

# **JOINT HOUSING STRATEGY FOR SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE AND VALE OF WHITE HORSE DISTRICT COUNCILS**

## **FOREWORD**

The Local Plans for South Oxfordshire and The Vale of White Horse district councils identify the need to build a significant number of new homes over the next 14 – 16 years. This represents a considerable challenge, which can only be met if the Councils work with landowners, developers, local communities and infrastructure providers to help them complete the planned number of new houses included in the Local Plans.

The Joint Housing Strategy does not seek to vary the number of planned new houses. Its clear purpose is to set out how the councils will meet this challenge by proactively managing the pipeline of new housing supply, helping developers to bring sites forward and working with existing and new partners to develop innovative housing solutions.

It is important that developers are given clear guidance on the councils' priorities for delivering new homes of the right type, in the right place and at the right time, and which meet required housing standards.

The councils also recognise the need to actively seek out opportunities to buy land and explore partnerships that will enable the Council to expand the range of housing options available in both South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse and/or secure the level of development planned for within the Councils Local Plans.

Achieving a rate of delivery needed to meet Local Plan requirements is the key driver behind the Strategy's ten-year action plan, which is designed to initiate, develop and progress a range of initiatives that will encourage new house building that more closely reflects the aspirations and needs of people currently living, or wishing to live, in our districts.

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are facing a significant challenge relating to the delivery of new homes.
2. South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council (hereafter referred to as South and Vale) are planning to enable development of new homes, in line with the Objectively Assessed Housing Need (OAHN) for both districts originally set out in the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)<sup>1</sup>
3. Reflecting the most recently published Local Plan documentation, South is planning to deliver 23,500 homes over the period 2011 – 2033.

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<sup>1</sup> Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2014

The Vale is planning to deliver 20,560 homes over the period 2011 – 2031 as set out in the Adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1.

4. It is acknowledged that as local plans are examined and adopted the target figures they contain may differ from those set out in this document and any necessary amendment will be part of the ongoing review process set out in the Action Plan.
5. Recent announcements for a proposed change in the methodology for calculating the Objectively Assessed Need may also impact on housing figures and the Strategy will be revised accordingly.
6. This planned housing development, though, is not just about delivering a certain number of buildings. There is also a need to make sure that new homes are of a high quality and deliver a wide range of tenure options, in the right locations, to support planned economic growth and ensure that vulnerable people have access to homes that enable them to live independently.
7. The supply of a high volume and wide range of housing, including affordable housing, is viewed as critical to the future growth of our local economies, as highlighted in South and Vale's respective corporate plans. The councils' focus will be to drive the delivery of housing in a way that enables greater control over site locations, standards and local involvement.
8. This Joint Housing Strategy has been developed following a significant amount of additional independent research and sets out the actions and policies needed to deliver these new homes, and achieve the mix of homes needed in terms of tenure, size and type of dwelling.
9. Neighbourhood Plans have the potential to make a significant contribution to achieving the aims of this Joint Housing Strategy, where appropriate.

## **CHALLENGES IN BOOSTING HOUSING DELIVERY**

10. The scale of the challenge can be summarised as follows:
  - Over the remaining years of the Local Plan period, Both South and Vale will need to increase the annual delivery of new homes each year, when compared to average annual delivery of new homes already achieved in the first 5 years of the each district's Plan period.
  - Plan-led approaches determine a number of homes on the basis of objectively assessed need, which combines a number of factors.
  - Plan-led systems usually work on the allocation of land that is sufficient to meet the requirement to deliver the required number of homes as determined by the objectively assessed need.

- Capacity within the house-building industry impacts on rates of construction for a number of reasons, including labour shortages and increases in the costs of materials.
- The whole housing construction process is extremely complex, from planning application and consent (cost of infrastructure, funding subsidised housing, timescales just to get to the stage where land is ready for development.) through to a completed development that is further impacted including labour force and supply chain matters.

## BACKGROUND

11. A sound evidence base is essential to the creation of any strategy. Accordingly, South and Vale councils appointed Wessex Economics Limited to undertake a detailed research study that provides a strategic framework for assessing current and future housing requirements, to meet the needs of our communities and the local economy.
12. The final report and supporting background research documentation<sup>2</sup> is a major piece of evidence-based work that provides the councils with a clear set of findings and recommendations. The suite of documents produced can be viewed [here](#) for further information<sup>3</sup>.
13. The report and supporting research papers provides:
  - 1) A profile of the current demand and supply for housing stock in the districts, and the **current gaps in provision**.
  - 2) From a **demand** perspective, an evaluation of the socio-demographic make-up of people that already live in the districts and want to move to the districts especially for high value jobs and their specific needs in terms of housing, in line with the economic forecasting to support the SHMA
  - 3) From a **supply** perspective, an evaluation of the current asset/stock base and an understanding of how it maps to demand both now and in the future, based on the councils' plans for economic development.
  - 4) **Projections of future demand** for housing based on the different employment scenarios which underpin the SHMA. In particular the need to understand the impact on the job profile across the socio

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<sup>2</sup> Housing Study: to support the development of a Joint Housing Strategy for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse - Final Report. Wessex Economics Ltd

<sup>3</sup> Findings arising from the research undertaken were reviewed by various housing organisations including developers and Registered Providers before final production of these documents

economic groups and therefore the location and type of appropriate housing including at particular locations such as Harwell Campus and near to the Culham Science Centre.

- 5) A baseline in terms of current housing development delivery across both districts and an assessment of the obstacles preventing, and **opportunities for accelerating housing delivery** in both districts
14. The evidence-based report focussed on the following four separate, but interconnected housing themes relating to the delivery of new-build housing,
  - ***Delivering housing numbers***
  - ***Providing an appropriate range of housing***
  - ***Delivering housing to support forecast economic growth***
  - ***Improving standards in new homes***

## **SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE JOINT HOUSING STRATEGY**

15. **The main objective of the Joint Housing Strategy is to outline the means by which South and Vale Councils can deliver the councils' significant new-build housing targets**
16. This objective can best be achieved by:
  - adopting a “housing delivery enabler” role
  - increasing the level of private sector investment in new housing delivery
  - increasing the level of public sector expenditure as a percentage of total investment in new housing delivery.
  - Working in close collaboration with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), land owners and developers to secure sites, master plan developments and obtain government funding to deliver;
    - The right balance of types and tenure of new homes to meet housing need, support economic growth and address Didcot's Garden Town priorities.
    - A range of low cost home ownership options that provide first-time entry points to home ownership
    - A good supply of affordable rented homes for those unable to buy
    - Suitable housing that enables older people and people with other specialist housing needs to live independently.
    - self-build and custom build initiative and ensuring land is made available for this purpose
    - Opportunities arising from Neighbourhood Plans
  - Working with partners to overcome infrastructure bottlenecks that impact adversely on business competitiveness and new residential site

delivery

- Working with Neighbourhood Plan groups where housing development opportunities have been identified.
  - Bringing forward development where there are gaps in provision, by using council resources and available government funding to establish effective, alternative delivery mechanisms.
17. Because the strategy is focussed on delivering the councils' significant new-build housing targets, this Joint Housing Strategy does not address other aspects of housing provision that are sometimes included in other Local Authority Housing Strategies, such as raising quality of existing private sector housing stock, providing disabled facilities grants to improve accessibility of existing housing etc. which are addressed by South and Vale's Environmental Health Service.
18. This focus on new housing provision means that the Housing Strategy will therefore broadly support the development of policies that encourage more new-build housing and better quality new build housing of appropriate size and which also caters for the accessibility and adaptability requirements of people living with physical disabilities.
19. The provision of both new housing also underpins South and Vale's commitment to reducing homelessness. Accordingly, in recognition of the importance of this issue, South and Vale have produced separate joint strategies for both Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation. These are specific and comprehensive in their targets and are designed to meet South and Vale's statutory duty towards people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. These strategy documents can be viewed [here](#).
20. Also, the proposed action plan linked to this strategy (see Table 1) takes into account the fact that the Local Plans for Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire are at different stages

## THE JOINT HOUSING STRATEGY

21. The strategy is underpinned by the research findings and an action plan based on recommendations will necessarily require a long-term strategy, since it's main objective is to deliver the councils' significant new-build housing targets over the next 15 years.
22. However, to assist with delivery, the strategy has been segmented into three time frames, years 1-3, years 4-6 and years 7-10.

**In Years 1-3**, the Strategy will involve the following actions;

- A. Building the Council's capacity to develop a "housing enabler" role. This can best be achieved by focussing on the areas identified in Figure 1, below.

**Figure 1: Steps in Developing the Housing Enabler Role**

1. Forward planning of housing delivery	<b>Resource and staff planning</b>	<b>Prioritisation</b>
2. Development management & planning		
3. Co-ordination of infrastructure investment		
4. Increasing the diversity of housing delivery		
5. Exploring the scope for direct Local Authority investment in land & development		

Source: Wessex Economics

- B. Completing work on the Local Plan framework for delivery of new housing;
- C. Ensuring that essential systems for processing planning applications, monitoring performance and forward planning are in place; and
- D. Working with developers to unblock obstacles on large strategic sites which will deliver new homes over a long period, to ensure commencement of construction at the earliest opportunity.
- E. Producing proposals for Council acquisition of land or investment in development will be undertaken; along with early scoping of the merits of the Councils taking on an a lead role in Infrastructure Dependencies Mapping and Infrastructure Co-ordination for developments across South and Vale.
- F. Developing a checklist to consider the tenure balance on new development sites. The councils may need to ensure schemes reflect emerging national government policy as it is adopted, including, for example, discounted market sale.
- G. Seeking to adopt the standards for Building Regulations Part M (4) Category 2 'accessible and adaptable' dwellings on all affordable housing<sup>4</sup>. The Nationally Described Space Standards Level 1 will also be applied to affordable housing. For market housing, the Councils will seek 15% Category 2 standard and application of the minimum (1 and 2 bedroom) Space Standard.
- NOTE: These recommendations recognise the need for viability testing through the planning process*

<sup>4</sup> "Access to and use of buildings: Approved Document M" (updated March 2016) – Department of Communities and Local Government

- H. Adopting policies that include provision in both affordable and market housing for housing to be built, or be capable of adaptation prior to occupation, to Part M (4) Category 3 standard, so that homes are available for households with more specialised mobility needs.  
*NOTE: These recommendations recognise the need for viability testing through the planning process*
- I. Reviewing the strategy at the end of year 3 to determine whether it needs to be adjusted or updated.
23. The main aim of the strategy, in this phase, is to ensure that the current mainstream mechanisms for housing delivery are operating at maximum capacity.
24. **In years 4-6**, the Strategy will involve the following actions;

- J. Introducing Infrastructure Dependencies Mapping as part of the Housing Delivery Enabler role.

This will ensure that housing is not delayed, by reason of poor co-ordination of road and utility infrastructure investment. This is not put forward as a short-term action because the approach is being piloted elsewhere (in the South East LEP area), and the Government has stated in the Housing White Paper that it will be investigating further how to ensure the utilities provide services that do not delay housing delivery. Policy is therefore emerging, and there is already a substantive work programme identified for the first three years of the Strategy.

- K. Diversifying housing delivery mechanisms.

Currently the vast majority of housing delivery in South and Vale is associated with large and medium sized developers; and provision of affordable rented and intermediate housing by Registered Providers, most through s106 agreements with private sector developers.

In the medium term South and Vale will look to bring in additional development partners, to diversify the housing product in the area. South and Vale officers will actively seek out these developers and explain why investing in South and Vale would be beneficial to them. The efficiency of delivery of planning consents, the spirit of joint working, and evidence of the robustness of the residential market for new homes for rent or sale, will be the essence of this pitch to developers and investors. The aim will be to convince them that South and Vale is a place actively wanting to promote development in accordance with its Local Plans.

South and Vale will also consider policies that are supportive of the other routes by which new homes may be provided, such as:

- Development of specialist housing for older people
- Small housebuilders
- The custom and self-build sector

The Councils will also explore whether the tenure of existing affordable housing could be flexed to take into account any differences in demand in either district such as remote rural locations.

L. Generating opportunities for Local Authority Investment in land and development

South and Vale will consider opportunities to identify sites that can be acquired by the Councils, where this would facilitate development quicker than might otherwise be the case or development of a more innovative nature (i.e. low energy housing or modular construction). South and Vale will also investigate how they might best present a strong case for the HCA purchasing sites as part of a land assembly process, especially in relation to Didcot Garden Town (in both South and Vale) and the Berinsfield Community Investment Scheme programme (South).

South and Vale will also work with local employers and RPs to explore opportunities for delivering 'key worker' housing and consider whether a more flexible approach to the provision of this type of housing could improve take up.

M. Reviewing progress at the end of year 6, including a review of the tenure mix on new development sites, with updating where required.

25. **In Years 7-10**, the strategy will involve the following actions;

N. Driving forward housing delivery through the Housing Delivery Enabling role

The expectation is that by the end of year 6 the Housing Delivery Enabler role will be fully functional, and will be bearing fruit in terms of enhanced delivery of new homes through the traditional delivery models, and the newer/additional delivery routes. Didcot Garden Town and the Berinsfield initiatives should also be delivering new homes of different tenures and types in significant volumes.

O. Delivering new residential communities, including affordable housing and extra care provision

Recognising that some parts of our communities need a range of options more suitable to their circumstances such as 'Affordable Private Rent' for those not currently seeking to buy a property for a variety of reasons, or Extra Care Housing that can help older people to remain in their communities with the support they need.

P. Evaluating the impact of previous activities and outcomes over the previous 10 years, to inform the development of a new 10 year housing strategy.



This Strategy will cover the latter years of the South and Vale Local Plans, and should provide a valuable tool to inform Local Plan preparation for the period beyond 2031.

## **IMPLEMENTING THE JOINT HOUSING STRATEGY**

26. Successful implementation of the Joint Housing Strategy will be dependent on executing a number of key actions over the short, medium and long-term.
27. These actions are set out in a Joint Housing Strategy Action Plan (see Table 1) that indicates when actions will be undertaken, and by whom, , what the anticipated outcomes will be and how these actions relate to each of the four strategic themes identified in the research study/framework document ([link to be provided](#)).
28. 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.

**Table 1 - Joint Housing Strategy Action Plan**

Strategy Actions	Task Ref	Tasks	Responsibility	Timing	Expected Outcome	Objectives Achieved				Resources
				No. of years expected for delivery of task including early preparation		Delivering housing targets	Providing an appropriate range of housing	Supporting Economic Growth	Improving standards	
B	01	Adoption of Local Plan Part 2 for Vale and Local Plan for South	Planning	1 - 3	Adopted Local Plans for both Local Authorities	X	X	X	X	Can be achieved using existing resources
A, C, D, L, N	02	Plan to allocate an appropriate and sufficient buffer of suitable sites for housing beyond the 5 year supply target	Planning	2-6	Greater control enabling allocation of good quality, appropriate sites. Councils in a better position to resist speculative applications and poor design	X	X	X	X	Can be achieved using existing resources
A, E, K, L, N	03	Promote identification of suitable smaller sites	Planning policy, Development	1-6	Opportunities identified in partnership with local parish councils and Neighbourhood Plan groups for sites that could address specific local need such as rural exception affordable homes, self-build etc.	X	X	X		Can be achieved using existing resources
A, C, D, E, J, N	04	Map infrastructure dependency to prioritise	Development, Planning	3-10	Secure pipeline of sites with no other barriers to	X		X		Can be achieved

		those sites where there are no other barriers to development over sites with more complex issues			commencement					using existing resources
A, C, F, K, L, N, O	05	Develop Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD), Local Development Orders (LDO) and other mechanisms as appropriate around major employment sites and, where appropriate, for areas of regeneration	Development, Housing,	2-6	Provision of a customised focus to housing development in areas to support economic growth	X	X	X		May require additional resources (amount depends on number of SPDs etc.)
A, D, F, G, H, K, N, O	06	Develop an Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (AH SPD) <i>NOTE: Development of the AH SPD will take into consideration the outputs of viability testing through the Local Plan-making process and the potential need to consider other circumstances, when agreeing the space standards to be adopted for any particular development.</i>	Development, Housing	1-3	Provision of clarity on the delivery of affordable housing requirements that will meet housing need in line with Local Plan policies.	X	X	X	X	Can be achieved using existing resources
A, C, F, K, N, O	07	Review affordable housing policies to enable future provision to more accurately	Development, Housing, Planning	1-5	Flexibility of approach to determining most suitable affordable housing		X	X		Can be achieved using

		reflect changing needs in tenure, location etc.			delivery will enable more effective processing of planning applications					existing resources
G, H, K, O	08	Continue to work with the County Council to develop older person housing and other specialised housing.	Development, Housing	1-6	Pipeline of good quality Extra Care Housing is continued. Enables improved turnover of affordable and market family homes	X	X			Can be achieved using existing resources
C, H, G	09	Ensure Local Plan includes policies to secure delivery of specialised housing on strategic sites, as appropriate.	Development, Planning	1-3	Pipeline of specialised schemes secured across both districts	X	X		X	Can be achieved using existing resources
A, K, L, N	10	Support alternative tenures and forms of delivery where aim is to help local workers, including, for example, through Community Land Trusts	Development	1-6	Promotion of schemes with a particular local focus as part of overall aim to introduce a much wider range of alternative housing delivery mechanisms		X		X	Can be achieved using existing resources
A, K, L, N	11	Work with RPs to provide shared housing for young workers under 35 years old	Development, Housing	1-5	Supply of shared housing to provide a more affordable renting option for younger people	X	X	X		May require additional resources
A, K, L, N, O	12	Promote availability of private rented accommodation – such as ‘affordable private rent’	Development (esp. Didcot Garden Town & Berinsfield)	2-6	Supply of rented accommodation that will positively contribute towards economic growth – in particular addressing issues of recruitment and	X	X	X		Can be achieved using existing resources

					retention In addition, Affordable Private Rented schemes provide an opportunity to improve security of tenure with longer term leases.					
A, K, N, O	13	Work with major local employers, such as NHS and Harwell Campus, regarding land holdings suitable for housing	Development (esp. Didcot Garden Town & Berinsfield	2-7	Delivery of output of site allocation from SPDs for areas of major employment, regeneration.	X	X	X		Can be achieved using existing resources
G	14	Inclusion of Nationally Described Space Standards for all new affordable homes and where needed for market housing (subject to viability)	Planning	1-3	Policies in place at early stage in the life of the Joint Housing Strategy				X	Can be achieved using existing resources
G, H	15	Increase proportion of new affordable homes built to Category 2 and Category 3 (subject to viability)	Planning	1-3	Policies in place at early stage in the life of the Joint Housing Strategy	X			X	Can be achieved using existing resources
G, H	16	Increase proportion of new market homes to be built to Building Regulation Part M (4) Category 2 standard with a small number of plots on sites over a certain size to be reserved for construction to Building Regulation Part M (4) Category 3 standard in	Planning	1-3	Policies in place at early stage in the life of the Joint Housing Strategy				X	Can be achieved using existing resources

		response to demand (subject to viability)								
I, M, P	17	Regularly review strategy to evaluate performance and update, where required.	Development, Housing	End of years 3, 6 and 10	Evaluation report highlighting lessons learned and providing recommendations for updating strategy	X	X	X	X	

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### 29. The Joint South and Vale Housing Strategy;

- Focusses on the Councils' need to deliver exceptionally challenging targets for housing delivery in a climate of constant flux, and
- Is based on a considerable amount of in-depth research of the housing market in both districts, and the likely housing policies and market trends that will shape this market in the future. [Note: this research has been compiled into a suite of documents that can be viewed or downloaded using the following web link: <weblink to be inserted in due course>.
- Addresses four strategic themes;
  - delivering housing need
  - providing an appropriate range of housing
  - delivering housing to support forecast economic growth
  - improving standards in new homes
- Has a clear short, medium and long-term focus and an action plan that is aligned to the main strategic themes and identifies key actions, delivery timescales and responsibilities and expected outcomes
- Involves investigating, developing and progressing innovative partnerships, exploring wider delivery mechanisms and providing funding, where necessary, to implement the strategy and ensure that the numbers, range and suitability of new homes will positively enhance the lives of people living and working in our districts.

### 30. Influencing housing delivery is an extremely challenging task due to the vast complexity of the housing sector (the development process, the changing make-up and needs of the population, the market place for social, affordable and market housing etc.).

### 31. The Joint South and Vale Housing Strategy attempts to take account of as many of these complex issues as possible, indicate the actions needed to increase the volume of new housing provision and ensure that new housing meets the needs of everyone wishing to live and work in South and Vale.