



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
OXFORDSHIRE

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CPRE Oxfordshire News Release

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Quick development could mean long-term pain for villages in the Vale

The Vale District Council is holding a consultation on its Interim Housing Supply Policy which risks making villages vulnerable to quick, poorly planned development that would have a long-term impact on villages and communities.

The Oxfordshire branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) [1] believes the Vale's Interim Housing Supply Policy will relax planning regulations protecting greenfield sites in order to encourage quick developments, with little consideration given as to whether towns and villages have the necessary infrastructure and facilities to accommodate this. [2]

The Vale's Interim Housing Supply Policy outlines the District Council's proposals to deal with a temporary shortfall in its five year housing supply, caused largely by delays in major development sites at Grove and Didcot. The consultation closes on 25th November. [3]

Helen Marshall, Director of CPRE Oxfordshire, said: "We are concerned that this policy is based on a first come, first served approach, rather than a proper exercise which looks at the towns and villages in the Vale and identifies the best sites, both in terms of supporting rural services and in environmental terms. There is little emphasis in the document on the criteria that will be used to determine site suitability."

She continued: "Larger towns have been excluded from this process. But it might well be that sites there would better meet planning criteria, such as availability of services."

The Vale's Interim Housing Supply Policy relaxes Policy GS2 which currently prevents housing on sites outside the defined settlement boundary of the towns or the built up area of the larger and smaller villages, a policy which has up till now been an essential ingredient in the protection of the countryside and the character of its settlements.

Helen Marshall added: "The idea of proportionate growth – which is really just "planning by ratio" – is without merit as there is no mechanism for demonstrating that the current population is the 'ideal' base from which to work. CPRE strongly supports the ambition of maintaining and improving rural facilities and services, but individual villages should be

consulted to determine whether they consider their local services will be at risk in the absence of growth and focus new housing where a defined local need exists.”

In many parts of the Vale, infrastructure is failing to catch up with recent development; for example, the availability of places in primary schools in the Wantage area, including many neighbouring villages, has failed to keep pace with building in the last couple of years. Such considerations are central, yet the figures produced by the District Council, giving ‘potential’ sites, do not in any way reflect them. In some places, therefore, recent local population growth can give good reason to avoid building in such areas. The basis for the suggested availability of sites is in this respect, and in many other ways, critically flawed.

CPRE is also concerned about whether the proportion of affordable housing will remain the same if the Council moves to more smaller developments.

Helen Marshall said: “The most pressing need is for affordable housing for local people on low incomes. However, the proportion of this type of housing tends to be higher in larger developments and it is not clear how the proposed policy will address this issue.”

CPRE Oxfordshire is calling upon the Vale District to:

- provide complete protection to our most important landscape assets;
- make a detailed survey of all possible building sites, in towns and villages of all sizes;
- incorporate in its policy the realisation that targets must be reduced or capital injected; and
- make a prioritised plan. [4]

CPRE is also asking the Council to consider extending the consultation for a further period to give people more time to respond.

Helen Marshall concluded: “Up and down the country, the likelihood of meeting building targets has decreased because developers are finding it difficult to raise capital. Any policy that proposes a quick fix and temporary ‘solution’, and one dependent on permanently damaging our countryside, has to be strongly resisted.”

- END -

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. CPRE Oxfordshire promotes the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural Oxfordshire by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country. Established in 1931, the charity is this year celebrating its 80th anniversary. We are part of the national CPRE charity. For more information see: www.cpreoxon.org.uk
2. **CPRE CONCERNS:**
 - We believe there is no sensible way of moving forward on building in villages without having a full, up to date survey of both needs and site availability in all the settlements concerned.
 - The proportion of affordable housing tends to be greater in larger developments. If the policy is changing to consider more, smaller developments, what impact is this likely to have on the overall provision of affordable housing?

- In general, the provision of infrastructure is closely related to sustainability, a subject close to the Government's heart. However the proportionate approach, when applied to smaller settlements, rides full-face against it.

That major sites might be delayed and villages targeted instead was fully considered at the original Local Plan Inquiry and was dismissed by the Inspector who said '*Reallocating new housing development around the area's villages to reduce the amount in Grove would not only be directly contrary to the plan's strategy and the PPG 3 search sequence but also result in a less sustainable pattern of development across the district and should not be contemplated for these important reasons.*' Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011 - Inspector's Report, Chapter 8 - Housing.

- Green Belt and AONB policies must not be relaxed and we will want the District Council to make this clear, especially in relation to the North Wessex Downs AONB.
3. A full copy of the proposed policy and details of how to respond to the consultation can be found here: <http://tinyurl.com/5wrad7>

4. CPRE PROPOSAL:

We are wholly against any relaxation of Policy GS2, which prevents development outside settlement boundaries, without:

- (i) compensating strong protection for the landscape in its fullest sense, including in particular the AONB, as well as the Green Belt;
- (ii) a full-scale survey of sites in ALL, and not just the larger, villages; and
- (iii) providing details of the current availability of building land, in particular of smaller plots in the major settlements, which are more likely to be brownfield sites.

We believe the above proposals will ensure that any development forced upon the Vale by legislation to enforce targets can only occur on generally agreed and prioritised sites.

For Further Information

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