



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
OXFORDSHIRE

CPRE Oxfordshire Campaign Briefing 29 August 2007

The South East Plan: Oxfordshire to get 56,400 more houses, 4,000 in the Green Belt.

The public inquiry into the South East Plan lasted for four months and now the Panel of inspectors has reported. They have found the Plan wanting in many respects. Some newspapers and broadcasters are today saying the report is "recommending a lower rate of housebuilding growth for the south-east". Lower than Gordon Brown's expectations perhaps, but the Panel's recommendations are still rather higher than those in the South East Plan which was five years in the making. And Oxfordshire is to get a heavy share of the extra growth, including an urban extension south of Grenoble Road with at least 4,000 houses. We are rapidly moving towards two Oxfordshires: "Urban Oxfordshire" based on the Plan's Central Oxfordshire Subregion, and "Rural Oxfordshire"—Banburyshire, Otmoor, the Chilterns and Cotswolds and the Vale.

1. Central Oxfordshire

The Central Oxfordshire Subregion is confirmed. This creates a separate planning policy area in the centre of the county that comprises Wallingford, Didcot, Abingdon, Wantage, Witney, and Bicester, but excludes Banbury, Thame and Faringdon. The Subregion will have higher growth targets than the rest of the county. Oxford City is declared a Centre for Significant Change because of its potential for significant growth.

The Panel considers that insufficient weight has been given to economic factors in Central Oxfordshire. Jobs in the Subregion are estimated to grow by 18,000 from 2006 to 2026, this is 2,000 more than the Regional Assembly's estimate. Some employment land will be on greenfield sites. In the second half of the Plan period, jobs will continue to outstrip labour supply and the extra housing proposed will not fully address this.

2. Housing

The targets for housing have been raised by 10% across the South East, and by 18% in Central Oxfordshire:

- ◆ Central Oxfordshire will get 40,100 houses instead of the 34,000 planned, up 6,100 (17.9%). This is a growth of 2,005 dwellings a year.
- ◆ The Rest of Oxfordshire will get 14,500 houses instead of 13,200, up 1,300 (9.8%).
- ◆ The South East will get 640,100 houses instead of 578,080, up 62,020 (10.7%).

The growth needs of the Central Oxfordshire Subregion will be met through a parallel approach of growth within Oxford with growth in Didcot, Wantage/Grove and Bicester, with a strategic urban extension to Oxford. The urban extension is one of two new Strategic Development Areas (SDAs) proposed by the Panel for the South East; the other is south of Reading.

The Panel rejects proposals for new settlements at Stone Basset, Shipton-on-Cherwell and Weston-on-the-Green in favour of the urban extension, which is a "more sustainable solution, particularly on travel patterns".

The Panel says that it is as important to get the size and type of housing right, for example, affordable housing, as to get the right numbers. But it lowers the affordable housing target for Central Oxfordshire from 50% to "at least 40%". The target for the South East as a whole is 35%.

The targets for extra housing to 2026 are (see also the table at the end of this Briefing):

Cherwell	12,800
Oxford City	8,000
Oxford SDA (south of Grenoble Road)	4,000
South Oxfordshire	10,940
Vale of White Horse	11,560
West Oxfordshire	7,300
Oxfordshire	54,600

3. The Green Belt

The panel concludes that there are exceptional circumstances to justify a review of the Green Belt. A strategic urban extension to Oxford can be accommodated “without damaging its setting but with significant benefits to the economy and housing affordability”. " We do not come to this conclusion lightly".

"The City Council advocate that the next steps should be a strategic Green Belt review. We are concerned about the potential for yet more delay if we were to recommend this... In our view a highly focused, selective Green Belt review would be preferable given the amount of evidence already amassed."

There will be a “highly focused selective” review of the Green Belt. Oxford City Council and South Oxfordshire District Council should accommodate this in their Local Development Frameworks or develop a Joint Area Action Plan. The new Green Belt boundary should endure to at least 2031. Green belt jumping as described in the Barker interim report has influenced the Panel and they say "we are not convinced that a major new settlement outside the Green Belt could be sufficiently self-contained as to outweigh the advantages for sustainable travel of an extension of the regional hub."

"We have a strong preference for the southern edge of the city" because:

- ◆ it could more easily be integrated with existing city public transport systems
- ◆ it is closer to employment sources
- ◆ there would be less risk of coalescence with surrounding settlements than between Kidlington, Yarnton and Begbroke.

But a transport appraisal is needed. The next steps:

- ◆ The Panel has recommended that south of Grenoble Road is declared an Strategic Development Area
- ◆ This needs to be accepted by the Secretary of State
- ◆ Sustainability assessments will be conducted with "full public consultation"
- ◆ A joint Area Action Plan or Local Development Document will be drawn up between Oxford City Council and South Oxfordshire District Council. This may identify additional safeguarded land.
- ◆ Whether there is further potential for expansion beyond 4,000 houses will no doubt be tested during the AAP work.

4. The Rest of Oxfordshire

The Panel recommends that 300 dwellings from the Vale of White Horse should be transferred from the sub-regional area to the ‘rest of county’ to avoid unnecessary release of greenfield sites but the Vale total will not increase. It recommends an increase of 1,000 for Banbury mainly to reflect its economic role.

5. Water

The Panel sees water supply as a local, not regional matter. The Panel concludes that, assuming a new supply is provided (through an Upper Thames Reservoir), this should have no impact on housing distribution. The South East Plan should identify specific reservoir schemes to provide greater certainty over their need and provide a firmer steer to planning authorities to facilitate the delivery.

The Panel is satisfied that sufficient account has been taken of the impact on flooding, even though "not all the Strategic Flood Risk Assessments were completed". Flood risk is a local, not regional issue.

6. Infrastructure and Transport

The Panel does not agree that housing levels can be made contingent on infrastructure as "this would be unhelpful to investment". The proposed East-West Rail link (Oxford to Milton Keynes and East Anglia) is seen as being of strategic importance to the region.

Car dependency has to be reduced but it is "unrealistic to achieve an absolute reduction during the life of the Plan". The Plan's transport policy should be strengthened. The Panel favours road user charging and says that the Plan does not give enough leadership on this. The Panel is frustrated at the lack of a regional freight strategy. The Plan should give more emphasis on moving freight from road to rail.

7. The South East Plan in General

The Panel finds that the Plan is sound overall, except in housing numbers. The Regional Assembly, it says, has given too much weight to the "views of existing residents (i.e. the consultation results) and not enough to demographic and economic factors." It calls for the Plan to achieve "sufficient" rather than "reasonable" levels of housing. It criticises the Regional Assembly for not focusing development on areas already economically buoyant, for not having a more flexible approach to the Green Belt, and for dismissing opportunities outside the subregions.

The Panel is ambivalent about a 60% target for brownfield and says sometimes it should be higher, sometimes lower. But it shares planning authorities criticism of PPS3 and says that it is not always possible to identify windfall sites in advance, and that planners should be allowed to expect unidentified sites to emerge.

Housing is being increased to meet the Plan's target of 3% Gross Value Added per person, but it is dismissive of smart growth, where the focus is on the existing workers creating greater value, rather than expanding the workforce. In pushing housing levels up by a further 10%, the panel concentrates the increase in the London Fringe, Central Oxfordshire and the Western Corridor/Blackwater Valley "to ensure economic potential is not restricted". There are unlikely to be any locations for sustainable new settlements in the South East. The backlog of affordable housing need cannot be cleared in the first years of the Plan, unless more than 25% affordable housing is achieved. One of the reasons for the extra housing proposed is to increase affordable housing. The Panel support a 35% affordable housing target across the South East, split 25% social rental with 10% intermediate (shared equity, etc.).

Green Belt reviews should be considered in Guildford, Oxford and possibly Woking. Major developed sites in the Green Belt "could contribute to development needs in a sustainable way." Reviewed Green Belt boundaries will endure to 2031. Strategic gaps will be maintained but revised regularly (by definition they will be narrowed). The minimum five-mile gap proposed in the Plan is reduced by the Panel to two miles. A new policy should be drawn up for green infrastructure.

The Panel pay little attention to the environment and proposes development that will have negative impact on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, though it says the environmental studies have not been done. It is supportive of a regional target for CO2 emissions but it does not agree with environmentalists that these should be more challenging. It rejects targets for ecological footprints for development preferring "aspirations".

8. Early Reaction

SEERA. The South East England Regional Assembly gave cautious acceptance—as long as Government funds vital extra infrastructure (<http://tinyurl.com/355x5s>).

SEEDA. The South East England Development Agency welcomed the increased housing figures and said that the South East needs smart growth and infrastructure investment to support new homes (<http://tinyurl.com/33efjo>).

9. And finally... The Future is Green?

Shipton-on-Cherwell. The developers who hope for 5,000 on the quarry in Shipton-on-Cherwell got short shrift from local planners and the Examination in Public. So in the wake of the Housing Green Paper, they have recast their proposal as "the first eco-town in Britain". 5,000 solar powered houses and car-free streets will accompany a rail station and park-and-ride. Road junctions will be modified but there is no information on how the housing and park-and-ride will add to the already congested traffic in the Kidlington and Bletchington area.

Abbreviations and Links

CLG: [Communities and Local Government](#). EiP: [Examination in Public](#). GOSE: [Government Office of the South East](#). SEEDA: [South East England Development Agency](#). SEERA: [South East England Regional Assembly](#).

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Recommended Housing provision by District and County

	Draft SE Plan Av/annum 2006-2026	Draft SE Plan Total 2006- 2026	Panel Recommended Change dpa	Panel Report Av/annum 2006-2026	Panel Report Total 2006- 2026	Increase above Draft SE Plan levels	% increase above Draft SE Plan levels
Cherwell	590	11,800	50	640	12,800	1,000	8.5%
Oxford City	350	7,000	50	400	8,000	1,000	14.3%
Oxford SDA	-	-	200	200	4,000	4,000	
South Oxfordshire	510	10,200	37	547	10,940	740	7.3%
Vale of White Horse	575	11,500	3	578	11,560	60	0.5%
West Oxfordshire	335	6,700	30	365	7,300	600	9.0%
Oxfordshire	2,360	47,200	370	2,730	54,600	7,400	15.7%
South East	28,904	578,080	3,104	32,008	640,160	62,080	10.7%

Recommended Housing provision by Subregion

	Draft SE Plan Av/annum 2006-2026	Draft SE Plan Total 2006- 2026	Panel Recommended Change dpa	Panel Report Av/annum 2006-2026	Panel Report Total 2006- 2026	Increase above Draft SE Plan levels	% increase above Draft SE Plan levels
Central Oxfordshire	1,700	34,000	305	2,005	40,100	6,100	17.9%
Rest of Oxfordshire	660	13,200	65	725	14,500	1,300	9.8%