



# The Planning Inspectorate

3/25 Hawk Wing  
Temple Quay House  
2 The Square  
Temple Quay  
Bristol BS1 6PN

Direct Line 0117-372-8468  
Switchboard 0117-372 8000  
Fax No 0117-372-8782  
GTN 1371-8468  
e-mail: [stephen.carnaby@pins.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:stephen.carnaby@pins.gsi.gov.uk)  
<http://www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk>

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Mr Mark Jaggard & Mr Adrian Roche  
Oxford City Council  
Ramsay House  
10 St. Ebbe's Street  
Oxford  
OX1 1PT

Your Ref:

Our Ref: PINS/G3110/429/5

Date: 18<sup>th</sup> March 2010

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Dear Messrs Jaggard & Roche,

## OXFORD CORE STRATEGY - EXAMINATION

I refer to the Procedural Meeting held on 9 February 2010 to discuss the completion of the examination of the Oxford Core Strategy. As you know, the examination is currently suspended, pending the resolution of the legal challenges to the South of Oxford Strategic Development Area included in the final approved version of the South East Plan Regional Spatial Strategy.

Following that meeting, on 3 March 2010, you provided a final response to the points raised, outlining the nature and scope of the suggested changes to the Core Strategy and suggesting a timetable for completing the examination. I have carefully considered all the points made by the City Council and other participants, including those made at the Procedural Meeting and to the City Council's response. Taking everything into account, I have decided that the City Council's suggested changes, along with the associated supporting evidence and suggested timetable provides a positive way forward to completing the examination. In coming to my decision, I particularly note that national policy in PPS12<sup>1</sup> emphasises the importance of producing core strategies in a timely and efficient manner, since this is essential for the supply of housing and other development land to meet need, and is related to the local government performance framework.

However, my decision is subject to several important qualifications. Firstly, I will expect the City Council to complete the necessary work and supporting material associated with the suggested changes to the Core Strategy before the consultation commences. This will enable other participants to understand the basis for the suggested changes and make full comments at the consultation stage. The main issues that I wish the City Council to cover are:

1. An update on the overall housing and employment land supply position, based on the latest information from the Annual Monitoring Report and other monitoring information, along with any other significant changes in circumstances since the hearing sessions closed;
2. Full and complete details of all the suggested changes needed to the text and policies of the amended Core Strategy;
3. The implications of the deletion or delay of the South of Oxford Strategic Development Area (SOSDA), as a result of the legal challenges to the South-East Plan RSS, particularly including:

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<sup>1</sup> Planning Policy Statement PPS12 – Local Spatial Planning (¶ 4.53-4.58)



- a. The implications for the overall provision of housing and employment development;
- b. The overall housing/employment balance, including the basis and justification of the figures and calculations used;
- c. The implications for the Northern Gateway proposal (and any other relevant sites/proposals), including the scale, nature, mix, extent and phasing of land-uses, particularly housing and employment;
- d. The implications for the regeneration and development of Blackbird Leys and Cowley Centre;
- e. The issue of general conformity of the Oxford Core Strategy with the South East Plan RSS following the legal challenges;
- f. The implications for the 4,000 dwellings originally allocated to the SOSDA, along with the implications for any review to accommodate this housing in central Oxfordshire or elsewhere, including any possible need to review the Green Belt around Oxford;
- g. The need for any contingency arrangements to deal with the possible reinstatement of the SOSDA at a future date, including any contingencies to cover the phasing, mix and scale of development proposed at the Northern Gateway, and indications of what would trigger a review of the Core Strategy;
- h. The need for any further sustainability appraisal work (including Habitats Regulations/Appropriate Assessment).

*Note: I may need to revise or supplement these issues once the legal challenges to the South East Plan RSS are resolved.*

Secondly, before the hearings recommence, I will need to have information on the latest position on the legal challenges to the South East Plan RSS. This will include details of any additional work to be undertaken by the Secretary of State on any amendments to the South East Plan RSS resulting from the outcome of the legal challenges. The resumption of the hearing sessions may depend on the stage reached in resolving the legal challenges. Once the legal challenges have been completed, I will inform the City Council and other participants about the scope of the remainder of the examination, and whether any further representations or statements will be required.

Thirdly, I understand that the City Council intends to undertake full consultation on the suggested changes to the Core Strategy and supporting material, so that anyone can make representations on the suggested changes, not merely those who have already made representations or have been involved in the examination and/or hearings. The City Council should make it clear in the consultation arrangements that representations should only address the suggested changes to the Core Strategy and accompanying documents, and should include all the points to be made, with no need to repeat points made previously, similar to the previous consultation in April/May 2009. I note the timing of the consultation period in relation to any national/local elections, but this is an issue for the City Council to address. However, I understand that senior officers and members are content with the timetable.

I propose to review the future progress of the examination once the consultation period has closed. When the City Council and I have had an opportunity to consider the representations, I will confirm whether the hearing sessions are to resume, and outline the matters for discussion at these sessions.

Following further requests to release the previous inspector's report on the examination of the Core Strategy, I reiterate the earlier decision of The Planning Inspectorate<sup>2</sup> that the public interest in the prompt and proper conclusion of the examination, with the report released once it has been fully completed, outweighs the public interest in disclosing an incomplete report.

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<sup>2</sup> Letter from The Planning Inspectorate to Mr Michael Tyce (11 January 2010) [ID/12]

Finally, I look to the City Council and all participants to approach the remaining stages of the examination in a positive manner, adhering to any guidelines, deadlines and timetables that are set. All material and points that participants wish to make should be submitted as part of their representations on the suggested changes. I will outline the details of the procedure to be followed for the hearing sessions when I confirm their resumption. The City Council should make provisional arrangements to resume the hearing sessions during the week commencing 12 July 2010, subject to my confirmation after the consultation period has finished.

In summary, the likely timetable will be as follows:

- 9<sup>th</sup> April - Consultation on suggested changes and associated evidence
- 21<sup>st</sup> May - Consultation period finishes (6 weeks later)
- 28<sup>th</sup> May - Representations available on web-site and in exam library
- 11<sup>th</sup> June - Inspector confirms whether the hearings are to be resumed and publishes details of the matters and issues to be discussed at the hearing sessions
- 1<sup>st</sup> July - Participants statements for hearing sessions submitted
- w/c 12<sup>th</sup> July - Hearings recommence (if confirmed)

If the City Council wishes for any clarification about these arrangements or wishes to amend the timetable, they should inform the Programme Officer as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

*Stephen J Pratt*

**Stephen J Pratt**  
Inspector