxford's excess housing since this is still an unknown. The options appraisal conducted by the Council is similarly flawed by adopting the premise that only land nearest Oxford would serve.

We represent the many residents who have participated in the Local Plan Consultations. Interest has mounted during both rounds of the Part one review so much so, that the council has had to employ

extra staff to process the replies. Kidlington alone submitted nearly 450 individual replies via our free drop boxes in September. We know that a large number of objections were submitted directly to Cherwell. We have spoken to hundreds of very concerned and often angry people. Both of the Kidlington public meetings at Exeter Hall were standing room only. We know first-hand that the public response is overwhelmingly critical of these proposals. People want to be able to afford to live within their community but most understand these proposals are not intended to help local issues and could well make them worse.

Kidlington Development Watch works to raise public awareness and participation in major Planning consultation exercises and participated in the previous Local Plan Examination in Public. We find the public shares our strong belief that Cherwell has a democratic duty to listen to residents and act on their feedback. Speaking in Parliament on 30 October 2017 the Communities and Local Government Minister Alok Sharma MP asserted that the government was committed to retaining the Green Belt. He went further, saying a responsible local Authority would 'have to take its local community with it' before building on the Green Belt. Be in no doubt that the majority of residents object in the strongest possible terms to the loss of Green Belt. It is profoundly disappointing to see that Cherwell's planning officers have failed to respond to the public consultation². We look to you and to your fellow councillors to correct this democratic deficiency by voting against the proposals.

It is extraordinary and shameful that the planning department seem intent on rushing through plans of massive importance to the community and our heritage. We believe both the plan and consultation process are so fundamentally flawed that it is not fit to put forward to the Planning Inspectorate. You are being asked to decide the outcome of a highly contentious, important public planning consultation. We urge you to vote to withdraw the present Plan. The Council should instead perform a full Local Plan review, grounded in a sound, up to date needs appraisal and informed by emerging new information³ which should include the outcome of a full Spatial review.

Our thanks for taking the time to read and consider our concerns.

Sent on behalf of Kidlington Development Watch

WWW.KidlingtonDW.org

1 https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/download/924/oxford_brownfield_register
https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/4245/oxford_brownfield_register_-_december_2017_pdf

2 Cherwell's 'Schedule of Focused Changes and Minor Modifications' to the Partial Review (appendix 3 of your meeting papers)

3 Oxford –Cambridge 'Growth Corridor and Expressway proposals for one million homes, with 300,000 new houses for Oxfordshire or 10,000 houses per mile, ie 6 more cities the size of Oxford over the next 30 years <https://www.nic.org.uk/our-work/growth-corridor/>