

SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN 2034

EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC

WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO EXAMINATION JUNE 2020

Mr John Walsh

Matter 7: Are the plan's infrastructure policies sound?

Issue a Highways

There is a significant difference between parts of the plan that have been present throughout the process and those sites added in late on. The developments at Chalgrove and Culham are complemented by detailed listings of road improvements which have been costed and there is information on the availability of funding. In contrast the strategic development sites added in later in the process do not have the necessary planned infrastructure. Modelling had confirmed that developments in the Green Belt to the east of Oxford would cause significant problems (TRA06.5 and TRA06.6) but exactly how to solve these problems and how much it would cost has not been progressed.

Therefore the Local Plan is not considered to be sound. It has not been positively prepared in respect of highway infrastructure for some of the proposed site allocations, affecting the ability to deliver these sites within the plan period. As such the local plan fails to be consistent with National Policy

Issue b Rail

Great Western trains from Oxford to London in the morning fill up and are crowded after Reading, but there is seat capacity the other way (London to Oxford) and on Cross-Country trains from Didcot. It is planned in the future to convert the line from Didcot to Oxford from two to four lines. This is mainly needed for freight, but will also allow for more passenger trains and in particular more trains stopping at intermediate stations. The proposed Culham development only makes sense as a sustainable proposal after that track upgrade takes place, before that all new residents will be travelling by car.

Similarly the developments at Grenoble Road and Northfield are dependent on the reinstatement of passenger services on the Cowley line to be sustainable. The road network in that area is already above capacity in the rush hour. While the works on the Cowley spur are relatively straightforward, use of the line is dependent on relaying the lines from Cowley Junction to Oxford Station and creating new platforms as part of a rebuild of the station.

None of this work is currently funded beyond the earliest of planning stages. It is highly unlikely to be completed much before the end of the plan period, this makes these proposed site allocation developments unsustainable in the near term.

The Government has spent a lot of money on Chiltern Rail and is continuing with the East-West rail scheme which will provide a frequent service from Oxford to Winslow, Bletchley, Milton Keynes and beyond from 2023. The line from Oxford to Haddenham and Princes Risborough via Bicester is already open and these two towns are expanding rapidly. Unfortunately the county boundary seems to be an insuperable barrier to planners. It seems very strange that developments in these areas do not figure in meeting Oxford's unmet need. Consideration to more cross authority cooperation is required to provide a more strategic approach.

In practice many people do commute from Haddenham and Princes Risborough into Oxford and the Science Vale, but the current timetable discourages their use of Chiltern Rail. Instead they go by car through the SODC area clogging up the roads. Some trains to Oxford from London in the morning rush stop at one or neither and the same the other way in the evening. If this were improved so that there was a regular half-hourly service morning and evening for both stations then people commuting from both towns and from Thame would take advantage of it. This would tie in with proposals for a Thame- Haddenham cycle path and could make a significant contribution to sustainable travel in the area.

In summary, the local plan supports strategic transport investment (Policy TRANS 1b) but is not supported by a comprehensive package of improvements and funding. Sites identified late on in the plan process have not been the subject of Transport Studies. It is considered that there is too much emphasis on individual proposed allocation sites producing transport assessments or transport statements rather than a more strategic approach. This could well result in allocated sites unable to deliver the required improvements to avoid increased congestion or increase rail capacity.

As such the infrastructure policies are not considered to be sound. They have been neither positively prepared nor will they be effective within and beyond the plan period. This also means that the policies are not consistent with National Policy.