

27 April 2021

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working locally and nationally to
protect and enhance a beautiful,
thriving countryside for everyone to
value and enjoy

West End & Osney Mead Supplementary Planning Document - Issues & Scope Consultation - CPRE Oxfordshire Response, April 2021

The Oxfordshire Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England is concerned with the sustainable use of land in order to ensure a healthy, thriving City that values and protects its green infrastructure, including the Oxford Green Belt and surrounding countryside.

As a centrally located brownfield site, CPRE very much supports the proposed regeneration of the West End & Osney Mead area to make more efficient use of the land.

We also support the creation of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and the ambition to set out a high-quality design code, a strategy for enhancing green infrastructure and to set out measures to alleviate flood risk.

However, there are a number of fundamental issues that the SPD must address.

1. Housing numbers should be increased.

The Local Plan 2036 allocates mixed use sites at the West End and Osney Mead capable of accommodating at least 981 new dwellings within the boundary of the SPD. Site allocations policies in the Local Plan provide for at least 734 new homes in the West End (Policy SP1) and a further 247 at Osney Mead (Policy SP2). However, in the time since the evidence base for the Plan was collated, the world already looks a very different place. The impact of Covid on changing retail and working patterns means that we are unlikely to need large city-centre offices and retail outlets in the same way as before. We also have a better understanding of the critical nature of the response required to both our climate and biodiversity emergencies.

Ring-fencing land for future economic growth ambitions is untenable when the requirement is for quality, affordable housing to meet existing need.

The current consultation is quiet on the number of jobs it is proposed the development will facilitate. Earlier estimates put the figure at 4,000. At an average occupancy of 2.5 people per household, one would need to allow for 1,600 houses just to accommodate the proposed number of employees, without taking into account partners, families or other dependants. The current proposals will therefore be exacerbating overall housing need.

All of this means that the figures for housing should be reviewed upwards.

2. Housing density should be maximised.

The proposed 981 dwellings over 44.63 hectares¹ amounts to a gross density of 22 dwellings per hectare. This is an absurdly inefficient use of land.

We note Local Plan Policy RE2:

“c) opportunities for developing at the maximum appropriate density must be fully explored;

...High-density development (for residential development this will indicatively be taken as 100dph) is expected in the city centre and district centres.”

High density housing is an essential tool in sustainable place-making, supporting effective public transport, services and infrastructure, and helping to reduce carbon emissions.

We note the importance of protecting views in and out of the city, but high density does not equate to high rise, and can be achieved effectively through good design. We also understand that flooding is a consideration, but note that the land area listed as available in the HELAA already appears to have been reduced to take this into account.

This is a once in a generation opportunity to maximise the effective use of large brownfield urban site and it must not be squandered.

3. A different vision

Instead of being developed for no longer needed offices and hotels, we believe that the West End & Osney Mead area would be the right location for a great deal of affordable/social family housing and a school and health centre, all with good access to the City Centre, nature parks and green spaces to the south of the river. Efficient use of this land would also help to reduce pressure on greenfield land elsewhere in the City and in the Oxford Green Belt. **This is the vision that the City Council should be pursuing, together with the University and other landowners, rather than a “globally recognised Innovation District”.**

¹ Osney Mead – 17.4 hectares, Oxford City Local Plan 2036, p115. Details for the West End Sites, totalling 27.23 hectares taken from the HELAA 2019, Appendix B – note that these areas are already reduced to allow for flooding issues.