

33874/A3/PT/dw

9th August 2022

JOINT HENLEY AND HARPSDEN NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN

A public hearing took place as a part of the Neighbourhood Plan examination on 1st August 2022 which debated the Examiner's hearing note. The extent of the contribution that developing the site would have in terms of affordable housing was discussed under point 3 and this focused on the development the site would yield, as described under Policy DS7 of the Neighbourhood Plan. It was discussed whether the community led housing would be in addition to the 110 new dwellings or be included within this number. Following these discussions, the Examiner invited the participants to provide comments regarding the delivery of 130 residential units (i.e. 110 no dwellings and 20 no community led housing) on site other than 110.

Policy DS7 of the Neighbourhood Plan sets out the site allocation pro forma and, as we understand it, the Policy lists the development that would be delivered on site. On this basis, we consider that the site is allocated, amongst others, for around 110 new homes in addition to the provision of community led housing. As such, our representations submitted in respect of the Neighbourhood Plan (including the accompanying proposed layout) and the evidence we gave in the hearing were on the basis that a total of around 130 residential units would be provided on site. Throughout the site selection process and the subsequent written representations we have proposed the provision of the Community Led Housing to be incorporated within the employment land designation, given the ability of the housing to provide employment opportunities locally. Nevertheless, the paragraphs below briefly discuss the positive contribution that the proposed amount of affordable housing would have towards assisting SODC's in meeting its identified housing needs.

SODC's latest Five Year Housing Land Supply Position Statement, published in June 2021, identifies that based on the requirement of 5,727dpa, there is a surplus of +374 net dwellings in the period 2021-2026, equivalent to a housing land supply position of 5.3 years. However, this position has been tested at appeals (see Appeal Decision APP/Q3115/W/20/325861) where the Inspector has concluded that a shortfall exists and SODC's five year housing land supply would be of 4.21 years.

Policy H1 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 advises that residential development will be permitted at sites allocated or carried forward by this plan and on sites that are allocated by Neighbourhood Plans. Policy H3 talks about housing provision in the market town of Henley-on-Thames and sets out a minimum provision of at least 1,285 homes (115 remain to be allocated by the Neighbourhood Plan). Neighbourhood Development Plans for the market towns should seek to meet demonstrable local needs, for example for specialist or affordable housing. Policy H9 (Affordable Housing) of the Local Plan states that the Council will seek a 40% affordable housing on sites within the AONB.

The latest Housing Needs Assessment, which formed part of the evidence base to inform the emerging Neighbourhood Plan (NP), demonstrates that there is a need over the Plan period 2020-2036 of therefore 527 (rounded) affordable rented homes and 800 affordable home ownership dwellings. Furthermore, the Needs Assessment goes on to say that Henley and Harpsden's overall housing target is 1,285 additional dwellings, of which 1,129 have already been allocated. The total of 1,285 new homes could be expected to bring forward approximately 514 new affordable homes (if 40% are affordable, in line with policy). This is just short of the need for 527 affordable rented dwellings - the most urgent form of need - but would not satisfy the potential total need of 1,327 (527 + 800) affordable homes.

However, these estimates of the potential supply of Affordable Housing stand in contrast to the reality experienced in Henley and Harpsden in recent years. SODC state that the number of Affordable Housing units delivered in Henley and Harpsden between April 2011 and March 2019 was just 14, all of which were shared ownership. The number of Affordable Housing units committed for delivery as of April 2019 was only 12, all of which will be for affordable rent and were expected to be completed in the 2019/20 period. That equates to a past effective delivery rate of 4% and an expected delivery rate of 2%, compared with the 40% requirement set out in SODC's planning policies. The Needs Assessment advises that this may be due to a high proportion of small infill sites that do not meet the size threshold needed for that policy requirement to apply.

The scale of Affordable Housing need identified is far in excess of the level of supply that can be expected based on either the policy requirement or past performance. On this basis, the Needs Assessment recommends that the community may wish to boost the supply of Affordable Housing in other ways, such as an entry-level exception sites, community development order or land trust.

The proposal aims to deliver up to 110 dwellings on site, which would meet most of the minimum outstanding requirement for the NP of 115 dwellings as identified by Policy H3 of the Local Plan. We note that the proposed allocations under Policy DS1 of the emerging NP are carried forwards from the adopted NP, save for the Highlands Park, Northern Field site and the Chilterns Centre site. All the sites listed under this policy would deliver fewer dwellings when compared to Highlands, Northern Field. The advantage of this site coming forward rather than a number of smaller sites would be its ability to deliver more dwellings and a greater number of affordable housing.

The proposal would deliver a 40% affordable housing provision. This would bring forward approximately 44 affordable homes which would assist the District Council in meeting their identified need in terms of housing provision. In addition, the proposal would further include the provision of 20 no. community led housing. The community led housing is exceptional to the development and would be provided as 1 bed apartments to meet the local need. As such, the overall provision of affordable housing on site would be over and above the 40% policy requirement.

As a part of the Local Plan 2035 Documents and Evidence Base the Council commissioned Kirkham Landscape Planning LTD / Terra Firma to prepare a Landscape Capacity Assessment for Sites on the Edge of the Four Towns in South Oxfordshire. The Northern Field, Highlands Park was assessed as part of a wider site ref. HEN5 and the report recommends that, from the land considered, only the Northern Field could be considered for housing on landscape and visual grounds.

The capacity report advises that the developable area covers 5.2ha which, at a nominal density of 25dph, could accommodate up to 130 dwellings. Although Policy DS7 advises that the site would have an area of 7ha, we note that this includes the area dedicated to the green infrastructure, open green spaces, community orchard and growing garden. As such, we consider that the proposal would fully meet the recommendations put forward by the capacity assessment.

In conclusion, we consider that the proposed community led housing would have no material impact over and above that of the around 110 home scheme on the landscape, given this would take the form of a two storey building that would take up a modest area as shown on the proposed site layout, screened by new and existing vegetation, as well as the new homes we are delivering. Additionally, the capacity report highlights the site has the capacity for up to 130 dwellings without any detrimental impact, whilst still maintaining an appropriate density. In addition, providing 20 no community led housing over and above the 110 dwellings would allow for a higher provision of the much needed affordable housing within SODC and assist in meeting some of the identified demand and significant undersupply as highlighted by the Affordable Housing need assessment. Further to delivering much needed housing, the proposed site would accommodate employment land and the Chiltern Centre, which would provide significant benefits to the local community. The proposal would mitigate harm to the AONB via a comprehensive landscape strategy, including new tree planting, hedgerows, open space, and offsets to the most sensitive boundaries. The proposed dwelling density would be in line with the conclusions of the Landscape Capacity Assessment and we stress that, in accordance with the recommendations of this report, we are preparing a comprehensive LVIA to inform the design strategy and ensure that the proposal conserves and enhances the AONB through careful siting, accessible open space, strong landscape and wildlife corridors.