

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the
WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen,
Witney, on Thursday 27 September 2018 at 2:00pm.

PRESENT

Councillors: Alex Postan (Vice-Chairman – in the chair); Jake Acock, Alvin Adams, Alaa Al-Yousuf, Jeanette Baker, Richard Bishop, Rosa Bolger, Andrew Coles, Laetisia Carter, Julian Cooper, Marilyn Davies, Pete Dorward, Jane Doughty, Harry Eaglestone, Hilary Fenton, Ted Fenton, Steve Good, Andy Graham, Jeff Haine, David Harvey, Gill Hill, David Jackson, Ed James, Peter Kelland, Liz Leffman, Nick Leverton, Norman MacRae MBE, David McFarlane MBE, Michele Mead, James Mills, Toby Morris, Kieran Mullins, Neil Owen, Elizabeth Poskitt, Carl Rylett, Geoff Saul, Guy Wall and Ben Woodruff.

34. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 25 July 2018, copies of which had been circulated, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

35. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andrew Beaney, Louise Chapman, Derek Cotterill, Charles Cottrell-Dormer, Maxine Crossland, Duncan Enright, Peter Handley, Richard Langridge, Martin McBride and Harry St John.

36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no other declarations of interest from Members or Officers in items to be considered at the meeting.

37. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS: MR PAUL CRACKNELL

The Chairman reported that Paul was currently absent from work, and stated that he would welcome reading material, which could be passed on via Keith Butler.

The Council wished its best wishes to be conveyed to Paul.

38. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

There were no submissions from members of the public under the provisions of the Council's Rules of Procedure.

39. WEST OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN: REPORT OF THE INSPECTOR AND ADOPTION OF THE PLAN

The Council considered the report of the Head of Planning and Strategic Housing, which requested consideration of the report of the Inspector and the possible adoption of the Plan. The report explained the background to the current position and request, and its appendices contained (i) the Inspector's report, including the Inspector's preliminary findings from 2015 and the schedule of main modifications (which were summarised in the covering report); (ii) a schedule of additional minor modifications; (iii) a composite version of the Local Plan which was the same as that which had originally been published in March 2015 but incorporating the Main Modifications recommended by the Inspector, together with a number of additional minor modifications; and (iv) a Sustainability Appraisal Adoption Statement, which was a legal requirement and included information on the matters specified in paragraph 7.1 of the report.

Councillor Haine proposed the recommendations contained in the report of the Head of Planning and Strategic Housing. As councillors knew, it had taken a lot of time and work to arrive at this point, and he welcomed the situation whereby the Council would be better able to resist speculative development proposals and defend appeals against refusal. What the Council was being asked to approve at this meeting did not contain any surprises, and all changes had been the subject of consultation. The proposed Plan took into account the housing needs of local people and some of the required provision for Oxford's unmet need, as well as employment and infrastructure, and would be reviewed at intervals no greater than five years. He emphasised the desire for West Oxfordshire to remain a good place in which to live or work, or to visit, and explained that the Inspector's main modifications could not be amended, and that if they were rejected by Council there would be a period of at least two years before the Council would be able to adopt a Plan, during which the District would again be vulnerable to speculative development proposals.

Councillor Mills seconded the proposal, and reserved the right to reply at a later stage of the debate.

Councillor Cooper expressed opposition to the adoption of the Plan. He referred to his perception that the Inspector's report should have been considered by the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which would have given him the opportunity to pose various questions, and enquired why that had not occurred. Councillor Cooper considered that the Council had allowed others to run the Plan, and did not accept the necessity to meet Oxford's unmet housing need to the extent which was proposed, enquiring as to what questions had been put to the City Council about the use of undeveloped land in its area. Previous amendments and alternatives put forward had been rejected, which he considered to be mistakes.

Councillor Cooper went on to query: (i) the sufficiency of the land available for the road proposed between Crawley Road and Burford Road in Witney; (ii) how the capacity of Hensington Road could cope with the proposed development in Woodstock; and (iii) provision for additional car parking in Woodstock. He commented that infrastructure was not able to cope with the amount of proposed development; that the Plan was not good enough; that he had been unable to establish the rationale behind the figures for meeting Oxford's unmet need via the Growth Board's papers and materials; and stated that he would be voting against the proposal.

Councillor Leffman concurred with Councillor Cooper, adding that she considered that the poor planning laws in the country were primarily to blame. She considered that the level of development proposed for Eynsham and Woodstock was excessive and would not preserve their character. Councillor Leffman went on to state that she was content with the position for Charlbury, and the fact that the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty was to be protected as a consequence of the decisions of the Inspector. She did not consider the Plan to be appropriate for the District and would abstain from voting as a protest against the apparent expectation that high levels of growth should be accommodated without adequate infrastructure.

Councillor Acock supported the previous speakers, and in particular referred to inappropriate levels of development in the Eynsham area and the inability of the A40 to cope with current traffic levels, a situation which would deteriorate with the greater demand which would follow. He also had concerns about the Witney North proposals, and cited the need for a Witney to Oxford rail link.

Councillor Rylett recognised the need for a Local Plan but felt that this should not equate to acceptance of what was proposed. He felt that greater account should have been taken of the genuine concerns of local residents, and that the District Council had not been as supportive as it could have been of the proposed Eynsham Neighbourhood Plan. He

considered that the option of 550 of the houses allocated to West Eynsham being situated in the Garden Village would have been preferable and made a greater contribution to infrastructure improvements, and would not be able to support the adoption of the Plan as it stood.

Councillor Carter queried whether the Plan was right for the District, and whether enough weight had been given to the concerns of local people. She referred to pollution issues in Chipping Norton and the absence of plans to address the problem, which would be exacerbated as a consequence of the increase in housing from the 600 originally proposed to 1200.

Councillor Poskitt thanked all involved for what was an extensive and detailed document, but nonetheless one she could not support, as a Woodstock Councillor. She referred to inadequate infrastructure, with no guarantees of improvements, and considered that new housing sites would be removed from the town and unable easily to access the centre.

Councillor McFarlane supported adoption of the Plan. He acknowledged that the District would be different and that there was no choice other than to accept change, but considered that it would emerge and evolve in a positive fashion. He considered that there were many pluses, and referred to tourism, the provision of new homes including affordable housing and the hope that gave to those needing them, the largely unchanged hierarchy of settlements; the positive position of the Blenheim World Heritage site, the provision for employment and for custom-built houses; and the protection and enhancement of parks and gardens and recreational and leisure provision. He believed there would be opportunities to address the question of congestion on the A40, and to use the development management process to raise design standards; and welcomed improvements to Carterton and the proposals which would enable the district to capitalise on the Oxford hi-tech economy; as well as enhancements to town centres and the better management of woodland. The Council needed to be sensitive to the beauty of the area and to strive to ensure the high standards of development which could preserve and enhance the District.

Councillor Owen asserted the need for the Plan to be adopted, and alluded to the increase in housing provision which had occurred during the period in which the Plan had been under preparation. He acknowledged that it was not perfect and never could be, and considered that Councillors had to take into account the District as a whole and not just their particular Wards, sentiments echoed by Councillor Postan.

Councillor Morris also referred to the increase in housing numbers, which was never likely to be either easy or popular. Whilst the proposals clearly were not to the liking of all, it was essential that the Council regained control of planning via policy rather than the risk of losing appeals on speculative development proposals, and he mentioned sites from previous plans which were now integral to their areas, just as the sites included in this Plan would be in the future. Whilst many concerns remained, the Inspector had recognised the issues, and some of the proposed modifications improved the plan and increased the protection for residents. Given the choices available at this stage, he urged the Council not to reject the adoption of the Plan, stating that whilst not all would be supportive of it, he hoped they could approve adoption as the best option.

Councillor James acknowledged some of the strengths of the Plan but considered it flawed in relation to the development proposed in and around Eynsham. In his view, it was still not clear how the garden Village proposal had arisen, and it had been damned by faint praise in the report of the Inspector. He concurred with a view stated earlier at the meeting that 550 houses at West Eynsham would have been better included in the Garden Village, thereby avoiding the unpopular proposed spine road, and the development of valued and well-used open space. Infrastructure was inadequate, and he felt the park and

ride proposals to be unrealistic, and the associated business plan to be opaque. Accordingly, he could not support the adoption of the Plan.

Councillor Ted Fenton noted that the Plan was not without its flaws, but felt it never could be, and asserted the need for housing, especially that which was within the financial reach of people in receipt of ordinary incomes. He hoped that the process of reviewing the Plan, if adopted, would begin as soon as possible.

Councillor Mullins recognised the work carried out on the Plan, but could not agree that it would not bring significant change to the District, regarding the impact of the large scale developments as huge, and a threat to the integrity of the landscape. He would not be supporting adoption of the Plan.

Councillor Bolger recognised the need for a Plan to be in place but, as a recently elected Councillor, did not consider that it reflected the views and voices of residents, and much of the local infrastructure was inadequate for the current numbers of residents. She expressed concern at the provision of health care in the context of the loss of the Deer Park surgery and the possible closure of the surgery at Cogges, and also referred to the provision of education. Councillor Bolger did not consider the right houses would be provided in the right places at the right price and intended to abstain from voting.

Councillor Davies supported opposition to the amount of development in the Eynsham area, which would impact on her Ward, with particular reservations about the Garden Village proposal, but would support the adoption of the Plan.

Councillor Coles thanked the Planning Policy team for their work, and went on to refer to inappropriate development in his Ward, the like of which he expected to be prevented once an adopted Plan was in place. He regarded the Witney North allocation as an excessive mistake, which would damage the landscape, and was concerned about the levels of air pollution, which were already too high, and was not in favour of the development of the current Woodford Way car park. Affordability of housing was a key issue, and he did not believe 80% of market value truly to be affordable. Accordingly, he would abstain from voting.

Councillor Graham stated that residents of his Ward were content, given the findings of the Inspector, but he considered that the proposals for Eynsham and Woodstock were disastrous, whilst recognising that the development and adoption of any Plan presented the Council with extraordinarily difficult decisions. He would be abstaining.

Councillor Haine was appreciative of the comments and input of council colleagues and was conscious of the amount of comment about infrastructure concerns, and stated that infrastructure improvements would follow development, and that the Oxfordshire Growth Deal would also help. He stressed the fact that the Council had initially proposed a much lower amount of housing but had been obligated to greatly increase the provision, partly to address the unmet Oxford housing need. He urged Councillors to support the adoption of the Plan.

Councillor Mills stressed how the Plan would help address issues around housing provision for people faced with any or all of extremely high rents, living at home well in their 20s or later, and relying on parental financial support. It would also be beneficial for groups of people facing difficulties, such as teachers and police officers, who were so essential to the community. He emphasised his belief that the Plan presented opportunities for both West Oxfordshire and the county of Oxfordshire as a whole, in the context of the many and various strengths and characteristics which, in the District, included the Blenheim World Heritage site, the Thames, beautiful villages and countryside, RAF Brize Norton, world class businesses and the research and technology industries. Whilst no Local Plan could present a solution to all the challenges faced by an area, it would as a minimum enable a

greater level of control and influence on the shaping of the future. West Oxfordshire would continue to thrive, and he urged Councillors to support the proposal.

In accordance with Rule 15 of the Council Procedure Rules, Councillor Ted Fenton requested that the vote on the proposition be taken by roll-call with each member present signifying whether he or she was voting in favour of the proposal, against the proposal, or was abstaining, which would be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

The following 24 members voted **for** the proposition:

Councillors Adams, Al-Yousuf, Baker, Bishop, Davies, Dorward, Doughty, Eaglestone, Hilary Fenton, Ted Fenton, Good, Haine, Harvey, Hill, Leverton, MacRae, McFarlane, Mead, Mills, Morris, Owen, Postan, Wall and Woodruff.

The following eight members voted **against** the proposition:

Councillors Acock, Carter, Cooper, James, Mullins, Poskitt, Rylett and Saul.

The following six members **abstained** from voting:

Councillors Bolger, Coles, Graham, Jackson, Kelland and Leffman.

Accordingly, the Council -

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the conclusions of the Local Plan Inspector's report, included as Appendix A to the report, be noted, and his recommendations regarding the Main Modifications that are required to make the Local Plan sound be accepted;
- (b) That the incorporation of the additional modifications as set out in Appendix B to the report, arising from the Inspector's recommendations as set out in Appendix A, be approved;
- (c) That the Local Plan at Appendix C to the report be adopted as a development plan document incorporating all of the Main Modifications recommended by the Inspector together with the additional modifications as set out in Appendix B, in accordance with Regulation 26 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2012;
- (d) That the content of the Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment adoption statement circulated as Appendix D to the report be noted;
- (e) That the Head of Planning and Strategic Housing be authorised to publish an updated adopted Policies Map to illustrate graphically the application of policies contained in the adopted development plan;
- (f) That the Head of Planning and Strategic Housing be authorised, prior to the publication of the Local Plan, to correct any further minor spelling, grammatical or typographical errors together with any improvements from a presentational perspective including paragraph and policy numbering; and
- (g) That it be acknowledged that the adoption of the Local Plan will revoke those saved policies indicated as being replaced in Appendix I of the Plan (Appendix C), with immediate effect.

The meeting closed at 3:11 pm

CHAIRMAN