

IMPACT OF CHANGES TO THE DRAFT SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN 2034 ON THE GORING NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

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1. Summary

- 1.1. Changes contained within the draft LP2034 document from its predecessor would impact on the Goring Neighbourhood Plan (GNP) in three areas:
 - 1.1.1. The overarching concept of Housing Need, and the interplay between district-wide need and locally identified need.
 - 1.1.2. Considerations of Major Development in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
 - 1.1.3. Flood Risk and in particular the application of the Sequential Test and Exception Test.

2. Housing Need

- 2.1. As time goes on, the use of the SHMA as being the basis for 'Objectively Assessed Need' for housing becomes more and more indefensible, given that the SHMA numbers were based on interim 2011 CLG housing growth projections, which have been superseded in the meantime by no less than three definitive sets of data, being the 2012, 2014 and 2016 projections. The 2014 data showed a significant reduction in the projected housing growth for South Oxfordshire, and the 2016 data show an even more pronounced fall.
- 2.2. Despite this, the LP2034 document shows an increased 'housing need' of 22,775, comprising some 17,825 for the district (based on the SHMA calculations), and a further 4,950 (up from 3,750 in the previous LP document) towards the unmet housing needs of Oxford City.
- 2.3. The plan document then proposes a total of 28,459 houses, an oversupply of some 25% on the above figures.
- 2.4. However, a subtle but potentially very important change with respect to the larger villages (of which Goring is one) is the removal of the right hand column of table 5f, which in the previous version was headed 'Target for NDP', and which for Goring contained the figure 140 houses which is very much regarded in the Neighbourhood Plan documents as the headline figure that Goring should strive to achieve.
- 2.5. The removal of this column may well be a recognition by SODC that imposing targets for allocations on villages within the AONB would be contrary to the NPPF, and indeed inconsistent with the examinations of the West Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Local Plans, where the examiner in both cases struck out the allocations in the AONB, indicating

that proposals for major development within the AONB should be dealt with through specific planning applications.

- 2.6. The Goring Neighbourhood Plan team have consistently been told by SODC that they must strive for 140 houses by allocations, subject only to capacity constraints imposed by the AONB and Flood Risk, and the Neighbourhood Plan documents reflect this – thereby making the process an exercise in capacity rather than need.
- 2.7. The SODC Cabinet Memo of 13 December, at para 32 thereof, gives perhaps the most important insight into the change of direction, saying as follows:

If Neighbourhood Plans wish to plan for more or less than their requirement, the policy supports that where it is evidenced.

- 2.8. The above could be construed as meaning that SODC wish the NP teams to provide evidence of locally identified housing need, which is a totally different matter from capacity for housing. In further support of this proposition, see paras 3.2 and 3.3 below.
- 2.9. To date, no housing needs analysis has been done for Goring. Interestingly, however, 6 of the 10 recently built houses on Gatehampton Road (all two and three bed houses) remain unsold, over 6 months after they went onto the market. This may be a function of price, but it does not exactly suggest a pressing need for large scale development.
- 2.10. It is perhaps notable that Goring's much smaller neighbour village, South Stoke, has recently commissioned a housing needs analysis (and indeed obtained grant funding for it) in order to make its own plans for the sustainable growth of the village. The position of the Neighbourhood Plan team that this exercise would not be realistic for Goring does not stand up to scrutiny.

3. Considerations of Major Development in AONBs

- 3.1. LP2034 is drafted on the basis that it will be compliant with NPPF2018. This will necessarily mean greater emphasis on conservation and enhancement within the AONB, and a stronger presumption against major development therein.
- 3.2. The Glossary to the LP2034 document reveals (see definition of 'Major Development') that SODC identifies that whether a development in the AONB should be regarded as 'Major' or not will be 'a matter for the relevant decision-taker, taking into account the proposal in question and the local context'.
- 3.3. It follows that the only correct forum for discussion as to whether a proposed development in an AONB a) is 'major', and if so then b) satisfies the exceptional circumstances and public interest tests in para 172 NPPF2018 (absent which development should be refused) is in a

specific planning application, and not in the plan-making process, as NPPF2018 distinguishes between 'plan-making' and 'decision-taking', with the latter confined to specific planning applications.

- 3.4. The logical consequence of the above, particularly in light of the massive district-wide overprovision of housing in the Plan, is that SODC seems now to accept that enforcing allocations on villages within the AONB through the neighbourhood planning process is inappropriate, and instead the emphasis should be on individual neighbourhood plans for villages within the AONB to set out their own locally identified need in order to achieve sustainable growth, and proposals as to how this need should be met, and any capacity constraints.
- 3.5. There should therefore be no allocations made within the Goring Neighbourhood Plan that would involve development outside the built-up area of the village, and which could therefore potentially be in direct contravention with para 172 NPPF2018. Any proposed developments outside of the built-up area of the village should be dealt with in the normal course of the planning process, but not as part of the neighbourhood plan.

4. Flood Risk and application of the Sequential Test and Exception Test

- 4.1. The Glossary to LP2034 defines Exception Test as follows:

The Exception Test provides a method of managing flood risk while still allowing necessary development to occur. The Exception Test is only appropriate for use when there are large areas in Flood Zones 2 and 3, where the Sequential Test alone cannot deliver acceptable sites, but where some continuing development is necessary for wider sustainable development reasons, taking into account the need to avoid social or economic blight.

- 4.2 The significance of the above is that, in conjunction with the points concerning Housing Need above, and in particular the massive district-wide overprovision in the draft Plan, and the absence of any specific locally identified need for Goring, there is demonstrably no 'wider sustainable development' need that would justify any form of Exception Testing in Goring. In light of the new EA Floodplain map, therefore, it would seem that development on site GNP3 would be entirely inappropriate, given that the vast majority of the site now lies within flood zone 2, even before adjusting for future climate change.