The Henley Society

This submission represents the views of The Henley Society as drawn up by members of its Planning Committee and is submitted for and on behalf of its Executive Committee.

The Society considers that the proposed increase to 450 in the housing allocation for Henley is unsound for the following reasons.

1. Tight constraints are imposed by the Chilterns AONB and the Thames floodplain, areas which it is national policy, the policy of Oxfordshire County Council, the policy of SODC and the policy of the Chilterns Conservation Board, to protect from housing development. Yet major sites in and around Henley identified in the SADPD capacity study of September 2011 are situated within the AONB; and others are adjacent to it and thus would affect its setting. Development of some of the sites would effectively result in contraction of the AONB by moving the boundary inwards, thus contravening the policy set out in para 115 of the NPPF which states that “Great weight should be given to conserving landscape ….in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty”.

2. Further expansion of Henley is constrained by the road network and in particular by the fact that all cross-Thames traffic has to negotiate narrow roads in the town centre, with the result that long traffic delays are frequent. Further significant development would be inconsistent with the statement in the NPPF, para 58, that planning policies should “establish a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit”.

3. Henley itself, and its setting in the landscape, are special when viewed from a national perspective and are appreciated by visitors from around the world. The character of the town (which includes many listed buildings), and also its surroundings, should not be sacrificed but should be conserved for future generations. The importance of sustaining and enhancing heritage assets is stressed in paras 126, 131 and 132 of the NPPF.

4. Increasing the number of houses in Henley will do little or nothing to assist Henley’s young people seeking homes, as properties made available on the open market will be purchased by more affluent older ‘incomers’ moving from overcrowded areas of London, Slough and Reading. And the occupancy of social housing cannot be confined to existing Henley residents as, under current arrangements, the whole of South Oxfordshire is considered together.

Proposed new wording:

10. Henley-on-Thames

“It is difficult to identify suitable sites for housing around Henley because of the strong constraints of the Thames floodplain and the town’s position, flanked the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Our strategy caps the level of growth that the town would take on a proportional basis, proposing that the Site Allocations PDP (SADPD) should identify land for 100 homes. However, it is appreciated that, because of the constraints, it may prove impossible to identify suitable land for this number. In the light of these circumstances, it will be possible for windfalls to be deducted from the total allocation to be made in the forthcoming Site Allocations DPD”.