



# The Planning Inspectorate

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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: 11<sup>th</sup> June 2010

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Dear Messrs Jaggard & Roche,

## **OXFORD CORE STRATEGY - EXAMINATION RESUMPTION OF HEARING SESSIONS**

As you know, the examination of the Oxford Core Strategy is currently suspended pending the resolution of the High Court challenges to the South of Oxford Strategic Development Area included in the approved South-East Plan Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). I understand that progress on these legal challenges is currently in abeyance, pending the outcome of policy decisions on the future status of the RSS.

A Procedural Meeting was held on 9 February 2010 to discuss a possible way forward to conclude the examination of the Oxford Core Strategy in an expeditious manner. On 9 April 2010, Oxford City Council published a Schedule of Further Proposed Changes to the Submission Core Strategy, with the consultation period expiring on 21 May 2010. Representations have been received on the Further Proposed Changes, and the Council has now published a report summarising the responses made in the representations. At this stage, I anticipated being able to review the future progress of the examination, with a view to resuming the hearing sessions on 14 July 2010.

However, on 27 May 2010, the Secretary of State wrote to Council leaders highlighting the new Government's commitment to rapidly abolish Regional Strategies (RSS) and return decision-making powers on housing and planning (including housing supply and the provision of travellers sites) to local councils without the framework of regional numbers and plans<sup>1</sup>. On 9 June 2010, the Minister of State also announced changes to housing policy relating to previously developed land (private residential gardens) and housing density<sup>2</sup>.

The Government's intention to abolish the RSS is a material consideration in examining development plans, but at present, the means by which it will be abolished have yet to be set out in detail. Formal revocation of the RSS has not yet occurred and, in legal terms, the current RSS (SEPRSS) is still part of the development plan. Current national policy (including PPS12 & PPS3, as amended) also remains in force. Furthermore, I am not yet fully aware of the views of the Council and other participants on the implications of the new Government statements on the emerging revised national policy approach to housing and planning or the associated transitional arrangements for dealing with plans.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP (Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government) to all local authorities [dated 27 May 2010; DCLG]

<sup>2</sup> Statement of Greg Clark MP (Minister of State for Decentralisation) [dated 9 June 2010; DCLG]



Consequently, at present, I consider that it would be difficult to proceed with the resumed hearing sessions until further clarity is available on the status of the RSS, and the means by which it will be abolished, and how decisions on housing and planning will be returned to the local planning authorities without a framework of regional numbers and plans. I understand that a formal Ministerial statement on this matter will be released shortly. I therefore intend to defer a decision about whether and when to resume the hearings until the nature, scope and approach of any revised housing and planning policy framework is clear, after the Ministerial Statement has been made.

I realise that this may inevitably delay the progress of the examination of the Core Strategy. However, I consider this limited delay would be preferable to resuming the hearing sessions at a time when the full implications of the new Government's policy on housing and planning have not been assimilated and assessed, with the possibility of further adjournments to consider these matters.

Depending on when the Ministerial statement is issued, it may leave insufficient time before the start of the hearing sessions (currently scheduled for 14 July 2010) for the Council and participants to fully assimilate and assess the implications of any changed policy approach to housing and planning decision-making and the status of the RSS. Consequently, it may probably be necessary to defer the resumption of the hearing sessions until the situation becomes clearer.

Mr David Fenton, the assistant inspector, endorses this approach.

I will reconsider the matter after the forthcoming Ministerial statement has been issued and the position on the status of the RSS and the nature, scope and approach of any revised national housing and planning policy framework is clearer.

Yours sincerely,

*Stephen J Pratt*

**Stephen J Pratt**  
Inspector