

Oxford Local Plan EIP GreenWay Submission

Matter 2: Housing capacity in Oxford

GreenWayOxfordshire is a group of members of North Oxford Golf Course opposing plans to develop the Course for housing. The Course has been allocated in the submitted Cherwell Local Plan Partial Review to meet alleged Oxford housing need, contrary to Green Belt and Recreation/Health policies in the NPPF.

GreenWay is part of the Cherwell Development Watch Alliance (CDWA) and endorses its separate submissions.

I was in charge (inter alia) of strategic planning in Oxfordshire until my retirement in 2003. I think that I retain an overview of what is happening in Oxfordshire.

1 Since the 1974 Local Government Review the City Council has sought to overstate its potential employment growth and housing need, at the same time underestimating housing land availability in order to seek expansion into the surrounding Green Belt. For instance the City Council argued at the first Oxfordshire Structure Plan EIP that the level of employment at the then British Leyland car factory (roughly 20,000 in the 1970s and now fewer than 5,000 under BMW) should be projected to increase significantly - at a time when it was quite clear that necessary automation would reduce worker numbers.

2 There is a large imbalance between employment and economically active people in the City. Nearly half Oxford's workers commute in to Oxford from outside the City. At a time of a declared Climate Emergency, it is simply not sustainable (in the proper sense of the word) to seek to perpetuate high commuting flows. Employment and Housing Policies should seek more balance by not reserving major sites for further employment, by redeveloping underused employment sites for housing, and by specifying housing at appropriately high density. (I should emphasise that high density does not require high rise or low quality.)

3 It is fair to say that the 25 ha. Oxford North development with a huge amount (87,000 sq.m.) of employment and small amounts of housing (480 homes in the current proposal with only 168 affordable homes) illustrates precisely this overall point.

4 In sum, the City Council has sought for some years to protect its underused employment sites, build housing at relatively low densities – and push its growth ambitions into the Oxford Green Belt. This is somewhat ironic; not least because one of the 5 purposes of the Green belt, urban regeneration, is there precisely to help the productive recycling of land. Indeed all 5 purposes of the Green Belt set out in the NPPF are there to protect the City as well as its surroundings.

5 The City Council could identify and then release suitable but currently reserved employment sites, specify higher densities and correct its grossly inaccurate calculation of housing need. This could remove substantial amounts, if not all, of the alleged unmet need which is currently being included in the Plans of neighbouring Authorities, and which is needlessly compromising the Oxford Green Belt – including the North Oxford Golf Course.

6 This alternative approach (higher density housing inside Oxford and really close to employment centres) would moreover help effect the sort of modal shift that is critically required in a Climate Emergency – as well as reducing tidal commuting flows. Only by making – *now* - such changes will we be able to achieve a zero carbon Oxfordshire by 2050 or earlier.

7 The Plan as it stands is therefore unsound and should at least be paused until a correctly calculated figure of housing need can be agreed and a thorough and up to date – and housing-need orientated - assessment of housing land availability carried out.

David Young on behalf of GreenWay 7/11/19

