

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Cabinet

held on Friday 7 August 2015 at 10.00 am

in the Meeting Room 1, 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, Milton, OX14 4SB



Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Matthew Barber (Chairman), Roger Cox (Vice-Chairman), Eric Batts, Charlotte Dickson, Mohinder Kainth, Sandy Lovatt, Mike Murray and Elaine Ware

Officers: David Buckle, Steve Culliford, Adrian Duffield, Sophie Horsley, Margaret Reed and Anna Robinson

Also present: Councillor Debby Hallett, Councillor Judy Roberts and Councillor Robert Sharp

Number of members of the public: 22

Ca.7 Apologies for absence

None

Ca.8 Minutes

RESOLVED: to adopt as a correct record the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 10 July 2015 and agree that the chairman signs them.

Ca.9 Declarations of interest

None

Ca.10 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

None

Ca.11 Statements, petitions, and questions relating to matters affecting the Cabinet

Cabinet received seven requests to address the meeting.

1. Councillor Debby Hallett made a statement

“Vale’s report specifically refers to a 'proven' need for more housing than Oxford can accommodate.

Although I understand that Oxford isn't being seen to be doing enough to help itself, as far as I'm aware there isn't any legal provision for determining if any declared need is 'proven' or not. When the Oxfordshire Growth Board's process for handling disagreement reaches its effective limit, the issue is dropped into a filing cabinet and nothing further is done. I would encourage the Growth Board to re-address this problem amongst yourselves. Personally, I expect Oxford will do little more that it has already done, and their neighbours will have to provide. It puts to question the meaning of 'cooperation'.

I, and my Lib Dem group, remain opposed to piecemeal removal of bits of the Green Belt for housing development. We still seek a proper, independent and public Green Belt review, where the questions asked are honestly answered. There's no sign of that forthcoming.

How can the various districts begin to consider options to meet Oxford's unmet housing need before we have a completed Green Belt review, particularly, as in the case of the Vale, where Green Belt land is being considered as an option to meet the unmet need?

Once the number of extra houses neighbouring districts must build is ultimately agreed, then what? Where would the houses best be placed? To divide them equally between the four neighbouring districts seems amateurish, unfair, and ineffective. I've been reading that City's housing need is greatest near their employment sites, on the eastern side of the city. That should be a consideration in deciding how best neighbouring districts can together meet the need. Consideration of proximity to jobs and provision of transport is relevant. If we build somewhere other than on the eastern edge of the city, then Oxford needs a modern and effective transport system to get people from home to work, not an old system (even an expanded OLD system) that continues to rely on the over capacity A34 and local roads.

And finally, housing need is explicitly not an exceptional circumstance that would allow for developing the green belt. If we needed green belt land in order to meet SHMA figures, then that fact should have been considered as a constraint when determining Vale's housing targets for the Local Plan. What evidence has Vale produced to support the case for exceptional circumstances that would support development on the Green Belt?”

In response to Councillor Hallett's statement, the Leader reported that the council disputed the City Council's housing capacity and believed that this needed to be proven, hence the commissioning of a consultant. The Oxfordshire Growth Board also needed to provide evidence of the housing numbers required and the council had suggested improvements to the Growth Board's process. Dividing the housing

requirement by four for the four rural districts was too simplistic. The evidence in support of the council claiming 'exceptional circumstances' was part of the evidence submitted to the planning inspector along with the Local Plan. He questioned the rationale that communities should grow at the expense of others. He hoped the proposed actions in the head of planning's report would provide a fresh opportunity to look at potential housing sites and invited the Opposition group to suggest possible sites.

2. Colin Thomas made a statement on behalf of the Sunningwell Parishioners Against Damage to the Environment (SPADE) as follows:

“Sunningwell Parishioners Against Damage to the Environment is an established campaigning group, which for over a decade, has responded to strategic planning processes, at local, district, and county level, with, and on behalf of the residents of Sunningwell Parish.

- We believe in the **permanence** of the Green Belt
- We accept the need for housing developments and infrastructure but believe that brown field sites should be used before green field and certainly before long established and valued Green Belt
- We believe that local people should have a true voice in establishing planning policy

With regard to addressing Oxford's unmet housing need:

- We believe that residential development should be co-located with job creation in order to make it truly sustainable i.e. in Oxford
- We applaud your demand that the City council revise its local plan in order that a sound assessment can be made of Oxford's true housing capacity
- We urge you to seek that they also assess the further development opportunities created by the intended Western relief flood channel
- We are concerned that your paper today promotes North Abingdon to address the City's unmet need
 - whilst you are uncertain of the veracity of the City's housing figures
 - when you have yet to meet the Vale's own full SHMA; and,
 - your justification is the remote park and ride when this policy is unproven and un-evidenced
- The forthcoming Examination in Public will consider your incursion into Green Belt of 1000 houses and now you are considering co-locating up to 3000 more, even before the enquiry has sat and scrutinised the initial 1000
- We would remind you that North Abingdon already faces huge incursions from development due to the OCC Local Transport Plan. These include the 4-way junction, 1600 space Park and Ride, 100 space Lorry Park, Lorry driver facilities, Freight Transfer Station, and a strategic link road between the A34 and M40, the western terminus of it being at Lodge Hill, which has been openly discussed at both the Oxfordshire Growth Board and the Local Enterprise Partnership
- All this changes open countryside, supposedly protected by its Green Belt status, to a major urban extension
- We therefore strongly support your statement that locations for strategic settlements should also be found outside the Green Belt

The Vale has been a supporter of the Green Belt. We trust that you will continue this support, actively adopt the policies outlined in the NPPF and positively reflect the Government's recent statements on the importance of Green Belt. Now is the time to

protect Green Belt - not to make empty statements of apparent support whilst planning for its obliteration in North Abingdon.”

In response to Mr Thomas’ statement, the Leader was grateful that the group recognised the council’s efforts to challenge Oxford City to review its local plan and reduce the housing requirement for the Vale. There should be co-location of homes and jobs, for example at the Oxford North Gateway. Cabinet would be making no decisions today but would seek the Scrutiny Committee’s views on 20 August before the Leader made an individual Cabinet member decision. At this stage, Cabinet was not endorsing any area for housing; an evidence base was needed first. However, the council could not defer consideration of this pending the full adoption of its local plan. The Leader also believed that the building of a full junction on the A34 at Lodge Hill was required without development of a Park and Ride, or a lorry park.

3. David Marsh on behalf of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) asked the following question:

“In its Draft Local Plan (February 2014), the Vale District Council originally identified twenty-two sites for removal from the Oxford Green Belt.

This included the four Green Belt sites identified in the Pre-Submission Plan, for a total of 1,510 houses at North Abingdon (800 houses), North West Abingdon (200 houses), North Radley (240 houses) and South Kennington (270 houses).

It also included an additional 18 parcels of Green Belt land (see list of sites below).

While these sites were not identified for development in Part 1 of the Plan, our fear then was that they would be earmarked for housing in Part 2 of the Plan.

It seems from the Cabinet Report by the Vale’s Head of Planning: ‘Planning to address Oxford unmet housing need in Vale of White Horse’, which includes as one of its options further encroachment into the Green Belt in Spatial Area 1: Abingdon-on-Thames and Oxford Fringe Sub Area, that our fears could now materialise.

Are we right to assume that some or all of the 18 Green Belt sites, or parts of some or all of them, that were included in the Draft Local Plan (February 2014) may now be identified as options to satisfy the City of Oxford’s unmet need, in advance of any consultation on Part 2 of the Local Plan?

The 18 Green Belt sites included in the Draft Local Plan (February 2014) were:

1. Abingdon (East)
2. Appleton (North)
3. Appleton (South-West)
4. Botley (North)
5. Botley (South)
6. Botley (East)
7. Botley (West)
8. Cumnor (North)
9. Cumnor (North-East)

10. Cumnor (South)
11. Cumnor (West)
12. Farmoor (North)
13. Kennington (North)
14. Kennington (South-West)
15. Radley (South)
16. Wootton (North-East)
17. Wootton (South-East)
18. Wootton (South-West)”

In response, the Cabinet member with responsibility for planning policy reported that although the council had to carry out a review of options to meet Oxford’s unmet housing need, including looking at the Green Belt, Cabinet had no particular preferred option at this stage. All relevant and realistic options would be considered. However, Cabinet looked forward to the Campaign to Protect Rural England’s further engagement with public consultation associated with this exercise.

4. Councillor Judy Roberts had registered to make a statement but had not arrived.

The chairman reminded the meeting that Cabinet planned to refer this matter to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration and Councillor Roberts was chairman of that committee and therefore would have the opportunity to ask her questions at its meeting on 20 August.

5. Joanne Blower made a statement on behalf of Sunningwell Parish Council as follows:

“Sunningwell Parish Council (SPC) seeks to comment on the Cabinet report dealing with addressing Oxford’s Unmet Housing Need in the Vale of White Horse.

As a Council we are aware of the demands that are placed upon Councillors to fulfil their statutory obligations and SPC is supportive of the statutory duty to cooperate that exists between the Oxfordshire Council Authorities. It accepts that demand for new housing exists within Oxfordshire, but contends that the housing numbers contained in the SHMA (the basis for arriving at the County’s housing requirements) are economically driven rather than housing need driven. It is disappointing to find that the SHMA numbers have been adopted by the Vale of White Horse.

SPC is extremely concerned about the lack of meaningful dialogue that has taken place between itself and the Vale on:

1. the current proposed number of houses and sites for new housing located within Sunningwell Parish boundaries at North Abingdon, prior to their inclusion in the Vale’s Local Plan (building 1,000 houses in a Green Belt location). SPC find this totally unacceptable.
2. the implication of Oxford City’s contention that it is only able to provide land space for 16,000 of its SHMA allocation, whilst seeking to offload under the duty to cooperate, the median figure of 12,000 houses on surrounding District Councils. The Vale’s share being one quarter of that figure.

3. the impact, if any, that the Vale's share of Oxford's unmet housing will have on the number of new-builds designated for North Abingdon and the Green Belt, in general.

SPC is aware that the Vale, along with South Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Councils highlighted grave concerns that Oxford has much more land that could be used to meet its own need than is being made available (Oxford's Housing Land Availability and Unmet Housing Need, 22 Oct 2014). Furthermore, that much is made of the need to protect the visual impact on historic Oxford and the green lungs of Oxford City, in an Investigation into the Potential to Accommodate Urban Extensions in Oxford's Green Belt (produced by Oxford City Council). This is all very Oxford centric — what is the Vale doing to ensure that green spaces in Oxford are not protected, at the expense of the GB and the welfare of rural GB communities in its District?

SPC is concerned that in complying with the Vale's duty to co-operate with Oxford City Council on its Unmet Housing Need and with Oxfordshire County Council's Local Transport Plan for a Park and Ride/lorry park and freight depot in the Green Belt, at/in the vicinity of Lodge Hill this area of GB will be annihilated. Furthermore, to identify North Abingdon (Lodge Hill) in the Oxford City's Green Belt review as having "High potential for development to take place that does not cause unacceptable harm to the function of the Green Belt" is to deny the reasons why GB was created, each of the five criteria to be satisfied are not mutually exclusive. Development here will destroy the GB and is likely in the longer term to result in Abingdon and surrounding villages becoming part of an Oxford/Abingdon conurbation.

Sustainable development means that the current generation satisfies its basic needs and enjoys an improving quality of life without compromising the position of future generations. It is difficult to see how this premise is being met when plenty of land is available for house/commercial/industrial development within Oxfordshire, that is not within the Green Belt.

Furthermore, if Oxford City does not have land available to meet its housing requirements, how is it to find land for the commercial/industrial development that is to create the additional employment that is driving its housing requirement? If the employment is not in Oxford itself but in the wider environs, the requirement to build houses in the Green Belt in Oxford's immediate vicinity is undermined."

In response, the Cabinet member with responsibility for planning policy reported that the planning inspector that examined the Cherwell District Council Local Plan had recommended the use of the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment numbers; this council should do the same. He encouraged the parish council to participate in future consultation and engagement opportunities. He also reported that this council had asked Oxford City Council to refresh its local plan, and revisit restrictive policies that restricted its ability to provide housing, including allocating more housing land at the Northern Gateway.

6. Priscilla Dudding, chair of Radley Parish Council's Neighbourhood Planning Group submitted the following statement that was read out on her behalf by the Democratic Services Officer:

“Radley Parish Council is very concerned to read the proposals in the paper from the Head of Planning entitled “*Planning to address Oxford unmet housing need in the Vale of White Horse*”.

As we understand the thinking in this paper, the result could be to more than double the number of new houses which the Vale is currently proposing should be built in the Abingdon and Oxford fringe area under the Local Plan. The report provides a middle point estimate that the number of houses falling to the Vale to deliver to meet Oxford’s unmet need will be 3000. It argues that ‘good opportunities exist to meet unmet need’ in the Abingdon and Oxford fringe area, while for the other two areas of the Vale the report argues that it is ‘unclear how development could meet unmet need’. The implication is that most of the estimated 3000 homes required to meet Oxford’s needs will need to be built in the Abingdon and Oxford fringe area. This is in addition to 722 dwellings already identified as needing to be found in this area under Part 2 allocations, making a total of perhaps **3,500** homes to be found in the sub-area on as yet unidentified sites. This compares to **1,990** homes in strategic sites in the sub-area already identified in the Plan.

Under the current Local Plan proposals, Radley Parish already faces the prospect of some 450 new dwellings on the edges of the existing village and a further 660 homes on 2 strategic sites which border neighbouring parishes¹. We are already extremely concerned about the impact of development on this scale on our small community. It will eat into the narrow strips of agricultural land dividing our settlement from Abingdon and Kennington and could overwhelm the existing community and infrastructure. Further substantial development within the parish boundaries would almost certainly destroy Radley as a village standing separately from the neighbouring settlements of Abingdon and Kennington and would utterly transform its character.

Like much of the Oxford fringe and Abingdon area, Radley is highly ‘sustainable’ in the sense that it has excellent transport links with Oxford and indeed with Didcot, Reading and London. But it is a travesty of the term ‘sustainable development’ to suggest that good transport links alone can justify the destruction of an existing community, the loss of swathes of agricultural land and the erosion of Green Belt. The Vale can expect extremely stiff and concerted opposition to any plans for further development in our area. It needs to challenge the figures and assumptions on which the estimated numbers are based, and think again from first principles about where any further substantial tranche of housing in the district should be sited.”

240 homes at the North West Radley strategic site; around 200 homes at the South Radley site removed from the Green Belt and identified as suitable for part 2 allocations; 390 homes in the Radley Parish area of the North Abingdon site; and 270 homes in the South Kennington site. The village currently comprises some 650 homes in the main settlement and a further 250-300 mobile homes within the parish boundaries to the south of Kennington.

In response, the Leader reported that the council was challenging figures and assumptions on which the estimated housing numbers were based.

7. David Woodford, on behalf of Keep Cumnor Green, asked the following questions:

“(i) Will the VWHDC confirm that it will abide by the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework and also current Government policy regarding the protection of the Green Belt areas?”

- (ii) Will the VWHDC confirm that it will abide by the provision within the National Planning Policy Framework that unmet housing need does not constitute exceptional grounds for infringing the Green Belt?
- (iii) What authority does the Oxford Growth Board have to preside over the future of the Green Belt?

Specifically on Cumnor:

- (iv) Why is the VWHDC pressing ahead with plans to remove five areas from the Oxford Green Belt around Cumnor when its own *Green Belt Review*, on which its Local Plan Part 1 is based, gave them highly positive environmental assessments?
- (v) Why, having dropped the plans for a 200-house development in area 6 around Cumnor, presumably on environmental grounds, is the VWHDC now proposing to remove this area from the Green Belt?
- (vi) Why is the VWHDC not complying with the Council's own decision following publication of draft proposals, to retain areas 4 and 5 around Cumnor within the Green Belt?"

In response to Mr Woodford's questions above, the Leader and the Cabinet member with responsibility for planning policy reported:

- (i) Yes, the council was abiding by these provisions.
- (ii) The council must consider the National Planning Policy Framework as a whole.
- (iii) The Oxfordshire Growth Board had agreed that each district council remained in control of its local plan.
- (iv), (v) and (vi) all referred to sites that contributed less to the Green Belt than others. The council had to rank each potential development site across its district. The detail had been included in the evidence base of the Local Plan Part 1 and would be subject to examination in September 2015.

The Leader of the Council also looked forward to meeting Keep Cumnor Green shortly.

Ca.12 Planning to address Oxford unmet housing need in Vale of White Horse

Cabinet considered the head of planning's report on how the council should plan to address Oxford's unmet housing need.

Following the six Oxfordshire councils' preparation of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment in 2013-2014, the Oxfordshire Growth Board had endorsed principles to quantify and apportion Oxfordshire's unmet housing need. Each district council would then address this housing need through its own local plan process. This reflected the requirements in the legal duty for councils to co-operate on plan-making.

Since then, Oxford City Council had asked surrounding Oxfordshire districts to make provision for that part of Oxford's housing need that it was unable to accommodate. Oxford City had identified capacity for 10,000 new homes for the period up to 2031, whereas the Strategic Housing Market Assessment had identified Oxford's objectively assessed housing need within a range of 24,000 to 32,000 homes during this period.

Cherwell, South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District Councils had together commissioned a consultant to study Oxford's housing land capacity. This study indicated that Oxford had capacity for 16,000 new homes over the same period. Using this figure,

the report set out three scenarios to apportion the unmet housing need equally across the four rural districts in Oxfordshire:

- Low = 2,000 homes, being the low point of Oxford City's objectively assessed housing need (24,000) less the capacity identified by this council's consultant (16,000), divided by four
- Medium = 3,000 homes, being the mid-point of the Oxford's objectively assessed housing need (28,000) less the capacity identified by this council's consultant (16,000), divided by four
- High = 4,000 homes, being the high point of Oxford's objectively assessed housing need (32,000) less the capacity identified by this council's consultant (16,000), divided by four

Cabinet believed that these three scenarios could be used to test options to address Oxford's unmet housing need.

Cabinet considered that the most appropriate way to determine the correct level of unmet housing need within the scenario ranges above was for Oxford City Council to review its local plan. Following the motion passed at the Council meeting on 16 July, the Leader had written to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government asking him to intervene and compel Oxford City to revise its local plan. In the meantime, Cabinet could consider broad plan-making principles and areas of search in the Vale and to commence work in investigating options to address the proven unmet housing need. The report proposed three broad areas of search, as defined in Core Policy 3 of the Local Plan Part 1:

- Abingdon-on-Thames and Oxford fringe sub-area
- South east Vale sub-area
- Western Vale sub-area

Cabinet supported this approach to ascertain which sub-area had the greatest potential for accommodating Oxford's unmet housing need. Once the scale of the unmet housing need and the Vale's share of it was proven, the testing results could inform a decision on the most appropriate method to bring forward additional housing.

Although Cabinet was minded to endorse the proposals set out in the head of planning's report, it invited the Scrutiny Committee to consider these at its meeting scheduled for 20 August. Following this, Cabinet was content for the leader to take an individual Cabinet member decision on this matter, in the absence of the Cabinet member with responsibility for the planning policy.

RESOLVED

(a) that Cabinet is minded to:

- (i) endorse the approach that Oxford's unmet housing need might be in the range of 8,000 to 16,000 homes and that pending confirmation of quantum, this range be used to frame options testing; and
- (ii) endorse the broad plan-making principles and approach to addressing the Vale's appropriate share of the unmet housing need as outlined in paragraphs 16-19 of the head of planning's report;

but

- (b) Cabinet invites the Scrutiny Committee to consider the proposals in (a) above at its meeting on 20 August 2015. Following consideration of the views of the Scrutiny Committee, the Leader (in the absence of the Cabinet member for planning policy) will take an individual Cabinet member decision confirming the decision on this matter.

The meeting closed at 10.46 am