

Matter 1 Written Statement – Summertown & St Margaret’s Neighbourhood Forum (ID 59).

According to Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Guidance March 2014: 'Neighbourhood Plans give communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their area. Neighbourhood planning provides a powerful set of tools for local people to plan for the types of development their community needs and where the ambition of the neighbourhood is aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area.'

More specifically, 'Neighbourhood Plans must be in 'general conformity' with the 'strategic' policies of Local Plans. This raises two questions; what are the specific 'strategic' policies of the Local Plan 2040, and what are the non-strategic policies of the Local Plan? Secondly, what does 'general conformity' mean, and who decides this and is this explained in the Plan ?

This is where we believe there is a need for clarification. We argue that for our Neighbourhood Plan to be meaningful it must have locally relevant policies. In other words, unless the Plan has meaningful neighbourhood policies the Neighbourhood Plans do not give communities 'direct power' as promised in the Guidance.

We can cite our previous examination in 2018-2019, where the Council and the Inspector thought that some of the NP policies in that Plan did not conform. This situation is unsatisfactory, and we hope that this can be avoided when our Review is considered, with the Local Plan 2040 providing a clearer definition and justification of the term 'general' conformity.

We argue that for our Plan now under review by the Neighbourhood Forum should allow spatial policies that vary from the Local Plan in order to address neighbourhood planning concerns. For example, policies on housing size mix, housing for the elderly, and housing for key workers or students for which a neighbourhood variation makes logical sense given the circumstances of our area. We seek clarification in the Local Plan that such neighbourhood level policies, applicable to our area and evidenced on this basis, are in 'general' conformity' of the Local Plan. Neighbourhood policies of this kind have much more meaning and impact for our neighbourhood (in terms of development control decisions) than city wide policies that do not make neighbourhood distinctions and are not based on neighbourhood level analysis.