

Scrutiny Committee



Report of Head of Development and Housing

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To: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 27th July 2017

Joint Housing Strategy

Recommendation

To recommend to the Cabinet that the Joint Housing Strategy is approved, subject to the outcome of the public consultation.

Purpose of Report

1. To present to Scrutiny a draft Joint Housing Strategy 2017 – 2027 and to seek approval for proceeding with a recommendation to Vale Cabinet for the approval of the Strategy subject to the outcome of the public consultation.

Strategic Objectives

2. A Joint Housing Strategy provides clarity for how the councils will work towards achieving the challenging government-set housing targets, whilst aiming to deliver an appropriate range of housing that will meet the needs of people living and working in the districts.
3. A sound, evidence-based housing strategy can be referenced as the source of housing policy within a Local Plan. A housing strategy will enable a housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to be produced and utilised in section 106 agreements, minimising delay and negotiation challenges.

Background

4. The Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2014) (SHMA) provided an independent, objective assessment of need for housing across the county.
5. The housing targets for both South and the Vale set out in the SHMA are high and will require annual delivery over the next 15 or 16 years significantly in excess of that which has generally been achieved in the past. In addition, there is an identified unmet need for Oxford City which the surrounding districts are having to take into consideration.
6. Wessex Economics Limited was commissioned to provide an extensive base of evidence to support the development of a Joint Housing Strategy with research focussing on four specific themes:
 - delivering housing numbers
 - providing an appropriate range of housing
 - delivering housing to support forecast economic growth
 - improving standards in new homes.
7. The findings from this research were presented by Wessex Economics at a stakeholder event organised by the councils in January 2017 to representatives of organisations from the housebuilding industry including and other organisations with an interest in housing including developers, housing associations, the Homes and Communities Agency and Oxfordshire Community Land Trust. The process for wider, public consultation, to be organised by the councils, is planned for later in the year.
8. The Housing Study report produced as a result of this research concluded that proactive action is needed by both councils to be able to meet their challenging housing numbers.
9. The draft Joint Housing Strategy draws from the findings and recommendations of the Housing Study, focussing specifically on the task of delivering new-build homes and the role for the councils as 'Housing Delivery Enabler' to achieve delivery whilst ensuring an appropriate range of housing and improvements in standards is secured to meet the needs of people living and working in our districts.
10. The Action Plan within the Joint Housing Strategy aims to break down the recommended courses of action into what is realistically achievable in the short, medium and long term, given that the direction of the first five years of the Strategy's lifespan will be predominantly governed by the existing pipeline of planning permissions already granted on sites that are not yet under construction.
11. The councils will need to develop existing relationships with Registered Providers to expand available capacity, look further afield for innovative opportunities and new partnerships and to consider the role of councils as financial investors in the future delivery of housing.
12. By having a sound Joint Housing Strategy the councils will be able to exercise greater control over the quality and standards of future housing developments and be in a better position to resist speculative and unwelcome applications.

13. The Planning Department and Housing Needs Team have been consulted throughout the development of the Joint Housing Strategy Team which has been reviewed and approved by both Cabinet Members for Housing.

Options open to both South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse

14. Each council could decide on separate housing strategies.

However, given that issues around housing delivery are the same for both councils, a Joint Housing Strategy provides simplicity of approach and economies of scale

15. The councils decide not to have a Housing Strategy.

The omission of a Housing Strategy can reduce support for housing policy and impact on negotiations on housing delivery.

Financial Implications

16. Where elements of the strategy cannot be implemented within existing resources, this will be considered as part of the Council's annual budgeting process or, sought, from external funding sources such as the HCA or other development partners

Legal Implications

17. None. The councils are producing a separate Homelessness Strategy

Risks

18. The absence of a Housing Strategy increases both councils' risk of external challenge to housing requirements, particularly as the evidence base commissioned to support the development of the Strategy is key to supporting the development of housing planning policies.

Other Implications

19. None

Conclusion

20. Both South and Vale have been without an up to date Housing Strategy for a number of years, the omission of which reduces the councils' ability to defend their existing housing policies and to create new policies which will enhance future provision.
21. The work that has been undertaken to support the development of a new Joint Housing Strategy has provided a clear set of recommendations with a focus on the need for the councils to take on the role of 'Housing Delivery Enabler' to ensure that challenging housing targets can be met.
22. More importantly, the direction recommended in the Action Plan will enable the councils to be more in control over the future of housing developments in both districts.

Background Papers

Reports produced by Wessex Economics Limited:

- “Housing Study: to support the development of a Joint Housing Strategy for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse”
- “Background Paper 1 – Accelerating Housing Delivery”
- “Background Paper 2 – The Private Rented Sector in S & V”
- “Background Paper 3 – Employment and Housing Growth”
- “Background Paper 4 – A Profile of the South & Vale Housing Market, Needs and Opportunities”
- Background Paper 5 – Standards in New Homes”