



The countryside charity
Oxfordshire

Campaigning to protect our rural county

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Dear sir,

RE: Cherwell Draft Local Plan 2040 consultation- CPRE Cherwell Response, October 2023

CPRE Cherwell welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Cherwell Local Plan 2040 (Reg 18 consultation).

Overall, we are supportive of the emphasis of the plan on tackling the climate emergency and the part the countryside can play in this.

Our top concerns are :

- The housing numbers which form the basis of the plan are not fit for purpose.
- A land use strategy, including renewables, must be developed urgently to underpin this plan.
- In the absence of this land use strategy, a “brownfield sites” first priority should be stated in relation to housing and employment development.
- A “brownfield/rooftop” first approach must be stated in relation to renewable energy.
- The proposed removal of land from the Green Belt at Kidlington is unjustified and should be dropped from the Plan.
- The low numbers of Local Green Spaces identified suggest that the system is not working well and that more support needs to be given to communities to help bring these forward.
- Proposed policy on employment land is significantly weaker than the existing Local Plan policy and should be revisited.

There are some elements of the plan where we would like to see either a change in policy, a strengthening of policy or an additional policy. We have grouped our response around five areas:

- Housing
- Green Belt



- Land use (including renewables)
- Environment and Biodiversity
- Other areas of concern

Housing

Total Housing numbers

The Housing & Economic Needs Assessment (HENA) report issued by Oxford City Council in conjunction with Cherwell District Council was taken to consultation earlier this year in a Part 2 Reg 18 report.

CPRE Cherwell considers the total housing numbers proposed in this report overinflated as :

- The trajectory proposed for Oxfordshire as a whole envisages the population growing by nearly 27% by 2040, compared to Office for National Statistics estimates of a UK population increase of less than 5%.
- The level of growth proposed is over 50% more than the growth experienced in the previous period.
- The household growth is assumed to continue at the same rate from 2019-2029 to 2029-39 when the Office for National Statistics predicts a 41% fall in the second decade.
- The net migration is based on a 5 year rather than 10 year average, adding 20% to the figures.

This report forms the basis of the numbers proposed in the Cherwell draft Local Plan and we feel that instead the Government Standard Methodology to predict housing need should have been employed.

Based on standard methodology, Cherwell's need would be 742 dwellings per annum (dpa) = 14,840 over 20 years. This is increased by the HENA to 1,009 dpa, plus 284 dpa for Oxford, giving total housing need of 1,293 dpa = 25,860 over 20 years. **This equates to 11,020 more homes.** (See Table 3, p114)

Oxford City's unmet housing need

The Oxford unmet housing need is identified as 284 dpa. We strongly oppose this on the basis of the unsound findings of the Housing & Economic Needs Assessment (HENA) report which we highlight above. Cherwell should focus on the housing needs of the people of Cherwell and resist Oxford city overspill, which is both an overinflated number and can be met by better land use, allocating brownfield sites within the city to homes instead of jobs. The map below illustrates this point:



City's growth policy ups pressure on housing



Housing Density

The details within Core Policy 24 show that the plan is largely aiming for 30 dwellings per hectare. We consider this to be extremely low and with good design, small affordable homes should be built at a target density of a minimum of 50 dwellings per hectare, although we would consider 80 dwellings per hectare or higher to be a reasonable target in many locations. This increase in density would have a significant reduction in land take as well as creating more sustainable communities that are better able to support services and infrastructure.

Affordable Housing

In Para 3.201 it is stated that “The Council’s Housing Strategy explains how housing for social rent is the only truly affordable housing option for many people in Cherwell.” We concur with this statement, but note that in 2020/21, just 7 social rented homes were delivered. Total delivery that year was 1,192 (table p119) i.e., only 0.6% of all the houses built met the real need. The draft plan states that it is proposed that 30% of new housing is affordable and 70% of this should be affordable/social rented but does not break down to give a social rent only figure. This needs to be clarified and more social rent homes must be provided within existing proposed numbers.

‘Affordable housing’ should be clearly defined and quantified within the plan, with new homes for sale or rent directly linked and affordable in relation to average local incomes for key workers.



Housing Locations

CPRE Cherwell strongly oppose the allocation of houses at land north of The Moors site in Kidlington. This site is **in the Oxford Green Belt**. NPPF and Local plan policies do not allow development on the Green Belt unless there is an “exceptional circumstance”, with a genuine need which cannot be met elsewhere. We note that further assessment is required to justify this site 2.189 as being exceptional. In CPRE Oxfordshire’s view, national planning policy indicates that exceptional circumstances can only exist where the development is overwhelmingly in the public interest and could only achieve its purpose if it were located on Green Belt land. It is clear to us that this site does not fall within this category and these houses could be easily accommodated on other identified sites if slightly higher housing densities were applied.

Windfall housing numbers

In the draft Local Plan that went before Scrutiny in Jan 2023, the windfall allocation was 2,800, but we note that in this draft it has fallen to 1,000 (see 3.182). It was discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny committee that this is a “working “ number and assume as this is refined it will be reflected in overall housing numbers. This in itself could easily justify the removal of the proposed housing allocation at Kidlington (see above).

Rural Areas

CPRE Cherwell support Core Policy 86: Rural Areas Strategy *“In accordance with the spatial strategy and Core Policy 34: District Wide Housing Distribution, the 500 dwelling non-strategic housing requirement for the rural area will only be met by site specific allocations in this Local Plan or in a Neighbourhood Plan.”* We hope this policy will stand up against unwelcome speculative development in rural locations. In order for this policy to stand up against speculative development in rural locations we would prefer if all sites were identified through the Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plan process.

We welcome the change in classification of Villages, (Core Policy 35) with some current category A villages dropping into the smaller category, which will require them to take less housing.

We caveat our support by noting that in para 8.7. *“We have already had a large number of suggested sites submitted to us. We have begun our assessments, although these have not yet been finalised. This document is therefore not proposing specific sites.”* Without knowledge of locations, we are unable to comment further and seek clarity on this.

Green Belt

We support policy 44 in relation to the Green Belt which states *“Development proposals within the Green Belt will be assessed in accordance with current government policy and other relevant Development Plan policies”*. On this basis we challenge the site allocated North of The Moors as NPPF



policy 140 where *“Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans”*. Full justification for this site being exceptional has not been provided. In addition, NPPF, policy 141 states *“Before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, the strategic policy-making authority should be able to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development”* No alternatives are considered within this draft report. A clear option which has not been assessed is the possibility of increasing housing density by a small degree at other sites to accommodate this housing need.

There are further Green Belt boundary changes proposed with regards to employment land near Kidlington and again, justification and alternative scenarios have not been properly assessed within the plan.

The proposal for a Bicester Green Belt has been dismissed in one sentence in the Plan ; this is unacceptable and against NPPF policy. It needs to be revisited and assessed with due diligence.

Land Use (including Renewables)

The need for a land use strategy

This plan should be underpinned by a comprehensive land use strategy which sets a positive long-term vision for land use across Cherwell. The strategy should inform decision making and incentivise greener land use decisions and deliver national environmental targets including net-zero.

Meanwhile, there should be a policy which addresses land use with suggested wording that *“urban regeneration and brownfield sites should be prioritised for housing needs. Developers should be required to use these sites before greenfield sites.”*

There should be a policy to *“retain a green buffer and a defined boundary between towns and villages”*.

Renewable Energy

This land use strategy should include identification of land for renewable energy use. There should be a strategic plan within the district to identify locations where renewables are most suited with least impact on the countryside, rather than the speculative developer led applications we are seeing come forward. **It is CPRE Oxfordshire’s view that all of Oxfordshire’s solar energy requirements could and should be met on rooftops and brownfield sites and that there is no justification for large-scale greenfield solar allocations, particularly not in the Green Belt, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or other sites of high environmental or biodiversity value.**

Certainly, Core Policy 6 Renewable Energy does not adequately protect the countryside. This policy should clearly state that priority should be given to brownfield sites and rooftops for solar energy. We suggest additional wording for Core Policy 6 as below:



“a sequential ‘roof first’ approach for determining ground-mounted solar applications, which prioritises use of suitable brownfield land, avoids land used by active, viable and sustainable farm businesses, and makes greenfield solar permissions more exceptional and time-limited.”

We also propose actions identified in 3.5 are strengthened to include :

- Make solar PV or thermal panels a standard requirement for all new build housing, commercial buildings and car parks to secure planning permission.
- Upgrade the Smart Export Guarantee to provide higher minimum tariffs for low income households and community-led schemes selling electricity from rooftop solar installations, thereby reducing payback periods, and improving investment viability.

Section 3.5 targets a five times increase in solar energy generation. It must state in policy that this should and can be achieved with a brownfield site/ rooftop first approach. Speculative developer led solar farms on food producing land which forms a blight on the landscape must be stopped with watertight policy wording which prevents developer “wobble room”. To protect our countryside, it is vital that Core Policy 6 is strengthened to include this wording.

Environment and Biodiversity.

Generally, there are some good policies around climate change and zero carbon housing which we wholeheartedly support.

CPRE Cherwell believes that the biodiversity net gain should be set at a minimum of 20% in line with the recommendation of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership.

CPRE Cherwell supports the highlighting of Hedgerows within the plan but would like to see the Climate Change Committee’s recommendation of “a 40% increase in hedgerows by 2050 “ as a stated target. This target would be best placed in Core Policy 43.

We support the three Bicester Local Green spaces sites coming forward; Derwent Green, Gavray Drive and Langford. We supported the designation of two Local Green Spaces at Kidlington, Church Street Conservation Area and Bury Moor Fields. We are disappointed they have been rejected and seek clarification on the grounds for this decision. We understand a number of sites proposed by communities around Banbury have also been rejected. Overall, it is very disappointing that, across the whole of the District, only three Local Green Spaces are proposed for designation. This suggests a serious failure in process and that much more needs to be done to raise awareness of this opportunity and to help communities understand what evidence is required to make a successful site nomination. [Recent research by National CPRE](#) suggests that deprived communities are particularly under-served. CPRE Oxfordshire would be happy to work with Cherwell District Council to discuss possible collaboration on this issue.



We support Core Policy 18 on Light pollution but would like to see this go further with a more proactive 'Dark Skies' policy. Such a policy would not only control new lighting but also take action to reduce existing light pollution and support the creation of identified Dark Sky areas.

Notwithstanding the policies within this Plan it is going to be critical that Cherwell District Council has the resources and manpower to monitor and enforce their delivery.

Other areas of concern

We are concerned that the new proposed policy on employment land is significantly weaker than the existing policy SLE1. Core Policy 27 on employment land on unallocated sites needs to be altered to state a brownfield first approach. We are concerned that this policy as it stands will lead to more warehouses on greenfield land. We propose additional wording "*brownfield sites should be prioritised for employment needs. Developers should be required to use these sites before greenfield sites*".

Core Policy 42 – says "*Sites for Gypsies and Travellers should be within 3km road distance of the built-up limits of our Main Towns, Local Service Centres or Larger Villages.*" We are concerned that this puts the site right out in the countryside, which we would be opposed to and would like to see additional wording which considers "*the scale, nature and appearance of the site on, and its relationship with, the settlement, its character and its landscape*".

We will be publishing this response on our website – www.cpreoxon.org.uk and would be happy to clarify and/or discuss any aspect of it with you.

Yours faithfully,

Nick Dolden
Acting Chair- CPRE Cherwell