

## QUESTIONS ON NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

(1) **Question to the Leader of the Council, Corporate Strategy, Economic Development and Planning (Councillor Bob Price) from Sietske Boeles**

Northern Gateway

The Northern Gateway policy in the Core Strategy allows for a mixed use site of 55,000 sq metres of employment use, with up to 200 houses and 3,000 employees. This took into account the potential for high economic growth and was identified by the Inspector to be at a level that would not jeopardise growth in Bicester and would provide a realistic housing versus jobs balance. However, the Inspector remained doubtful about the transport and environmental constraints and the final decision was therefore referred to the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan.

How can the City Council reconcile this with now bringing forward a plan that:

- Is significantly larger than that identified in the Core Strategy?
- Is ahead of the publication of vital evidence on commuter information from the last census, despite the fact that the development could put an estimated 10,000 more cars on the road in a particularly congested and polluted area?
- Is prioritising employment (which generates additional housing need) above meeting existing housing need?
- Is still not clear on funding for any necessary mitigation (given that the Growth Fund money announced last week will only cover around one third of the £88 million Access to Oxford Funding envisaged several years ago)
- And, given the above, is the decision to continue with the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan lawful or should the entire Core Strategy not now be revisited to take account of the implications of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment on employment sites?

**Response:** The question asks a number of specific questions about the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan, that is before Council. The following is a response to each question in turn:

*The plan is significantly larger than that identified in the Core Strategy?*

The AAP is not significantly larger. It provides for 90,000m<sup>2</sup> employment floorspace by 2026; this reflects the 80,000m<sup>2</sup> identified at Core Strategy and the 10,000m<sup>2</sup> released as there no longer being a requirement for the emergency services centre. In terms of the complementary uses, the AAP provides for the same level of retail

development and the same size hotel as the Core Strategy. As part of the detailed AAP work, it has been shown that the site has capacity for a greater amount of housing than was originally identified in the Core Strategy, while still maintaining the employment focus for the site. Whilst CS6 makes provision for 200 dwellings to 2026, the AAP makes provision for 500 dwellings. It is considered prudent to increase the housing numbers at the Northern Gateway.

*It is ahead of the publication of vital evidence on commuter information from the last census, despite the fact that the development could put an estimated 10,000 more cars on the road in a particularly congested and polluted area?*

The County Council has carried out detailed transport analysis. The North Oxford Transport Strategy (NOTS) will provide an overall strategic approach to the transport needs of the area and specifically address the potential transport impacts related to the Northern Gateway.

The key findings from the NOTS work include:

- Traffic modelling completed to date concludes that transport solutions can be developed to mitigate the impact of Northern Gateway.
- The proposed transport improvements (identified in the AAP) will need to meet other traffic growth demands, not just those arising from Northern Gateway development
- The traffic generated by the Northern Gateway will be minimised through a series of policies in the AAP (including parking standards) and associated conditions with future planning applications.

*It is prioritising employment (which generates additional housing need) above meeting existing housing need?*

The AAP proposes an increase in the number of houses on the site. Through its Core Strategy and other planning policies the City Council seeks to deliver as much housing as possible but without compromising the economic and environmental sustainability needs and constraints in Oxford. The National Planning Policy Framework expects Local Planning Authorities to deliver both housing and build a strong, responsive and competitive economy by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation.

*It is still not clear on funding for any necessary mitigation (given that the Growth Fund money announced last week will only cover around one third of the £88 million Access to Oxford Funding envisaged several years ago)*

The Northern Gateway requires significant investment in infrastructure and in turn the development provides an opportunity to address current issues through attracting both public and private sector investment. The

Northern Gateway infrastructure requirements will be funded through a combination of the following:

- Developer funding secured through the Community Infrastructure Levy
- Developer funding secured through a Section 106 agreement for site-specific requirements and Affordable Housing
- City Deal funding already secured £11 million towards highways and transport infrastructure which will fund the improvements to Wolvercote and Cutteslowe roundabouts and contribute towards the construction of the strategic link road
- Local Growth Fund monies bid for via the Oxfordshire Local Economic Partnership
- City and County Council funding (for example via capital programmes and funds secured from other sources)

*And, given the above, is the decision to continue with the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan lawful or should the entire Core Strategy not now be revisited to take account of the implications of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment on employment sites?’*

The Core Strategy was adopted against the background evidence of a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) dated 2007 which demonstrated a large housing need for Oxford. The SHMA that was published more recently in April 2014 also demonstrated a comparable housing need. Therefore the context for housing need in Oxford has not changed with the publication of the latest SHMA. Evidence of housing need is only one piece of evidence that is considered in the Plan making process. Plans must balance all sustainability matters as specified in the National Planning Policy Framework such as the need to promote economic growth and the need to protect environmental designations such as flood plain and nature conservation areas. The Core Strategy Inspector confirmed that the City Council had produced a ‘sound’ plan.

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