



## Government Office for the South East Meeting and visit report

Purpose/reason for meeting	<b>Meeting with Oxford City Council to discuss ways to unblock progress on core strategy</b>
Locality:	Oxford City Council (Mark Jaggard's Office)
Key person(s) met	David Paine – Senior Planning Officer (GOSE) Mark Jaggard – Spatial and Economic Development Manager (OCC) Adrian Roche – Planning Policy Team Leader (OCC) Laura Goddard - Principal Planner (OCC) Rachel Williams - Principal Planner (OCC)
Date of meeting:	23 <sup>rd</sup> October 2009; 9.30am
Report completed by	David Paine (GOSE) and Mark Jaggard (OCC)

<b>Notes:</b>  Core Strategy	<p><b><u>Timetable</u></b></p> <p>We discussed the recent letters from PINS and the suspension of the Core Strategy examination until the legal challenges to the South East Plan are resolved.</p> <p>MJ expressed the City Council's disappointment at the delay and his concern that it could slow down delivery of other key elements of the Core Strategy.</p> <p>DP first stated that any discussions were on a without prejudice basis to legal proceedings and any findings by the Planning Inspector. Any discussion of possible outcomes from the Courts were on a "what if" basis to inform possible ways forward and were not to be regarded as expressing any preference for particular outcomes from the Courts. He explained that there was no date fixed at present for the High Court judgement nor for any consequential work following that.</p> <p><b><u>Implications of the South of Oxford Strategic Development Area (SDA) being removed from the South East Plan</u></b></p> <p>DP started by explaining that he could not express preferences about particular sites or proposals so as not to prejudice the Secretary of State's discretion. Also, he was not party to any draft Inspector's report. He then posed the question – if the SDA falls, what implications would this have in terms of Oxford's Core Strategy?</p> <p>OCC indicated that the 4,000 dwellings in the SDA would be outside the City's administrative boundary. Although the SDA would clearly contribute significantly to meeting Oxford's housing need, there would be no implications for the Core Strategy in terms of delivering the city's housing allocation in the South East Plan (8,000 dwellings).</p> <p>OCC felt much of the debate at the Core Strategy examination was around the housing-employment balance issue, and the main discussion at any reconvened hearing session is likely to be on this topic. In particular, whether there would be any implications for the proposed strategic employment allocation at the <b><u>Northern Gateway</u></b>.</p> <p>MJ outlined the nature of the debate about the Northern Gateway at the examination, including the economic and transport issues associated with the proposal.</p> <p>LG explained that the Northern Gateway has never been dependant on the SDA. The Northern Gateway has been part of the spatial strategy since the Preferred Options stage of the Core Strategy, whereas the SDA issue was added to the Core Strategy through a further Preferred Options stage following the publication of the Panel Report into the South East Plan. The council advised that the housing/employment balance was considered <b>before</b> the addition of the SDA, albeit the SDA helped to improve the balance</p>
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over the plan period.

DP asked if the ecotown at Bicester would have any bearing on this. MJ felt that it wouldn't since Bicester's employment market is very different from Oxford's. DP added that it might be worthwhile to check employment evidence from surrounding LPAs to get a feel for what was happening in the sub region as a whole.

In relation to transport, DP enquired about the possibility of ramp controls onto the A34 to address any possible Highways Agency concerns that may be of concern to the Inspector. OCC explained that this is something that OCC and the developers had not explored in detail, but could be an option for the Area Action Plan. The council considers that there may be practical difficulties given the nature of the slip roads onto the A34.

MJ indicated that the City Council intended to hold the **Northern Gateway Area Action Plan** in abeyance pending the outcome of the Core Strategy. DP agreed with this approach.

AR indicated that another possible implication could be in relation to the Core Strategy's proposals for regeneration in Blackbird Leys. However, the City Council is committed to regeneration on the estate with or without the SDA, and will shortly be commencing work on preparing an Area Regeneration Plan.

### **Contingencies**

DP indicated that it is important for the City Council to consider a Plan B in the event that the SDA does not come forward. What would this mean in terms of housing/employment balance and how would the council ensure a sustainable outcome with regard to the Gateway if the SDA could not be developed? The Council should consider a range of reasonable options, bearing in mind that any such options need to be viable and deliverable. DP encouraged OCC to think of scenarios and possible outcomes (if x happens, then the strategy will enable us to do y).

DP added that the Plan B should be considered against the Council's sustainability objectives and that the Council should be mindful of whether the options considered would require any additional consultation requiring a suspension of the examination. These points are likely to be explored at any new procedural meeting that may be called by the Inspector.

DP referred to the Reigate and Banstead Core Strategy, where the Inspector has (exceptionally) allowed consultation on proposed changes while the examination was suspended.

OCC responded that the City Council is happy to do this exercise, adding that any alternative options considered are likely to already be in the public domain (e.g. issues relating to possible phasing or alterations to the mix of the Northern Gateway proposal had already been consulted on and debated in detail at the Core Strategy examination).

DP indicated that, without prejudice, it might be useful to send the Council's thoughts on a Plan B to the new Inspector to see if it would help him to reconvene the examination as early as possible.

Barton

MJ and RW outlined the importance of the proposed strategic housing site at Barton. The council considers this to be in conformity with the South East Plan; key to Oxford's housing land supply; will have wider regeneration benefits; has Homes and Communities Agency financial support; and had general support during the consultation process. OCC therefore intends to continue work on the Barton Area Action Plan, notwithstanding the delay to the Core Strategy.

DP queried whether it was necessary to do an AAP and suggested that an SPD could be an alternative route. DP referred to Horsham and Crawley, where some strategic sites had been progressed through AAP's and others through SPD's. He suggested speaking to these authorities to find out their experiences.

A discussion followed about the pros and cons of the AAP or SPD routes. DP suggested that an important factor would be the views of key stakeholders such as the County Council on whether an AAP or SPD would be preferable. Another key factor is whether there is any additional material that ought to be tested at the DPD level.

RW enquired whether it was now possible to prepare an AAP in advance of a Core Strategy given that the relevant phrase had been removed from the latest version of PPS12. DP referred to Regulation 13 and advised the LPA to seek its own legal advice.

The question is whether, in advance of the core strategy, an AAP could be used to make a statement that the Local Plan Safeguarded Land policy is no longer being implemented with respect to the Barton land and that must be a matter for lawyers to advise. DP suggested an alternative approach might be to use the AMR to state that the policy is no longer being applied.

In terms of timescales, DP confirmed that an SPD couldn't be adopted until the Core Strategy is adopted. Work on an AAP could progress through Regulation 25 public participation up to the point of publication, although it might be unwise to publish the AAP if the Inspector's Report had not been received by that point.

DP indicated that, in practice, many of the tasks in the early stages would be the same whichever route is followed. The City Council should ensure that consultation meets DPD requirements and that sustainability appraisal of reasonable alternatives for regenerating this location is undertaken, so that any risks involved in switching routes at a later stage in the process are minimised.

OCC agreed to give further thought to the pros and cons of the two processes following the meeting, but confirmed that in any event the Council is committed to extensive community engagement on this project.

DP asked whether the LPA might consider using the development management process in advance of the core strategy. If so, he suggested that any Environmental Assessment should cover reasonable alternatives for regeneration of the site/estates and should be prepared to a high standard including consultation. He could not comment about the likelihood of call-in.

<p>Site Allocations DPD</p>	<p>LG indicated that, while the current LDS shows Site Allocations and Development Management as separate DPD's, the current thinking of OCC officers is that these should be combined into a Sites and Policies DPD to make better use of resources and reduce consultation fatigue. DP agreed that this seemed a sensible approach and invited the LPA to update its LDS accordingly in due course.</p> <p>LG enquired about the level of evidence required to support Site Allocations, in the context of constraints on local authority resources.</p> <p>DP responded that the evidence does not need to be 'gold-plated'. Evidence needs to be tailored to the decisions that need to be made in the light of reasonable alternatives for the particular level of plan-making.</p> <p>DP added that the key consideration is to define what evidence is needed to make these decisions, i.e. what does that decision hinge upon. It is important to concentrate on the big-ticket issues and to identify any potential showstoppers at an early stage. Less significant detailed issues can be left to a later stage.</p> <p>DP also suggested that the council should approach the main statutory agencies and the County Council to ensure that relevant issues were addressed for particular sites. The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment could be used as a starting point for any such discussions.</p>
<p>Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)</p>	<p>AR enquired as to whether or not it was necessary to review the Council's SCI to reflect the amended 2008 Regulations, noting that other local authorities appear to be taking different views on this.</p> <p>DP asked whether this would help with the lower order DPD's. AR felt that it wouldn't add much value, since Oxford's SCI takes a 'menu' approach to the different forms of consultation that may be appropriate at the various stages of plan preparation.</p> <p>DP indicated that the amended Regulations would in any event override any elements of the SCI that are now out of date. GOSE are therefore not pushing local authorities to review their SCI's.</p> <p>DP added that it would be helpful to publish a note on the City Council's website indicating the effect that the 2008 Regulations have on the adopted SCI. The City Council agreed to do this.</p>
<p>Local Development Scheme (LDS)</p>	<p>DP confirmed that there would be little point in formally reviewing the LDS until the uncertainty surrounding the Core Strategy timetable is resolved.</p> <p>In the meantime, DP suggested that the council should publish an update of the programme on the City Council's website so that interested parties can see the latest position. AR agreed to do this once the programme had been discussed further with OCC Members.</p>
<p>Annual Monitoring Report (AMR)</p>	<p>DP asked about Oxford's current position on housing supply. LG reported that figures up to the end of March for the AMR showed that Oxford was still exceeding the South East Plan target despite the recession. DP stated that it would be useful, if possible, to include a snapshot in the AMR of what the latest position was at, say, the end of September.</p> <p>With regard to the five-year supply of deliverable sites, LG indicated that latest figures may show there to be a very minor shortfall depending upon how the calculation was done.</p> <p>MJ enquired as to whether the housing trajectory should now be exclusively based on the SEP target of 400 dwellings a year, or whether reference should still be made to the Local Plan target of 433 dwellings a year pending adoption of the Core Strategy. DP confirmed that the 433 target should now be dropped in favour of the later published SE</p>

	<p>Plan RSS.</p> <p>MJ indicated that the City Council has been working proactively with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), which has helped to keep the delivery of housing going during the recession. MJ cited the grant that the City Council had obtained from the HCA to be one of the pilot authorities for building new council housing. DP added that AMR's in general often come across as monitoring for monitoring's sake. He felt that they could benefit from executive summaries that pull out the key facts such as this for the reader.</p>
Action	OCC and GOSE to send agreed copy of meeting note to the Planning Inspectorate

## Meeting with Northern Gateway Consortium

**Date:** 4<sup>th</sup> November 2009

**Time:** 2.30pm

**Attendees:**

Kevin Dixon, Kier Property  
Mike Robinson, Carter Jonas  
Robin Moxon, Goodman  
Mark Jaggard, City Council  
Tom Morris, City Council

Following the decision from the Planning Inspectorate not to publish the Inspectors Report pending the outcome of the High Court challenges into the South East Plan, the Northern Gateway Consortium requested a meeting with the City Council to discuss the implications of this decision and the impact on the Core Strategy timetable.

The City council explained that since the South East Plan had identified the land south of Oxford SDA for the allocation of 4,000 houses. This site lies within the Green Belt, and if deleted might have implications on Oxford's Core Strategy.

The Consortium expressed concern and a degree of frustration with the new planning system, and the prospect of further delay to the determination on the soundness of the Core Strategy.

The Consortium is currently considering their position in relation to how to take forward the Northern Gateway. The options include awaiting the Inspectors Report; undertaking further background work on the proposed Area Action Plan; or submitting a planning application. To a degree their future course of action would be significantly influenced by the new timetable and the extent of the delay envisaged.

The City Council confirmed that contact would be made with PINS to seek clarification on the potential delay to the Core Strategy.

The Consortium considered that providing some assurance could be given from PINS that the Examination would be re-convened as soon as possible then they were minded to continue pursuing the Northern Gateway site through the LDF process. Then following the Inspector's binding Report on the proposal for the allocation of the Northern Gateway if it is supportive the Consortium would seek to work with the City Council to deliver this site through the Area Action Plan process.

In the meantime the Consortium intend to undertake further research on the uses proposed and the quantum of development put forward at the Examination to see whether it would be possible to provide more information to the new Inspector on the proposed phasing of the development.