

Scrutiny Committee report for City Executive Board – Thursday 15 June 2017

7. Scrutiny Committee Reports (Pages 3 - 6)

The Scrutiny Committee's report on the Local Plan Preferred Options decision is included.

City Executive Board response to follow.

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To: City Executive Board
Date: 15 June 2017
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Local Plan Preferred Options

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present the findings and recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee on the Local Plan Preferred Options decision.
Key decision:	Yes
Executive Board Member:	Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Planning & Regulatory Services
Corporate Priority:	A Vibrant and Sustainable Economy; Meeting Housing Needs; Strong and Active Communities; A Clean and Green Oxford.
Policy Framework:	Development Plan Document
Recommendation: That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations set out in the body of this report.	

Introduction and background

1. The Scrutiny Committee considered the Local Plan Preferred Options decision paperwork at a special meeting on 12 June 2017. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Board Member for Planning and Regulatory Services, Patsy Dell, Head of Planning, Sustainable Development and Regulatory Services, Mark Jaggard, Planning Policy and Specialist Services Manager and Sarah Harrison, Principal Planner, for attending the meeting and advising the Committee. The Committee would also like to thank two public speakers for addressing the meeting and informing the Committee's discussion.

Public addresses

2. The public speakers drew the Committee's attention to the policy approach options for homes for boat dwellers in section 2.3 ii) of the draft preferred options document (page 81 of the CEB paperwork). The Committee heard that the wording of Option B is flawed on the basis that definitions of 'boat dwellers' and 'houseboats' are provided in the Housing and Planning Act 2016. The Committee also heard that Option C is not viable because the Council is required to have a policy. It was suggested that these options, as worded, should have been rejected at an earlier

stage and that an explanation should be provided as to why they were potentially non-compliant with legislation and government guidance, given that assurances had previously been provided (in response to a question at full Council) that the Council was aware of its statutory duties in regards to boat dwellers. It was also suggested that these options should be replaced with a proposed Option D:

‘Oxford City Council should seek to meet the needs of boat-dwellers guided by a periodical assessment of their accommodation needs, published as part of a Supplementary Planning Document on the use of Oxford’s Waterways’.

3. The Board Member emphasised that Option A is the preferred option and that options B and C were alternative options. His understanding was that the government’s draft guidance was yet to be finalised but he resolved to check the situation and make any necessary textual amendments to Option B as required. He also resolved to correct or reject Option C and to clarify to Scrutiny how the two alternative options had been arrived at. The preferred option is for a capacity based policy that will apply similar principles to planning applications for new residential moorings to those that already apply to bricks and mortar developments.

Consultation

4. The Committee commented that consultation materials need to be as clear and concise as possible, including specifically in respect of:
 - Seeking views on the mix of housing and employment sites in the city.
 - Emphasising that social housing is the only category of affordable housing that is genuinely affordable for many people in the city.
5. The Board Member agreed to circulate a draft of a public consultation leaflet to scrutiny members on the proviso that they would have the opportunity to comment on but not to re-write the material.

Policy Options

6. The Committee reviewed the preferred options document and considered each set of policy options in turn, with the Board Member and officers drawing their attention to the more significant changes and contentious issues. The Committee welcomed the Council putting the preferred options, including the various new proposals, out for public discussion and sought to assure itself that the wording accurately reflected the options being presented for consultation, without itself expressing a preference, and with the understanding that there will be a range of opinions offered at the consultation stage. During the discussion the Committee noted that:
 - a) It would be possible to draft a policy that differentiates between categories of language schools, summer schools and independent colleges for over 16s that the Council would wish to restrict and those it wouldn’t wish to restrict. (p. 44)
 - b) Remote working is a demand side factor that can mitigate housing demand and as such it will be factored into an updated Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) over the next few years. (p. 46-50)
 - c) The proposals continue to prioritise new socially rented housing while allowing some flexibility for more imaginative schemes that can deliver other housing tenures that will be genuinely affordable over the long term. (p. 52)

- d) While it is being proposed that new purpose-built Houses of Multiple Occupations (HMOs) will be allowed for the first time in areas where there is no over-concentration of HMO accommodation, there are no plans to water down existing HMO policies. (p. 71)
- e) The targets for university students living outside of university provided accommodation are realistic. The thresholds have been being lowered and redefined to exclude groups such as nursing and teaching students. (p. 75)
- f) It may be possible to seek to reduce the numbers of university students living outside of university provided accommodation over time through a ratchet effect but this would need to be carefully addressed by any new policy and a means of achieving this outcome would need to be found. (p. 75)
- g) It is proposed that new student accommodation will be limited to certain areas including the city centre and tightly drawn district centres. Student accommodation does not form part of the HMO concentration calculation and the consequences of considering these two categories together (which is not being proposed) would need to be carefully thought through. (p. 77)
- h) The Council has a legal duty to accommodate travelling communities but a recent needs-based study identified no requirement for any sites in the city. Option B: 'Do not include a policy on travelling communities' will be rejected. (p. 81)
- i) The Council is using a common sense definition of outdoor amenity space. (p. 85)
- j) Green Belt land within the city has been reviewed against the same objective criteria that the Council has been encouraging neighbouring district councils to use and district councils have been consulted as per the duty to cooperate. (p. 93)
- k) The Council can make a strong case that exceptional circumstances related to housing need and the local economy do warrant development on identified Green Belt sites in the city. (p. 93)
- l) Carbon emission target standards will be set that require the delivery of onsite renewable energy generation at new developments. (p. 97)
- m) Already developed land in the highest risk flood zone areas can be safely redeveloped with very high standards of flood mitigation. (p. 105)
- n) The new Health Impact Assessments are potentially a very useful tool for assessing the impacts of major developments on health inequality, mental health, etc. (p. 109)
- o) The proposals relating to building heights are intended to enhance the skyline by allowing an appropriate degree of height variation, as well as allowing for increased capacity. (p. 133)
- p) While few other cities have height limits in place, lots of guidance is available on assessing the visual impacts of higher developments. (p. 133)
- q) The Oxford Design Review Panel, which isn't specifically referenced in the documentation, will continue to play an important role. (p. 136-139)

- r) The provision of facilities for tourist coaches outside the city centre would, together with a zero emissions zone, help to improve air quality in the city centre. (p. 150)
 - s) It is considered that car free residential developments would only be suitable in areas where a controlled parking zone (CPZ) can be enforced. (p. 154)
7. The Committee noted the policy approach options for primary and secondary shopping frontages of district and local centres (p. 166) and considered whether the Council would wish to use planning policy to protect and control smaller shopping areas that may not be classified as local centres, such as Magdalen Road and Northway. The Committee heard that the definition of local centre flows from the National Planning Policy Framework and that it may be possible to argue that additional shopping areas should be classified as local centres.

Recommendation – That consideration is given to the possibility and desirability of using planning policy to protect and control shopping frontages in smaller shopping areas that are not classified as local centres.

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