

**OXFORD CITY COUNCIL**

**EXECUTIVE BOARD**

**Date of meeting: 10<sup>th</sup> October 2005**

**Report of: Michael Crofton Briggs**

**Title: CONSULATION ON NEW HOUSING TO 2026 IN  
OXFORDSHIRE UNDER THE SOUTH EAST PLAN**

**Ward: All**

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**Key Decision: No**

**Lead Member: Alex Hollingsworth**

**Scrutiny responsibility: Environment**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is RECOMMENDED that the Executive Board should make the following comments to Oxfordshire County Council as the basis for the City Council's response to the public consultation on the housing distribution under the South East Plan.

1. No support is given to either Option 1: Focus on Bicester and Didcot or Option 2: Focus on south of the county.
2. The Alternative Option that should be promoted is Land South of Grenoble Road. It is considered that this urban extension to Oxford is the most sustainable location for new housing in central Oxfordshire.
3. A comprehensive review of Oxford's Green Belt is required, with an aim of creating a new and enduring boundary that meets all the needs of the City.

**Summary**

1. The purpose of this report is to agree the City Council's response to the consultation by Oxfordshire County Council on the housing requirement in the county between 2016 and 2026 for inclusion in the South East Plan by the deadline of 28 October 2005.
2. One of the City Council's top priorities is to provide more affordable and better quality social housing. The policies in the final version together with the location of new housing in the South East Plan will be

fundamental to enabling or frustrating this priority. The City Council's ability to achieve its other priorities will be significantly influenced by this Plan.

### **Background and Context**

3. SEERA (The South East England Regional Assembly) has decided that 21,000 new homes should be built in Oxfordshire between 2016 and 2026. It has asked Oxfordshire County Council to advise it on the distribution of this county requirement.
4. The County Council is consulting on options for accommodating the new homes, with particular focus on the 8,000 homes that it estimates may need to be built on greenfield land in central Oxfordshire. The County Council's preferred strategy, which it states is in line with the draft South East Plan, is to distribute the greenfield development at major urban centres without extending into the Oxford green belt.
5. The County Council has prepared a leaflet that is being distributed widely and this leaflet and further information is available from [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk) or local libraries or any City Council offices (especially Ramsay House, St Ebbes Street)
6. The County Council has explained that:  
"In total, 47,200 homes need to be built between 2006 and 2026. Of these 26,300 are already planned up to 2016 and been consulted on for the Oxfordshire Structure Plan.

What we are consulting on now is 21,000 additional homes between 2016 and 2026. Building on previously developed land is a priority and we calculate that just half of this housing (around 11,000 homes) could be built on previously developed land including about 2,700 in Oxford City. This leaves 10,000 homes to be distributed.

Around 2,000 new homes may need to be built on greenfield land outside central Oxfordshire at places like Banbury, Carterton, Chipping Norton, Henley, Faringdon and Thame.

Around 8,000 homes may need to be built on greenfield land in central Oxfordshire.

Option 1: Focus on Bicester and Didcot. This option concentrates the new housing requiring greenfield land equally at Bicester and Didcot. This would mean building up to 4,000 new homes on the edges of each town.

Option 2: Focus on south of the county. This option concentrates the new housing requiring greenfield land in the south of the county. This would mean development on the edge of Wantage and Grove

(around 2,000 new homes), Didcot (up to 4,000 homes) and Bicester (about 2,000 homes).

## **Commentary**

7. In March the City Council responded to SEERA's consultation on the draft South East Plan. It concluded that:
  1. There is a need for additional housing in central Oxfordshire to tackle the existing levels of housing need and homelessness as well as future needs. As a result the level of development in Central Oxfordshire should be at least 2,000 dwellings per annum (40,000 between 2006 and 2026) (Section E7 paragraph 2.1).
  2. There is the desire for managed growth to take advantage of the unique opportunities for sustainable economic growth in the Central Oxfordshire sub-region.
  3. There is a belief that an urban extension to Oxford is the most sustainable location for new housing in central Oxfordshire. As a result Spatial Option B is preferred or even a hybrid of spatial Options A and B. (Section E7 paragraph 2.6).
  4. A comprehensive review of Oxford's Green Belt is required, with an aim of creating a new and enduring boundary that met all the needs of the City. As a result an objection is made to Policy CC9 Green Belts and Strategic Gaps (Section D1). This policy and the accompanying text should specify that there is a case for a strategic review of the Oxford Green Belt.
  5. For the South East as a whole, support is given to the provision 32,000 dwellings per annum and located through the 'sharper focus' distribution. (Option ii c Section C paragraph 3.4.2). However, the City Council believes that SEERA should reconsider an even higher rate of 36,000 dwellings per annum.
8. The City Council prepared its alternative strategy at this time and submitted this to the Regional Assembly because it considered that the best interests of its residents and businesses would be achieved through the provision of new development within and adjacent to the City itself.
9. The two Options being offered in the County Council consultation perpetuate the county towns strategy in the current and former Structure Plan documents. The County Council is seeking to argue that the SEERA decision that there should not be any regionally-led strategic reviews of the green belt means that it must not include a third option in this consultation, namely an urban extension on Land South of Grenoble Road. However the draft South East Plan does not preclude local discretion from undertaking a green belt review. Something that has been positively encouraged by an independent Panel report to the County Council (see paragraph 16 below)

10. This strategy is now being seen in many quarters as un-sustainable and likely to have serious environmental consequences not least in terms on traffic congestion on the A34 as residents travel to the City for employment, shopping, hospitals and other important services.
11. Since 1991 both Didcot and Bicester have already experienced phenomenal growth. Now in addition to the new housing that has already been built at these two towns, the County Council's current proposals amount to an additional 4,000 houses at Bicester and 8,000 houses at Didcot under Option 1. (This is by combining what is already planned in the structure plan from 2006 to 2016 with this consultation for more greenfield housing between 2016 and 2026. This planned growth would see Bicester grow by some 150% since 1991. (7,000 to 18,000 houses). Not surprisingly local residents, residents groups and parish councils together with some local councillors are very concerned with these allocation and are calling for a pause in the development to give the towns time to draw breath and for the infrastructure to catch up.
12. The City Council's Alternative Strategy includes the provision of an urban extension on land south of Grenoble Road for mixed development including some 6,000 to 8,000 homes together with appropriate facilities to support such new communities. It is suggested that land South of Grenoble Road should be recommended to the County Council as the best and most sustainable location for the 8,000 new homes that it considers need to be located on greenfield land between 20216 and 2026 in the south East Plan.
13. Making use of the Land South of Grenoble Road will leave 99% of the Oxford green belt intact. The City Council's Alternative Strategy considers that there are the necessary exceptional circumstances to warrant revision to the green belt boundaries to facilitate taking land out of the green belt and enabling the provision of a new community as an urban extension.
  - There are unique economic needs that can only be met within or adjacent to the City
  - The very substantial scale of housing needs cannot be accommodated at the country towns alone
  - The country towns need a period of consolidation while their infrastructure backlog has a chance to catch up
  - There is an opportunity to build truly sustainable communities associated with the City.
  - The City, with its established social and cultural facilities, is better able to meet the needs of new residents
  - New infrastructure is more sustainable and the associated costs less adjacent to the City
  - Affordable housing is required by the City, near to the City, rather than at the country towns.

14. It is acknowledged that if the Alternative Strategy were to precede this would entail a careful and comprehensive review of the green belt around the City. Such a review should include consideration of the outward extent of the green belt and the opportunities to more than replace any land removed from the green belt at Land South of Grenoble Road.
15. The green belt was originally conceived in the 1950s and its general extent established at that time, although the actual detailed boundaries have only been finally confirmed more recently. This has therefore endured for over 50 years. The review proposed would equally aim to endure for a considerable time. The land likely to be required for development represents only a small proportion (about 1%) of the whole of the green belt around the City and is not within the areas that contribute directly to the character and setting of the City. The scale of development being contemplated represents a small part of the countryside of the whole of the County.
16. The urban extension proposed would involve building on what is currently low-quality agricultural green belt land within an adjoining local authority area. Although this option was rejected in the deposit structure plan for the county, the structure plan examination in public panel concluded:

“The Deposit Structure Plan strategy up to 2016 just, but only just, meets the development requirements of RPG9 and the needs of the Oxfordshire economy. A more comprehensive review of options, including those that involve making changes to the green belt, is needed to provide a rational basis for development choices in the longer term.”
17. In other words the Panel concluded that the option of changing the green belt boundary had to be examined properly for the period after 2016. The City Council in recent decisions has strongly supported this view.

**The grounds for recommending a particular option**

18. At the Council meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2004 Council resolved to commend the Council's submission on a sub-regional strategy for Central Oxfordshire, noting in particular:
  - (a) the need for additional housing in central Oxfordshire to tackle the existing levels of housing need and homelessness as well as future needs.
  - (b) the desire for managed growth to take advantage of the unique opportunities for sustainable economic growth in the sub-region.
  - (c) a belief than an urban extension to Oxford appears to be the most sustainable location for new housing in central Oxfordshire.

- (d) that a comprehensive review of Oxford's Green Belt is required, with an aim of creating a new and enduring boundary that met all the needs of the City.

**The timetable for action following the decision**

19. The County Council is seeking views on its consultation by 28<sup>th</sup> October. It has to submit its advise to SEERA by 9<sup>th</sup> December 2005. SEERA will then use the advise from all the Principal Authorities in the region (County and Unitary Councils) to inform the next draft of the South East Plan, which it intends to submit to the government in March 2006.
20. There will then be a period of formal public consultation as well as a public examination. Central Government will decide the content of the final plan.

THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN (*AND APPROVED*) BY:

Portfolio Holder: Alex Hollingsworth and Ed Turner

Strategic Director: Sharon Cosgrove

Legal and Democratic Services: Jeremy Thomas

Financial Management: Mike Baish

Background papers: No unpublished papers have been relied upon in preparation of the report

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