


Oxford Core Strategy Examination Statement of Oxford City Council		www.oxford.gov.uk  OXFORD CITY COUNCIL
C/M5/6	Matter 5 – Housing Issue 6 – Existing housing stock	

i) Should more be said about the role and care of the existing housing stock?

There are run-down dwellings in some areas of Oxford, notably on council estates such as Barton and Blackbird Leys, and there is an AAP and SPD respectively, planned for these areas which may help facilitate improvements to the existing stock. A major regeneration scheme is currently taking place in Rose Hill and is near completion. These are all referred to in the Core Strategy (p7, p34, p46).

The Balance of Dwellings SPD (CD7/14) seeks to protect smaller family dwellings from conversion into flats in many areas but allows for the conversion of larger family dwellings into smaller homes thereby making better use of the larger houses. This SPD is referred to in the Core Strategy (p98).

With regards to empty properties, there is no specific reference in the Core Strategy. At 2009 there were 1,632 empty properties in Oxford (long and short-term empties) so it is important to bring them back into use. Oxford has a dedicated Empty Property Officer to reduce vacant dwellings even further and an Empty Property Operational Strategy 2009-12. Bringing homes back into use is important as it releases pressure on the housing market however it does not add to the housing stock so the value of a specific reference in the Core Strategy is limited. The Council's Private Sector Stock Condition Survey (2005) assists in developing policies for improvements to existing stock.

ii) Should more detail be given of programmes to improve the existing housing stock?

The Draft Regeneration Framework for Oxford 2026 (CD7/4) includes an action plan for estate-based renewal, and the Housing Strategy 2008-2011 includes details on improving properties, which would be linked to the Barton and Blackbird Leys AAP and SPD. Both documents are referred to in the implementation section and it is not considered necessary to refer to them further. The City Council is committed to the implementation of the Decent Homes Standard to ensure that all social housing landlords bring their properties up to basic standard of habitation by 2010. This is referred to on a number of occasions in the Core Strategy.

iii) Is a policy needed to tackle the issue of concentrations of student housing within certain areas of the city and the problems that brings?

The planning system has limited powers in being able to control where students live because many live in market houses (Use Class C3) as 'house-shares'. Where these house-shares occur in existing residential properties, and are not classed as Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), the planning system cannot do anything to enforce who occupies them. It is inevitable that landlords will purchase (and students will prefer) houses close to the Universities and favoured student areas and, because occupancy in house-shares cannot be controlled, there will be unavoidable concentrations of student house-shares in some areas.

Some house-shares would be classed as HMOs. An HMO has a separate use class to a residential dwelling so planning permission is required to turn a house into an HMO. This is therefore where the planning system can intervene and affect the location of HMOs. The definition of an HMO can vary with case law and can be down to internal issues of whether locks on bedroom doors exist or how the household manages its household cleaning which have the potential to change over time and can therefore unwittingly affect whether or not it is being used as an official HMO. The CLG is currently consulting on new HMO guidance. Difficulties accepted, Oxford adopted a policy in the Local Plan to restrict the number of HMOs in East Oxford (CD 7/6, Policy HS.15) where the highest concentration of students has historically been (based upon the City Council's Environmental Health HMO licensing saturation policy). This policy has been saved, and the intention is that a similar policy will be carried forward into the Development Management DPD.

Like other university cities, Oxford does have significant concentrations of students in Use Class C3 houses which we cannot control. The only two methods by which the planning system can try to reduce students in houses is, firstly to control HMOs which we are doing in East Oxford and, secondly to deliver more purpose-built student accommodation to encourage students out of Use Class C3 houses. Core Strategy Policy CS26 limits students living outside university-provided accommodation to 3,000 per university. The West End AAP (CD7/5) (Policy WE18) and the Local Plan (Section 14) identify suitable sites for student accommodation and the forthcoming Site Allocations DPD will also identify suitable sites.

Oxford has also taken into consideration the level of known HMOs in an area as a key indicator of pressure on the existing housing stock which provided evidence for the Balance of Dwellings SPD. East Oxford has the highest concentration with Headington, St Margaret's and Hinksey Park with the next highest concentrations.

iv) Are the targets and milestones for housing realistic and in sufficient detail to enable careful monitoring of delivery and possible remedial action?

Yes. Housing targets are monitored annually in order to maintain a 5-year rolling supply of deliverable sites. This enables issues of supply to be spotted on a regular basis and would allow remedial action in Policy CS23 to take effect.

The target of 95% of schemes to comply with Balance of Dwellings SPD (CD7/14) is just shy of 100% to recognise that there may be some developments which are just incapable of delivering the required mix due to the shape of the site or particular physical constraints, which is quite possible in an urban environment.

On affordable housing, it is most appropriate to benchmark monitoring against 100% of schemes to comply with the Affordable Housing SPD (CD7/9) rather than monitoring against 50% affordable housing on all sites. This is because the SPD itself allows for some flexibility on viability grounds, particularly important in the current economic climate, which may lead to less than 50% on some sites.

v) Should there be progressive targets and milestones to enable more effective monitoring?

Housing completions are already measured annually and the mix of dwellings and affordable housing policy targets are on a site-by-site basis. This level of detail is considered to lead to very effective monitoring.