

Larger Villages Site Assessment

Introduction

Our towns and larger villages are the most sustainable places to live, they have the best access to jobs, shops, schools, public transport connections and other services and facilities and have vibrant clubs and community organisations. Our existing strategy in the Core Strategy seeks to enhance the vitality of towns and larger villages by allowing for a proportion of housing and employment growth. By maintaining the network of larger service centres we can help ensure that everyone in the district has access to a basic range of services and facilities.

The Core Strategy allocated 1,154 homes to the larger villages. In July 2013 we consulted on how this number should be split between the villages. The final split, agreed by our councillors in September 2013, planned for growth based on the existing size of each village, except at Wheatley where the Green Belt forms a strong constraint. Since then an Oxfordshire-wide Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) has been produced with the aim of identifying the level of housing growth needed in Oxfordshire. This has shown that South Oxfordshire needs more homes than have been planned for in the Core Strategy so this Local Plan will set out how we will deliver these additional homes within the district. The larger villages are being asked to consider how they could accommodate any of these additional new homes on top of their Core Strategy allocation.

Communities in a number of these villages -Berinsfield, Chalgrove, Sonning Common, Watlington and Woodcote - have chosen to prepare Neighbourhood Plans that will identify the sites where new homes should be built (Woodcote's Neighbourhood Plan is now completed). In the larger villages of Benson, Cholsey, Chinnor, Crowmarsh Gifford, Goring and Nettlebed the sites chosen for new homes will be allocated in the Local Plan 2031.

Over the summer of 2013 we consulted with these communities and with service providers (for example Thames Water and Oxfordshire County Council) to understand their views about where new homes should be built and what other services and facilities may be required to support additional housing (such as road improvements or expansion of schools). We presented each village community with a number of potential housing sites to consider. These sites were identified through the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). The aim of the SHLAA is to identify as many sites as possible with housing potential in and around settlements; it does not determine whether a site should be allocated for housing development and just because we have assessed a site as suitable in the SHLAA it does not mean the council will allocate it for development. As a result, far more sites were identified than would be needed to deliver the numbers of homes allocated in the Core Strategy plus the additional homes needed as a result of the SHMA work. Residents were asked to comment on each of the SHLAA sites and a record of comments made (both positive and negative) was kept.

The aim of this 'refined options' stage is to narrow down the number of potential housing sites by removing sites that are no longer considered suitable (this is the

case for several sites where a landscape assessment has recommended that some sites should not be developed for homes) or are no longer available. To help with this task we produced a 'Site Assessment' table for each of the six larger villages that looked at a whole range of criteria against which each site was tested. This allowed us to compare sites in a fair and consistent way and to present the findings in a clear way. The list of criteria that each site was assessed against covers these broad areas: environmental constraints, heritage constraints, accessibility and biodiversity. The table also contains columns that summarise comments made by local residents and parish councils at the consultation events held in 2013, as well as comments received from Oxfordshire County Council as Highway Authority and Education Authority, and Thames Water.

The results of the site assessment work has informed the process of deciding which of the sites have been taken forward to this stage of consultation, and which sites should be discounted. The 'Larger Villages' section of the Refined Options consultation document summarises the findings of the site assessment work for each of the six larger villages.

The tables have been edited down to make them easier to read: some columns have been removed where they did not contain any information (e.g some villages do not have any sites that contain contaminated land or that are in flood zones, or have listed buildings) so these columns have been removed from the table for these villages. The information from some columns has been merged into one where appropriate, for example information on protected species and habitats. For this reason, the tables for each village are not identical.

For information, a Landscape Capacity Assessment¹ column has been included, which shows an estimate for how many dwellings could be accommodated on a site. This has been calculated based on a nominal density of 25 dwellings per hectare, and is based on how much of the site could be developed taking into account landscape constraints. This figure does not take into account other constraints, such as flood zones, and has been included to give an indication of capacity, but it is not a fully appraised calculation of the capacity of the site. The Landscape Capacity Assessment report can be viewed on our evidence page: www.southoxon.gov.uk/evidence.

¹ Landscape Capacity Assessment for Sites on the Edge of the Larger Villages in South Oxfordshire, KIRKHAM LANDSCAPE PLANNING LTD / THE TERRA FIRMA CONSULTANCY LTD, May 2014