

CPRE Oxfordshire Address to Oxford City Full Council, 14 July 2014

CPRE believes we need more housing in Oxfordshire - affordable housing for local people.

The trouble is the unpalatable truth - that increasing land supply will not deliver this. Oxfordshire's attractiveness, and proximity to London, means that housing *demand* in the county is virtually limitless and house prices will remain out of reach for those most in need. To meet genuine housing *need*, we will need a different approach probably based on significant investment in social housing.

Meanwhile, CPRE believes we are currently facing not just a debate over housing numbers, but a fight for the future of Oxfordshire. What is the vision for the county?

Do we stay as the most rural county in the South East, a county of small village communities and market towns, with a historic city of character at its heart? Not set in stone, but growing organically to meet the needs of local people.

Or, alternatively, do we become an overflow county for London and the Thames Valley, another Birmingham perhaps, actively seeking to bring more and more people into the area?

Some time ago it seems, the leaders of our various local councils in conjunction with the unelected Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership effectively decided, behind closed doors, that it was the latter vision they were after, keen to pursue a policy (in line with the government) of economic growth at all costs.

Out of this has flowed a whole series of announcements, all presented as 'done deals':

- The Oxford & Oxfordshire City Deal - no public consultation.
- The Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan, which proposes creating 80,000 new jobs in a county of full employment - unlike previous county plans, no public consultation and no Public Inquiry.
- And the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) - no public consultation. Heavily influenced by the draft Strategic Economic Plan, the SHMA proposes 100,000 new houses in the county within just 17 years.

This is roughly double the previous estimate and is the equivalent of a 40% increase in every town & settlement in the county.

These figures are horrifying.

They are not about meeting local need but about catering for the influx of people to meet those 80,000 notional new jobs.

It completely fails to take into account that increasing land supply will not make housing more affordable - no builder is going to build at this rate.

What it will do is allow developers to cherry pick the most attractive sites, putting our Green Belt, our Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and other greenfield sites at risk.

The impacts for Oxford City

The impacts of all these decisions are now starting to be felt in terms of planning for Oxford:

- 1) The growth plan south of Grenoble Road, looking to include both a science park extension and houses in the Green Belt
- 2) The significantly enlarged Northern Gateway Application, which proposes to take out a piece of the Green Belt
- 3) The planning application for the bioescalator and other developments coming through on Old Road Campus and at the Churchill Hospital site.

All of these will add significantly to infrastructure demands on the City in terms of transport, parking, education, health etc. So, whilst Government funding may be available to support some of this, it will not solve existing problems, but only help to offset a little of the increased impact from expansion.

What do we want Councillors to do?

1. Ask for a Public Inquiry into the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan so that all these issues can be explored in a proper democratic forum
2. Reconsider the Strategic Housing Market Assessment figures, which are deeply flawed as shown by an independent report *Unsound & Unsustainable: Why the SHMA will increase greenfield use but not meet housing needs* - commissioned by CPRE and available via our website
3. Ensure that development sites in Oxford are prioritised for housing, rather than employment (which creates additional housing need)
4. Direct development away from the Green Belt, which provides a much needed resource for all the people of Oxfordshire and protects the historic setting of the City itself.