

Oxford Local Plan 2040 (the “Plan”)

Regulation 19 Consultation

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1. Introduction

Soundness tests assume for all
plans:

1.01 These representations explain why the submission draft plan is unsound, not being:

- positively prepared by failing to objectively assess the need for new housing and consequently failing to accurately assess the un-met need to be provided for by neighbouring areas, or to ensure that the housing strategy would be sustainable; or
- justified in failing to take into account the reasonable alternatives and/or rely on on necessary and proportionate evidence; or
- consistent with national policy ie enabling the delivery of sustainable development as described in the Plan or the Climate Change Act in terms of the carbon reduction targets.

Objectives and strategy- healthy and inclusive city to live in objectives:

1.02 The Plan should be changed to incorporate a housing strategy that would achieve sustainable development which necessarily includes an understanding and assessment of the upfront or embodied carbon emissions. The Secretary of State is conversant with the fundamental importance of reducing carbon in the short term that will be a cause of global warming before any possible benefits from reducing operational carbon (one of the objectives of the Plan) will be realized.

H14:

1.03 The Plan is also unsound having inadequate policies to meet the demand for self and custom building, being based, in turn, on an inadequate assessment of the demand.

2. Objections

R2 (should ensure net zero in construction)

2.01 Meeting housing needs within carbon budgets

These objections refer to a number of extracts from the Plan:

“60% of Oxford’s total carbon emissions come from buildings – and residential buildings makes up 25% of total emissions. Oxford has a goal to become a net-zero carbon city by 2040, and decarbonising buildings is key to this. Bringing forward the requirement for all new homes and businesses in Oxford to be zero carbon to the adoption of the Local Plan 2040 – likely in 2025”.

This is an accurate assessment of the challenge of decarbonisation. However, not only is there no policy requiring new building to be zero carbon in construction (ie about half of the lifetime carbon) but there are no proposals for eliminating the operational carbon emitted from the existing buildings. The only way that these crucial objectives could be met would be through a concerted programme of subdividing existing under-occupied houses. The consequence of under-occupation is the insulation and heating of space and fabric that is not meeting housing needs as well as giving rise to the need for new building with high levels of upfront carbon. The Plan allows for offsetting but, “... only through local offsetting schemes in Oxford or Oxfordshire.” There is no attempt in the Plan to describe reliable ways of offsetting carbon emissions or to explain how this would be achieved ‘locally’. No reliance should be placed on offsetting unless the Plan also explains how this could be relied on to reduce or remove carbon emissions arising from development being supported.

H2 (capacity does not account for or encourage potential for subdivision)

2.02 Data in respect of occupancy rates (ie the 2021 Census) is held by the Council but not included as part of the database of the plan?

The City housing stock is about 55,238 dwellings of which 29.6% (ie 16,500) have 2 spare bedrooms amounting to 33,000 bedrooms, and 30.2% (ie 16,500) have one spare bedroom (another 16,500 bedrooms). In raw figures there is a surplus of about 50,000 spare bedrooms requiring to be insulated, heated and ventilated to a zero carbon standard as soon as possible or by 2040 at the latest. This is the equivalent of 25,000 two bedroomed houses/flats or more than double the number being proposed in the Plan as the objective housing need. There is overcrowding in the city measured at about 5%.

2.03 The Plan would be unsound if it proposed to meet the objectively assessed housing need by sub-divisions alone as it would first have to properly examine this complex issue including the distribution, the causes, the climate impacts and the ways in which policies (and incentives) could encourage sub-divisions and downsizing-in-place. However, in completely ignoring the significant potential of sub-divisions the deposit plan is unsound as there no real attempt to demonstrate how its alternative strategy relying on new building could comply with local or national (legally based) carbon reduction budgets.

2.04 The Sustainability Assessment claims that, "...There is not enough capacity within Oxford to meet all of the city's housing needs to 2040.". This statement is made in the absence of evidence as to how zero or very low carbon housing could be provided within the City through sub-divisions thereby significantly reducing the case for new building in or outside of the City. The expectation that housing needs of the City will be met by neighbouring districts is also a recipe for increased commuting and adding to the traffic problems on the trunk and distributor roads around the City.

2.05 Only though sub-dividing existing housing stock at scale would it be possible to:

"1.To achieve the city's ambition to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2040

3.To encourage the efficient use of land through good design and layout, and minimise the use of greenfield and Green Belt land

4.To meet local housing needs by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent affordable home,”

all within carbon budgets.

2.06 Under alternative housing strategies the Plan prefers,

“B1. Capacity-based / constraint-based housing requirement (thought to be c7,852 dwellings 2020-2040at the options stage, now known to be 9,612)”

The Plan is unsound as there is no evidence that this scale of new building (at about 50 tonnes of upfront carbon per dwelling) could be completed within official carbon budgets. The further ‘preferences’ in respect of HMOs and retrofitting point in the right direction,

“D1. Allow a maximum of 20% HMOs in any area

D2. Allow new purpose-built HMOs in appropriate locations.

H1. Support energy efficiency measures on all existing buildings that are not heritage assets.

H2. For heritage assets, support energy efficiency measures where their benefits outweigh harm.”

but leave a significant gap to be filled by policies that encourage sub-divisions.

H14

2.07 Table 1.3 Assessment of plan vision, themes, policies and sites refers to “H14 Self-build & custom housebuilding”. This subject is given short shrift by the Plan but could be linked to the need for sub-divisions at scale as custom-splitting. Inroads could be made into the need represented by the registered 56 households and 21 members of the Oxford Cohousing Group by enabling custom-splitting as an alternative to the serviced plots required by the Housing and Planning Act 2016 to be provided/permitted by the Council. The fact that the background information being

provided by the Council on self and custom building makes no reference to the obligation to provide a proportionate number of serviced plots could have resulted in fewer people thinking it worthwhile to register their interest. i.e.

“All local authorities are required to keep a register of people who are looking for serviced plots of land to develop for self-build and custom-build projects in their area.

The information on the Register helps us to understand demand for self-build and custom-build plots in Oxford. We will use this information when reviewing our planning and housing policies.”

Surveys x

Carried out by Ipsos Mori for NACSBA have shown a far higher demand for custom-building that suggests a failing in how the Council is collecting the data and the time response.

SA:

2.08 Table 1.4 Overall impacts of the Local Plan 2040SA/SEA topic

Overall impact of the plan

1. Carbon emissions+/-The plan policies on net zero carbon, employer-linked affordable housing, building retrofits, restricted car parking and vibrant local centres promote walking, cycling and public transport. However its plans for 9,612new homes will increase the number of people in Oxford, which will increase carbon emissions, at least in near term though broader changes such as decarbonisation of energy grid and transition to EVs should reduce this over time.

By encouraging the sub-division of under-occupied houses the population density would increase with positive impacts on the viability of local facilities (ie lifetime or 25min neighbourhoods) and levels of active travel. And this without building on precious green space and reducing biodiversity. The Plan is unsound to the extent

that it relies on decarbonisation of the grid and adoption of EVs without any firm evidence regarding the viability of sharing renewable and low carbon energy between sectors of housing, transport, manufacturing, health and security services. And the Sustainability Assessment says as much at,

2.09 Table 3.2 Sustainability issues and problems for the Oxford Local Plan 2040

1. To achieve the city's ambition to reach net zero carbon
 - Oxford is still very far away from achieving its 2040 target of net zero emissions and Local Plan cannot deliver it alone.
 - Retrofitting existing developments will be a significant challenge
 - New development must not further contribute to climate change
 - Policy should embed the energy hierarchy into the design of new buildings (fabric first, reducing energy use, mitigating remaining emissions)
 - Embodied carbon is an ongoing challenge to be addressed as part of the construction process
 - There is potential for supporting larger amounts of renewable energy generation across city through greater uptake of micro-renewables in new development, and for supporting mitigation of emissions from the existing built environment.

There is a dearth of evidence as to how these challenges would be met. The new development being proposed by the Plan will contribute to climate change although enough is known about embodied (or upfront) carbon for this to be addressed in a sound local plan. As the Council accept that the issue of decarbonisation and sustainable development are important to the soundness of the Plan there is no justification for the deliberate neglect and/or delay. It cannot be assumed that embodied carbon will be addressed satisfactorily or at all unless the Plan does so now.

3. Summary

[Link to other R2 comments:](#)

3.01 The Plan purports to mitigate carbon emissions as it must in order to comply with s19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. However, the Plan fails to address the challenge of embodied or upfront carbon emissions implied by the chosen strategy and policies relying on new building to meet housing needs.

[Link to other H2 comments:](#)

3.02 There is evidence (ie 2021 Census) that shows the level of under-occupancy of existing housing stock and the potential to provide a significant number of dwellings through sub-dividing existing houses. The extent to which this were to include custom-splitting, the Council could also go some way towards meeting its legal obligations under the Housing and Planning Act 2016 as amended.

[Link to H2 comments:](#)

3.03 The failure to consider the potential of residential subdivisions and reliance instead on new building would not only overshoot carbon budgets but also requires neighbouring districts to attempt to meet the housing needs of the city. This would give rise to a significant level of commuting in and out of the city contrary to its transport policies. Sub-divisions would have the opposite effect in the regeneration of local areas aiming to create lifetime neighbourhoods.

[link to other R2 comments:](#)

3.04 There may be doubts about the feasibility of relying on sub-divisions to meet what is a substantial need for housing in the City. However, this issue was thoroughly debated in the adoption of the current local plan that has instead continued to support unsustainable development in the form of housing which has done nothing to reduce under-occupancy and which will require retrofitting if not sub-dividing in order to meet carbon reduction and zero carbon budgets and targets. Unless and until local plans explore the potential of sub-divisions the carbon mitigation policies (see s19 PCPO 2004) are no more than wishful thinking and not meeting any real measure of effectiveness or soundness as required of an adopted development plan.

