

Note to Oxford City Council

OXFORD CORE STRATEGY

As you know, and as confirmed in the Planning Inspectorate's letter of 20 October 2009, I have taken over the examination of the Oxford Core Strategy from my colleague inspector, David Fenton, following his retirement. On 14 October 2009, Mr Fenton wrote to you indicating that the South East Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) had been subject to legal challenge on the basis that the Sustainability Appraisal had failed to take into account reasonable alternatives to the green belt reviews for the South of Oxford and North East of Guildford. Since the Oxford Core Strategy was drawn up in the light of the RSS's approach to Oxford, particularly its dependency on the identification of the South of Oxford Strategic Development Area, he decided to suspend the examination into the Core Strategy until the legal challenges are concluded.

I am currently assessing the current position and bringing myself up-to-date with the key issues relevant to this examination. I am keen to see whether there might be a positive way forward of progressing the examination of the Oxford Core Strategy whilst the legal challenges are proceeding, so that the momentum of the examination is not lost. I have now been briefed by the previous inspector and wish to seek the views of Oxford City Council's planning officers on the possible implications of this legal challenge for the strategy and policies of the Oxford Core Strategy (as amended). This might include making some limited amendments to the text and policies of the Oxford Core Strategy to incorporate a contingency to cover the South of Oxford Strategic Development Area not coming forward within the current plan period.

To these ends, I would be grateful if the Council's officers could address the following basic questions:

1. Whether any progress can be made with the examination of the Oxford Core Strategy, pending resolution of the legal challenge relating to the South of Oxford Strategic Development Area;
2. What, if any, are the implications of the legal challenge relating to the South of Oxford Strategic Development Area (SOSDA) for the strategy and policies of the Oxford Core Strategy, in particular:
 - a. What would be the implications for the Oxford Core Strategy if the SOSDA proposal were to be deleted from the South East Regional Spatial Strategy or did not come forward within the current plan period?
 - b. What, if any, implications would the deletion or failure of the SOSDA proposal have for the housing:employment balance of the Oxford Core Strategy?
 - c. Would any contingency arrangements need to be included in the Oxford Core Strategy to address the likely implications of the deletion of the SOSDA or its failure to come forward within the current plan period, and if so, what would these be likely to be?
3. What minimum alterations to the wording of the strategy, policies, text and Proposals Map of the Oxford Core Strategy (as amended) would be necessary to take account of the possible deletion of the South of Oxford Strategic Development Area proposal or its failure to come forward within the current plan period?
4. Have any meetings been held with key stakeholders (such as GO-SE, South Oxfordshire District Council, developers and landowners etc) about this issue since the close of the hearing sessions; if so, could notes of these meetings be forwarded to me as soon as possible.

It would be helpful if the Council's officers could make an initial response to these queries by 19 November 2009. Depending on what views are forthcoming, I may then decide to invite responses from other parties and representors, and consider arranging a Procedural Meeting to examine the way forward.

Stephen J Pratt – DPD inspector
2 November 2009