Dear Mrs Wilson

National Planning Policy Framework & South Oxfordshire Core Strategy

Thank you for your letters dated 2 and 23 April 2012 asking whether or not the Core Strategy reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and, if not, whether the inclusion of the ‘model policy’ included on the Planning Portal would be an appropriate way of securing consistency with national policy.

1. Presumption in favour of sustainable development

My clients, R&J Styles, strongly endorse the contents of the model policy on sustainable development. They consider that there is a need for the policy to be incorporated within the Core Strategy because at present there is no policy relating to housing that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

It is also considered that the Core Strategy CSR1 as currently drafted is not consistent with the presumption in favour of sustainable development and that an adjustment is needed to this policy. This policy and the supporting text make it clear that in the larger villages, apart from infill and rural exception sites, development will only take place on allocated sites, which are to be identified in the Site Allocations DPD. The Council’s current Local Development Scheme indicates that the Site Allocations DPD will not be adopted until February 2016. There have already been many delays in the preparation of this document, which was in 2008 programmed for a submission document in June 2009, followed by an examination in March 2010, so there is no guarantee that this timetable will be achieved. This means that sites that are in sustainable locations and are not subject to the environmental constraints outlined in footnote 9 of the NPPF, cannot, under current Core Strategy policy CSR1, be brought forward for development until at least 2016. This is contrary to a number of the statements in the NPPF. These include:

- Local planning authorities should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area (para 14);
- Policies in Local Plans should follow the approach of the presumption in favour of sustainable development so that it is clear that development which is sustainable can be approved without delay (para 15);
- Planning should proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes…and thriving local places that the country needs. Every effort should be made objectively to identify and then meet the housing, business and other development needs of an area, and respond positively to wider opportunities for growth. (para 17)
- Housing applications should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development. (para 49)
- In rural areas, ..., local planning authorities should be responsive to local circumstances and plan housing development to reflect local needs, particularly for affordable housing…. Local planning authorities should in particular consider whether allowing some market housing would facilitate the provision of significant additional affordable housing to meet local needs. (para 54)
The current Site Allocations policies are contained in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011. This document covers the period to 2011 and is therefore now out of date. As the Core Strategy only identifies strategic sites, for non strategic sites there is therefore no current up to date plan. The situation is therefore now that identified in paragraph 14 of the NPPF, which states that the presumption in favour of sustainable development means that:

‘where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, granting permission unless:

– any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or

– specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.’

To make it consistent with the NPPF the Core Strategy and policy CSR1 In particular, should therefore make it clear that for non strategic sites the presumption in favour of sustainable development will apply, and that where development proposals are consistent with the advice in the NPPF they will be approved without delay, even where the site has not been allocated.

2. Meeting housing need

Paragraph 47 states that local planning authorities should:

‘use their evidence base to ensure that their Local Plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area, as far as is consistent with the policies set out in this Framework, including identifying key sites which are critical to the delivery of the housing strategy over the plan period;’

According to paragraph 14.4.2 of South Oxfordshire District Council’s Housing Needs Assessment:

‘The scale of demand and need identified through the HNA from existing households moving, new households forming and migration is significant. Compared to the proposed annual provision of 547.5 units p.a. in the Panel Report of the SouthEast Plan and the Secretary of State proposed changes, the 2008 South Oxfordshire household survey identified an annual shortfall of 883 units in the market sector and 530 units of affordable housing. Two-thirds of this net shortfall is due to in-migration.’

According to this assessment the full requirement for market and affordable housing would be 1,413 dwellings per annum or 29,673 over the period 2006 - 2027, compared with the 547 dwellings per annum and 11,487 over the period 2006 – 2027 that the Core Strategy proposes.

The Council’s housing market assessment summary report on the council’s web site also states on page iii:

‘Our modelling suggests that the shortfall in social rented and affordable housing is currently around 2,200 homes and will rise to around 7,500 pa by 2026, while the shortfall in market housing is currently around 900 homes per year rising to around 5,000 per year homes by 2026.’

The core strategy itself acknowledges the shortfall in affordable housing provision, stating in paragraphs 2.19 and 2.20 that: ‘The housing needs Assessment identified an annual level of outstanding affordable housing need of 530 units. This is almost equal to the full annual housing allocation of 547 units in the period 2006 to 2027. Modelling carried out for the Oxfordshire Housing Market Assessment suggests that in a worse case scenario there could be four households for every affordable dwelling available by 2026.’

Given the advice in paragraph 47 there is therefore a need to re-visit and increase the core strategy housing figures to make them consistent with the NPPF. As the council have adopted a urban based distribution as now acknowledged by paragraph 7.10 of the Core Strategy (February 2012), it is particularly important that the housing figure is increased for the larger villages, six of which have a population of over 3,000 and are therefore more appropriately classified as small towns.
3. Persistent shortfall in meeting the allocated housing figures

The need for an increased housing allocation is all the more pressing because South Oxfordshire District council has a persistent record of failing to meet their allocated housing figures, including against the former Structure Plan figures. In the case of SODC their Annual Monitoring reports indicate that the number of dwellings that they have delivered in recent years is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Dwellings completed</th>
<th>Strategic allocation</th>
<th>Annual Deficit</th>
<th>Cumulative deficit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001/2</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>-168</td>
<td>-168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002/3</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>-211</td>
<td>-379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/4</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>-333</td>
<td>-712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004/5</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>-339</td>
<td>-1051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005/6</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>-307</td>
<td>-1358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006/7</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>-379</td>
<td>-1737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007/8</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>-35</td>
<td>-1,772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/9</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>-294</td>
<td>-2,066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>-356</td>
<td>-2,422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010/11</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>-336</td>
<td>-2,758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,477</td>
<td>5,235</td>
<td></td>
<td>-2,758</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total number of dwellings delivered is therefore 2,477, when the total that should have been provided is 5,235, giving a cumulative deficit of 2,758 or over half the number of dwellings the Council has been allocated over this period. The Annual Monitoring Report 2010/11 indicates that the current cumulative deficit is 1,400 dwellings, but when the period back to 2001 is included this nearly doubles to 2,758.

Paragraph 47 of the NPPF states that:

'Where there has been a record of persistent under delivery of housing, local planning authorities should increase the buffer to 20% (moved forward from later in the plan period) to provide a realistic prospect of achieving the planned supply and to ensure choice and competition in the market for land;'

While the Council claim that they currently have a five year housing supply plus 20% over the last few years the Council has failed to meet its projected figures. For example, in 2003/10 the projected figure was 265 while the actual completions were only 191; while in 2010/11 the projected figure was 390 and the actual completions was only 211. Given the long term record of under delivery in SODC and that the Core Strategy figures themselves are not sufficient to meet the level of housing need there is clearly a need for more sites to come forward during the next five years, rather than their identification being postponed until the Site Allocations DPD is prepared at some point in the future.

If you have any queries about these representations, please give me a call.

Yours sincerely

Alan Divall BA (Hons)
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