

NEWS RELEASE
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CPRE condemns ‘The Great Oxfordshire Housing Stitch-up’ - and calls for return to democratic planning

The Oxfordshire Growth Board, without any public consultation or pre-warning at all, yesterday announced numbers and locations for the allocation of Oxford’s unmet housing need around the Districts.¹ It includes sites at Begbroke, Kidlington, Old Headington, Grenoble Road, Abingdon, Botley, Cumnor, Eynsham and elsewhere.

CPRE condemns this process as fundamentally undemocratic, completely undermining the Local Plan process, and calls for a return to a proper County Structure Plan.

Helen Marshall, Director, CPRE Oxfordshire said: “This information was published quietly on a website with those members of the public who might have spotted it given just 24 hours to register questions ahead of it being signed off at a meeting of the Oxfordshire Growth Board, which 99% of Oxfordshire residents will never have heard of.

“Although the Growth Board says final decisions will be left to Local Plans, it is clear that the Districts will have about as much room for manoeuvre as a rat in a trap. How can a Council, whose Leader has signed this off at the Growth Board, then speak out against inclusion of one of these sites in a Local Plan? ***This is a great Oxfordshire housing stitch-up.***

“And of course it is all complete nonsense as the Infrastructure Strategy to support the proposed development - also being worked on behind closed doors - is not due to be considered until next Spring.”

CPRE believes there is sense in an Oxfordshire wide plan, but not one produced by an unelected quango. We should return to a full County Structure Plan:

- Led by a democratically accountable body (such as the County Council)
- Supported by adequate evidence (eg information on infrastructure before, not after, decisions on housing targets are taken)
- Open to proper public consultation
- Subject to independent scrutiny (ie a Planning Inspector and an Examination in Public).

Since the calculation of housing need is completed at an Oxfordshire level (ie the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment), it is logical that the spatial distribution of the housing should also be considered at that level, which would allow for better assessment of the cumulative environmental and social impacts.

Helen Marshall added: “The Growth Board is made up of elected Council leaders but none of them are empowered to agree at the Growth Board how Oxfordshire will be developed. They certainly weren’t elected to take instruction from other Growth Board members as to development that may or may not be in line with their residents’ wishes. It completely pre-judges and undermines the value of any public consultation.

“It is all based on a desperate desire to be seen to be fulfilling the Duty to Co-operate, without which an Inspector is unlikely to find a Local Plan sound. Unfortunately, without a Local Plan in place, the threat of speculative development is rampant and this is forcing through rushed and poor decision-making.”

“Oxford’s actual unmet need is really still unknown as it hasn’t done its own Local Plan yet - it could be less or considerably more than the arbitrary figures selected here. The important point is that this is *not* about meeting the housing needs of existing residents, but trying to anticipate what might be needed to accommodate the vast numbers of extra people that the Growth Board wants to bring in to the county to take up new jobs that may or may not be created. None of this proposed development will make the slightest difference to those struggling to find affordable accommodation.”

CPRE will also be questioning the Growth Board on the housing density assumptions behind these proposed allocations. The Growth Board’s Spatial Options Assessment¹ uses density targets as low as 25 per hectare compared to, for example, much sought after Victorian terraced housing at 60-80 dwellings per hectare. CPRE’s position is that the only way to get the smaller, more affordable units that local residents want is to force developers away from building high end executive houses by adopting tougher housing density requirements.

Helen Marshall concluded: “It is quite possible that if target densities were doubled across the board no more land than that already identified in Local Plans would be needed.”

-ENDS -

1. See: <http://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxfordshire-councils-work-together-to-tackle-oxford-housing-shortage/>

The proposed apportionment on ‘green’ (ie ‘suitable’) sites is as follows:

Cherwell	4400
Oxford	550
South	4950
Vale	2200

West	2750
Totals	14850

The detailed spatial options assessment is here:

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/communityandliving/partnerships/GrowthBoard/OxfordSpatialOptionsFinalReport.pdf>

2. 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's volunteers have been helping to protect and enhance our local countryside for over 80 years. We are part of the national CPRE charity. For more information see: www.cpreoxon.org.uk

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