

Policy H14 Self-Build & Custom Housebuilding – unsound based on ineffectiveness and lack of justification

Q4 Please tell us below why you consider the document to be unsound, not legally compliant or fails to comply with the duty to co-operate. If you do believe the document is sound, legally compliant, or complies with the duty to co-operate you may use the box to explain why.

Community-led housing is not effectively supported

Policy H14: Reason for unsoundness - not effective, not justified

Community-led housing is very hard to develop, requiring the work of determined volunteers over many years, often for no personal gain. The Council aims 'to help encourage and support community-led housing schemes to come forward' (para 2.71). But policy H14 only provides support to the small sub-section of community-led housing where people commission homes for themselves.

The policy could give much more effective support to community efforts to tackle Oxford's housing problems and promote social cohesion. Other local authorities do so.

1. Community-led housing is much more than 'Self-Build & Custom Housebuilding'

No explanation or justification is given for shoe-horning community-led housing under the heading 'Self-Build & Custom Housebuilding', and it is hard to see how or why this could be justified.

Community-led housing comes in a variety of forms, but only one type is supported in H14. As para 2.67 makes clear, 'Self-Build & Custom Housebuilding' is defined by the government as housing that individuals commission to live in themselves. The work of more altruistic individuals is not supported in H14, despite the stated intention in para 2.71 'to help encourage and support community-led housing schemes to come forward'.

It is a mistake to include paras 2.70 and 2.71 (which cover community-led housing) under the heading 'Self-Build & Custom Housebuilding' as most types of community-led housing do not fit that limited definition. They seek to be more diverse and inclusive, housing people who do not have the money and energy to commission homes for themselves and to wait years for them to be built. For example Oxford Cohousing has always intended to include as much affordable housing as possible and to keep it affordable in perpetuity. We expect to recruit residents for affordable housing from the housing register after planning permission has been achieved.

2. The proposed policy H14 is less effective than the previous policy H7 (Local Plan 2036)

The proposed policy H14 has taken a step back from the previous policy H7 (Local Plan 2036). H7 covered '**Community-led housing** and self-build housing' and handled them separately. It began with a sub-heading 'Community-led housing' and stated: 'Proposals for community-led housing will be supported'. This covers all forms of community-led housing. However the proposed H14 only covers the limited category defined by the government as 'Self-Build & Custom Housebuilding'.

3. Effective support for community-led housing

Planning support for community-led housing should tackle the planning barriers it faces at present. Oxford Cohousing needs flexibility with the requirements for specific proportions of tenure-types. We believe an ***equal mix of tenure types*** would be important for cohousing: a third social rented, a third shared ownership, and a third market housing. This would help us to achieve social cohesion in a diverse group of residents. Even with this mix it is challenging to create a financially viable scheme.

Cohousing would also benefit from ***flexibility in the balance of dwellings requirements***, as the cohousing model includes shared spaces with guest rooms, and encourages individual households to limit their number of bedrooms.

4. Effective support for community-led collective self-build

The proposed H14 does little to support even those community-led housing groups who intend to live in the homes they build. It offers only 5% of the area of developments of 100 homes or more, which are extremely rare in Oxford. But Oxford Cohousing has been advised to aim for a minimum of 20 homes for a successful mutually supportive and outward-looking cohousing community.

Once again the previous policy H7 (Local Plan, 2036) offered more effective support to cohousing than the proposed H14, because it included a provision within the category of Self-Build & Custom Housebuilding to ***particularly*** support 'community-led collective self-build'.

Q5 What change(s) do you consider necessary to make the document sound or legally compliant? Please explain why this change will achieve soundness or legal compliance. (Please note that non-compliance with the duty to co-operate is incapable of modification at examination.) It would be helpful if you could suggest revised wording for the policy or text in question.

Policy H14: Suggested changes

To make the Local Plan sound it needs to achieve its stated aim in para 2.71, by offering effective planning support for community-led housing. It should reinstate and improve the parts of policy H7 (Local Plan, 2036) that supported community-led housing. To avoid confusion these should be in a new policy, separate from the proposed H14. Community-led housing does not belong under the heading 'Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding' (see point 1 above).

The new Community-Led Housing policy would recognise community-led housing as a distinct and innovative type of development that has made important contributions in other local authority areas. It would provide comprehensive support for community-led housing, including allowing flexibility with other planning requirements when these place barriers in its way. Paras 2.70 and 2.71 could be moved to the new section of the Local Plan.

Proposed policy Hnn COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING

On all proposed developments the Council will require active consideration of proposals for community-led housing from local community-led housing groups. It will particularly support innovative schemes and assist them to include permanently affordable housing. It will seek to allow flexibility in tenure types and the balance of dwellings where this will promote social cohesion.

Failing this, the first section of policy H7 (Local Plan, 2036) should be retained as a separate policy from H14. H7 reads:

Community-led housing

There are several organised groups with ambitions for providing community-led housing in Oxford. Proposals for community-led housing will be supported because of the benefits they are expected to bring in terms of community cohesion, permanent affordability and sustainable development.

In addition, the following section of policy H7 (Local Plan, 2036) should be reinstated in the proposed H14:

Proposals for self-build housing will be supported as a way of enabling people to meet their own housing needs, particularly community-led collective self-build.

Oxford Cohousing

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