

Planning

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Listening Learning Leading

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BY E-MAIL

24 July 2019

Dear Sir/Madam

I write to update you on the progress of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan and provide a summary of the current position. The progress of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan was considered at a meeting of Council on 18 July, where Council resolved to:

- (1) express its determination to maintain its housing land supply and avoid speculative development;
- (2) express its continued support for the Housing and Infrastructure Fund (HIF) funding and infrastructure projects that could be delivered by it;
- (3) ask officers to explore with Oxfordshire County Council, Homes England and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government options for protecting the HIF funding whilst enabling the council to address concerns about the current emerging Local Plan 2034 including (but not limited to) climate change issues, Oxford City's unmet housing need, and to report back to Cabinet and Council;
- (4) recognising that the Climate Change Emergency is all too real and is recognised to be of key and statutory importance under the Climate Change Act 2008 and the associated objective of "zero carbon by 2050", express its wish to do all that it can to respond through the Local Plan process;
- (5) agree that as soon as practicable, alongside satisfactory progress being made on resolving issues in the emerging Local Plan, work on a subsequent Local Plan shall commence, strengthening climate change considerations.

The motion makes specific reference to "protecting" the Housing and Infrastructure Fund (HIF) so I wanted to get in touch to let you know what this means from our perspective.

To confirm the current situation, our Local Plan remains at examination and we have been keeping our Planning Inspectors informed of the democratic process taking place in South Oxfordshire. The Inspectors could provide us with their initial matters

and questions at any time – although it is considered that this is mostly likely to be once the examination into Oxford City examination is complete, in part or whole as we share the same Inspectors with Oxford City.

In the meantime, we have been asked to discuss with Oxfordshire County Council, Homes England and MHCLG on what options there are to protect HIF that could arise in the event that the Council decide at a later date to withdraw or make changes to the emerging Local Plan.

Councillors recognise the importance of the HIF to supporting growth in the district and Oxfordshire and are keen to avoid putting that funding and the related infrastructure projects at risk.

We will be liaising closely with the county council, MHCLG and Homes England to understand better to how much the HIF award depends on the level of housing in the emerging Local Plan and the timescales and financial risks associated with any potential decisions Council may choose to make. We will also discuss whether there is flexibility for councillors to make changes to the plan in line with the will of the new administration, and if so, what level of changes could be made without putting the HIF at risk.

I will continue to work with you and other stakeholders to keep you informed on our progress. As soon as we have more information following our exploratory meetings, I will be in a position to outline the process we consider appropriate to progress the Local Plan and be in a position to give a stronger indication on the most likely timescales for this. We have previously committed to seeking your views on this matter and will continue to do so.

I look forward to hearing your authority views and would be happy to meet to discuss.

Yours sincerely



Holly Jones
Planning Policy Manager