

Brightwell cum Sotwell Neighbourhood Plan

Brightwell cum Sotwell Neighbourhood Plan & the Implications of the SODC Local Plan 2032 Preferred Options Report



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This paper summarises the implications that SODC's Local Plan 2032 Preferred Options Paper could have on Brightwell cum Sotwell's emerging Neighbourhood Plan, as set out in a public meeting held at the Village Hall July 2016. The meeting did not discuss the merits of the Local Plan, nor whether the BCS NP Cttee agreed with the Local Plan or not. The meeting set out in a factual way what the implications of the Local Plan could mean to the NP.

What is the Local Plan?

The Local Plan 2032 provides a policy framework for development across South Oxfordshire to 2032. It sets out a vision, shows how SODC have developed a strategy that responds to that vision and how SODC will deliver it. The policies in the Local Plan will be used to help SODC make decisions on planning applications across the district. The Local Plan 2032 sets out a strategy for delivering growth, managing change and protecting the natural and built environment. It identifies the amount and distribution of housing, employment and retail across the district. It also identifies the infrastructure, such as community facilities and strategic transport required to support sustainable development.

Why is SODC preparing a new Local Plan?

In April 2014, the councils across Oxfordshire published a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). This identified new evidence of South Oxfordshire's housing need beyond that which was planned for in the existing Core Strategy. Oxford City Council for example has indicated that they could have difficulties in meeting their identified housing need within the city boundary and have asked other districts across the county to consider taking some of this "unmet need." This change in evidence meant that SODC needed to review its existing plan, the Core Strategy, and consider how it can plan for additional growth. The Preferred Options document is the latest stage in that process and sets out how SODC proposes to meet that housing need.



SODC Proposed Housing Allocations

The Local Plan seeks to meet housing needs identified for South Oxfordshire as well as a contribution towards our neighbour, Oxford City's unmet housing need. The Preferred Options consultation proposes to make provision for 15,750 homes to meet the identified housing need for South Oxfordshire over the plan period (2011 to 2032), this equates to 750 homes per annum. SODC also proposes an additional 3,750 to help meet the housing needs of Oxford City. This is broken down into the following categories:

• Completions 2011 - 2016	2,634
• Commitments at 31 March 2016 - sites under construction, with planning permission or resolution to grant planning permission and allocations carried forward	8,795
• New strategic allocation in the Local Plan 2032	3,500
• Brownfield allocations (Oxford Brookes University, Wheatley & Culham No.1)	800
• New allocations at Thame and Wallingford (430 HOMES) for their Neighbourhood Plans	1,025
• New allocations in the Larger Villages for their Neighbourhood Plans	2,465
• Sites in smaller villages (Neighbourhood Plans) and windfalls	785

Proposals for development in South Oxfordshire should be consistent with the overall strategy of:

- retaining Didcot/Science Vale as a focus for major new development with improved transport connectivity
- providing for major development at Chalgrove Airfield
- supporting the roles of Henley, Thame and Wallingford
- supporting and enhancing the roles of the larger villages
- supporting smaller villages by allowing limited amounts of housing and employment
- protecting and enhancing the countryside and particularly those areas within the Areas of Outstanding natural Beauty and Oxford Green Belt by ensuring that outside towns and villages any change relates to very specific needs such as those of the agricultural industry or enhancement of the environment
- working closely with partner agencies, local authorities, communities, neighbourhood Plans groups and other stakeholders to ensure the comprehensive and timely delivery of our strategy



The Role of Neighbourhood Plans

SODC is proposing (in the Local Plan 2032 Preferred Options paper) that Neighbourhood Plans will provide the way for communities to deliver their housing targets. SODC propose that the Local Plan will provide the broad strategic framework for growth but much of the detail, such as the specific sites to be allocated for housing, will be finalised at the local level through neighbourhood development plans and orders. SODC will support parish and town councils who are working on neighbourhood development plans. In this way, the Local Plan will stipulate the approximate amount of housing that they expect each village to have but it will be down to each parish to determine where it goes in their NP.

SODC advise in the Local Plan that parishes who do not set their housing requirement in a NP that is in line with the Local Plan expectations and deliver this housing on time, will lose the ability to shape their own future (see the draft section from Local Plan below)

11.8 We propose that where villages are in the process of preparing a neighbourhood plan, the houses allocated to these villages should be delivered through the neighbourhood plan, allowing communities to have their say on where development in their area will go. If a neighbourhood plan does not progress within a specified time frame, we will, as the local planning authority, support acceptable proposals that come forward through the planning application process.

SODC clarify their position further in order to be sure that their approach is robust and that the housing supply is, in practice, likely to be delivered. SODC is therefore proposing a contingency Policy for villages that will operate as a contingency in the event that a neighbourhood plan cannot or will not allocate the required level of housing.

If a neighbourhood plan does not adequately progress with allocating sites within 12 months of adoption of this local plan 2032, planning applications for housing in the villages will be supported provided that:

- i. Proposals comply with the overall housing distribution strategy***
- ii. Proposals comply with the housing and other applicable policies in this plan***



Implication to the Brightwell Cum Sotwell (BCS) Neighbourhood Plan (NP)

The importance of neighbourhood planning as SODC's preferred way to enable communities to deliver housing targets at a local level is clearly set out in the Local Plan. Our Neighbourhood Plan will therefore carry weight when SODC is considering planning applications within the parish. This does not mean that once we have a NP, only those developments that are in the NP will take place but by having a NP we are in a much stronger position to shape development including where we want it and what we want.

We have to therefore ensure that we agree a Neighbourhood Plan that is consistent with SODC policy – even if this is uncertain at the moment until the SODC Local Plan is agreed in March 2016. We need to complete our NP as quickly as possible if we do not want to be exposed to un wanted development.

Brightwell cum Sotwell will have to play its part in meeting the housing need identified for South Oxfordshire. We cannot pull up the drawbridge and say no to development – we have to be pragmatic. The parish has already identified a need for new housing, in the Housing Needs Survey and the Community Led Parish Plan to help sustain our core services and also to deliver specific types of housing need.

If we do not allocate land for a realistic amount of housing then SODC probably will. This would more-than-likely be developer led (through SODC's call for sites). Our only say would be to object to the inevitable planning applications that would follow.



Housing in Rural Communities

SODC's vision and objectives for South Oxfordshire recognise the rural nature of the district and the importance of our rural communities in contributing to what makes South Oxfordshire such a beautiful and prosperous place to live. South Oxfordshire has about 140 rural communities. These vary considerably in size and character

SODC's strategy is to continue to ensure that all communities thrive and that everyone has access to services within a short distance. This is achieved through a network of settlements and a settlement hierarchy. This identifies villages as being either:

- larger villages, with a wide range of services and facilities in sustainable locations
- smaller villages that have a more limited range of services
- other' villages that are generally very small with very limited or no services and facilities.

SODC's preferred option is to base the housing distribution strategy for rural communities on the settlement hierarchy.

- An average of 10 percent growth in the larger villages
- An average of 5 per cent growth in the smaller villages

The actual amount of development that is expected in any given location would be considered on the identified need for each village and also on what constraints are in place such as flood risk and AONB – there will be some degree of flexibility.

The Local Plan proposes that where villages are in the process of preparing a neighbourhood plan, the houses allocated to these villages should be delivered through the neighbourhood plan, allowing communities to have their say on where development in their area will go and at what number of housing. The NP would be expected to consider what the specific housing needs of its community are. This locally derived figure would be considered against SODC's assessment of how much it considers the village could grow in a sustainable way.

If a neighbourhood plan does not progress within a specified time frame or if the housing allocation derived by any village falls short of SODC's expectations, SODC would support acceptable proposals that come forward through the planning application process. Where a village already has an adopted neighbourhood plan, they will need to review their neighbourhood plan, within the specified timeframe set out in the proposed Contingency Policy.



Housing in Smaller Villages

There are currently 58 villages in the district that are classed as 'smaller villages.' At present there is no requirement for smaller villages to allocate land for development although in-fill development is permitted.

The preferred options paper sets out a change to this policy, proposing that smaller villages are expected to deliver AN AVERAGE OF 5% growth, based on the number of dwellings at the 2011 Census, plus completions over the period 2011-16 and outstanding commitments at 31 March 2016.

This will be met through small sites of 10 homes or less (although this figure could be higher if deemed sustainable by SODC), and infill development, and will not be allocated by the local planning authority. Some smaller villages will be expected to deliver more where there are fewer constraints.

Where smaller villages are preparing a neighbourhood plan, they may choose to allocate sites for housing in their plan. Infill development is defined as the filling of a small gap in an otherwise built-up frontage or on other sites within settlements where the site is closely surrounded by buildings.

Housing in the larger villages

There are currently 12 settlements classed as larger villages in the district. These are: Benson, Berinsfield, Chalgrove, Cholsey, Chinnor, Crowmarsh Gifford, Goring, Nettlebed, Sonning Common, Watlington, Wheatley, Woodcote

Ten of these are either in the process of preparing a neighbourhood plan, or already have a 'made' plan. The proposed strategy for housing distribution in the larger villages is for each settlement to grow proportionally by around 10 percent. The Local Plan provides some flexibility for these villages to have slightly higher or lower allocations depending on constraints such as Green Belt, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and flood zones. What is important, is that this should be achieved through a NP.

What this is saying, is that both small and large villages will have to play their part in meeting the housing need. The sites for housing in villages will be decided by local people, set out in their NP. SODC will guide how many houses need to be built but local people will decide where and what should be built provided that a valid NP is in place.



Proposed Changes to the Settlement Hierarchy in Rural Communities

SODC is in the process of reviewing the existing settlement hierarchy by collecting up to date information on the services and facilities available in settlements across the district. This information will be used to assess the relative sustainability of various settlements and will be used as the basis for a new settlement hierarchy for South Oxfordshire. This will be based on both size and access to services. The options being considered on how to amend the settlement hierarchy are:

1. Do nothing, leave the settlement hierarchy as it is
2. Move some villages from the 'Smaller villages' category into the 'Larger villages' category
3. Introduce a 'Medium sized village' category with an appropriate scale of growth, perhaps at 7.5%

Implication to the Brightwell Cum Sotwell Neighbourhood Plan

We will need to allocate sites that at the very least can accommodate housing to meet the requirements set out by SODC for smaller villages. We have been advised that without a realistic NP that allocates specific sites for housing, Brightwell cum Sotwell may find that in the future, SODC supports sites for development in our village that do not meet our needs. By allocating sites for housing within our NP that meets the requirements of smaller villages we can identify those places that are favoured (for development) by our community greatly increasing the chances of stopping any un-wanted development that may come along in the future in those places that we have indicated in the NP we do not want to see development taking place. A NP can propose places for development and also provide evidence on why a site is not suitable for housing.

In an ideal world, BCS would remain as a smaller village with development based on our housing need.

Some smaller villages will be expected to deliver more housing than others. It is the advice of our planning consultant however, that under this scenario we would more than likely be one of the smaller villages that could be expected to deliver more than a 5% housing increase as we have less constraints than some smaller villages with good services and easy access to Wallingford. The implication of this is that even with a NP, if we allocated fewer houses than is deemed sustainable by SODC or a planning inspector, the NP would not carry enough weight to support refusal by SODC if it has to determine a future un-wanted planning application for the village.



Brightwell cum Sotwell is one of the largest of the small villages in terms of population size but is very much a small village in terms of character and community value. It has good facilities and access to Wallingford. It is openly viewed by developers as a place that could have more housing. In SODC's review could we become a larger village? If it is decided by SODC to allocate some villages as medium villages, we have been advised that BCS may be considered as a medium village. The NP has to take a view on what level of housing we should accommodate within the parish. This has to take into account the uncertainty of what type of village BCS may be categorised as in the future whilst considering OUR identified housing needs.

- If we became a larger village we would need to find space for over 70 new houses
- If we become a medium sized village we need to find space for around 50 – 55 houses
- If we remain a smaller village the allocation would be around 35 new houses

We are therefore trying to grapple with the amount of housing that we need to find space for. This will be above 20 houses, it will be above 35 houses and is likely to be more although less than 65. We are not considering that BCS would become a larger village due to its character and constraints. Whatever happens we are going to have to build more than the 10 - 20 houses we have previously talked about in the Community Led Parish Plan (Housing will be built during the period 2017 to 2032. It would be phased).

The Neighbourhood Plan is currently considering what the implications could be if BCS was re-classified as a medium sized village even though the likelihood of this is still uncertain and that there has been no indication by SODC as to their expectations on what a medium sized village would need to deliver. If we do not plan for this potential scenario and carry on regardless and we subsequently are re-classified as a Medium Village, our Neighbourhood Plan would be immediately be out of date and as such would carry no weight. This could open the door for un-wanted development and also necessitate starting the whole NP process again. We are therefore currently exploring whether we think that the village could accommodate between 50 – 55 additional houses. To achieve this, we may need to allocate sites that include above 10 houses or more and how this could effect an edge of settlement.

Where we do allocate sites, we need to include some that can be delivered quickly in order to demonstrate to SODC the robustness of the plan and how it will meet the development needs of the district. These sites will need supporting information's such as outline proposals and indicative plans. The support of the landowner will be also be crucial. We can allocate what is known as reserve sites if we wish and prioritise sites, stipulating other places that will come for development later in the development plan process.



Other External Factors

The public meeting at the Village Hall also considered other external factors that could have an impact on the Neighbourhood Plan. The need to conclude the Neighbourhood Plan as quickly as possible was set out. This approach, may not allow for the final SODC Local Plan to be considered in our NP. This uncertainty means that the NP Committee is having to make a judgement call on certain issues such as the number of houses to allocate in the village. This will be based on the advise of both SODC and our independent planning consultant.

What is certain however, is that by following this route we will be in a strong position to shape the future growth of our village in a way that meets our housing needs and is in keeping with Brightwell cum Sotwell's special character. By adopting a robust and realistic Neighbourhood Plan we hope to meet the needs of villagers to 2032, creating a sustainable community that is strong enough to resist development pressures that we feel are not appropriate for a rural parish.

