

To whom it may concern

Re: Central South Oxfordshire Core Strategy

The standpoint of Sustainable Wallingford is that the development around Wallingford is neither needed nor wanted. Therefore our response should not be seen as an endorsement of these plans for large scale building, but as an attempt to influence what we see as a flawed and imposed process.

It is interesting to note that Thames Water have scaled down plans for their new reservoir near Abingdon; in part because they forecast that much of the proposed development in the south of England will not happen. As a group we wonder if it is possible for you, as the planning authority, to challenge the desire of central government for these houses to be built. In light of the Thames Water doubts it may be possible to find other economic, as well as social, indicators that support our contention.

Our comments are broken down into the following sections:

- 1 Biodiversity**
- 2 The Built Environment**
- 3 Standard and Quality of Living**
- 4 Transport**
- 5 Background Environmental Issues**

1. Biodiversity

The natural environment is recognised as vital for sustaining human life and is also important in enhancing the quality of our life. This extends beyond specially protected areas and nature reserves, and the location, scale and type of developments need to be considered in the context of species that need to migrate and find alternative habitats particularly in the face of climate change and land management pressures.

The sustainability appraisal acknowledges the threats that development poses to wildlife and countryside conservation and the contradiction between objective 7 (to conserve and enhance biodiversity) and the strategy to build so many homes and associated infrastructure. Development at this scale is likely to harm biodiversity rather than enhance it, and mitigation needs to be carefully considered in partnership with the county council and ecological experts.

Loss of biodiversity (issue 2) is defined as fragmentation and loss of key habitats and species listed in the Oxfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan as a result of neglect, harmful agricultural practices and the direct and indirect effects of urban development and climate change. The core strategy alone cannot address all these factors completely, but should be stronger in all the policies and measures to limit global warming, including energy

efficient homes aiming to be carbon neutral, sustainable transport and reducing the need to travel, local food production and encouragement of more sustainable agriculture and countryside management.

Green infrastructure is encouraged in section 11: this must provide space for people to enjoy outdoor recreation in harmony with the natural environment.

The river corridors, especially the Thames and its tributaries, should be protected for their wildlife and environmental importance, not just in terms of transport and leisure

2. The built environment

More emphasis should be laid on encouraging individual/small scale initiatives and innovation in the house-building field such as self-build. There should be allowance for experiment settlement models like the Hockerton development.

Visual values should be much higher. The sprawl of monotonous housing estates/pastiche Georgian and “tudorbethan”, built by large scale developers continues to do enormous visual damage to our townscapes. While the demand for detached housing will remain high planning should nonetheless encourage more intensive housing development per acre through favouring terraced housing and low level blocks of flats. This embodies greater ecological payback through more shared renewable energy generation CHP, ground source heating, anaerobic digesters, through more green spaces and through greater energy conservation efficiency. Any new development should be exciting to look at as well as live in and be seen as a highly positive addition to the built environment.

Any high density development should consider amenity areas on the roofs -eg green roofs, garden roofs and not just sedum roofs (which are probably unsustainable and do little to enhance bio-diversity).

Houses should be level 5 not 4, and use Passifhaus ideas.

There should be adequate allocation for allotments and other provision for community supported agriculture in future.

Developers who are unwilling to build to the highest ecological and visual standards should be excluded.

3. Standard and Quality of Living

Residents of our town should have access to:

Good quality healthcare, education and cultural, social and community services.

Facilities for young and elderly people.

Places to live that are decent; free from threat, noise and vandalism.

Public transport that lessens the need for private cars.

Local shops and retail facilities that enable to shop within the town.

Surrounding countryside.

Good waste management with full recycling facilities.

Proper open areas within the town. As pressure mounts for building land our green “lungs” could disappear. This could include areas like school playing fields.

4. Transport

“5.1 Improving accessibility to services and employment is fundamental to sustainable development”

“4.2 Climate change is a key consideration that permeates this core strategy. The need to address the causes of climate change and reduce CO₂ emissions is reflected in the transport and distribution strategies.”

We are relieved that SODC is considering climate change in formulating their Core Strategy, but believe that it needs to be central. We agree that the district needs to become more self sufficient and that transport is a major theme in achieving this. As the planning authority SODC can have a great influence on the siting and design of new developments. We would like to see SODC adopt some firm principles in all its planning decisions as follows:

The environment should be made much safer and more attractive for walking and cycling.

The layout of estates must ensure a safe and attractive environment for walkers and cyclists. There has been much research done on how to achieve this, some key points are:

Walking routes should be direct and link up to existing routes that lead to key destinations e.g. Shops and schools

Pavements must be well surfaced and wide enough for two mothers pushing buggies and holding the hands of a toddler each to walk side by side or pass each other

Street furniture should not obstruct footpaths or cyclepaths

Research suggests that in shared road spaces (such as Home Zones) drivers are much more careful and alert

In existing towns and villages SODC must ensure a network of well maintained, well lit footpaths and cycle routes that connect key residential areas with town centres, schools and leisure facilities. In most areas these already exist, but they need to be better surfaced and lit.

Dead ends are for cars not people

New developments should have several exits for pedestrians and cyclists so that they can always choose the shortest route to their destination. All design should put people first.

Generous cycle parking and cycle storage

All new housing, however small should be supplied with easily accessible, secure storage for bicycles and buggies.

Far more facilities for cycle parking should be provided in town centres, at schools, at bus stops etc.

“5.4 The Regional Transport Strategy recognises that some investment in the transport system is necessary. It encourages rebalancing the transport system in favour of more sustainable modes, but it recognises that in rural areas, the car is likely to remain the primary mode of travel. Improving travel choice in rural areas is to be encouraged, while accepting that there is unlikely to be a single model for delivering the flexible and responsive transport services required to meet the diverse needs of rural communities.”

“5.16 The way in which we manage the location of new housing, employment, retail and leisure provision within the district offers much scope for reducing the need to travel and promoting walking, cycling and the use of public transport.”

This is all true, but the bulk of South Oxfordshire's transport CO₂ emissions are and will be created by people already established in their homes and jobs.

We welcome the planned improvements to the mainline rail network and hope that the current economic situation will not put these in jeopardy.

Oxfordshire County Councils Local Transport Plan has the right principles, but is severely limited by lack of resources. We ask SODC to lobby OCC constantly to put far more resource into the maintenance and improvement of our bus network, particularly in the following areas:

Our experience in Wallingford with the X39 and X40 services demonstrates that ensuring a half hourly frequency increases usage. OCC should be working to increase frequency, and reliability of County services, thus enabling more of them to become self-funding.

OCC should work to integrate the bus networks with and with the train timetables.

OCC and SODC should work together to inform non-bus users about available services.

OCC and SODC should be more imaginative about public transport services e.g. the use of mini-buses to do circuits of the outlying parts of towns to pick up passengers and perhaps even deliver shopping

Rural Areas

OCC and SODC are dismissive of the possibilities of improving alternatives to the car in rural areas. When we have a good frequent network of buses on the main roads, it would not be difficult to set up shuttle minibuses to connect with these fast services. As long as OCC measures its public transport success in terms of passenger journeys rather than passenger miles, it is not going to plan to improve rural transport, nor can its existing structure deal with rural issues. SODC should be pressing for more thought about how rural services can be provided, especially with the increase in the numbers of older people living in villages who at some point will no longer be able to drive. This can lead to real hardship. SODC should be our advocate for good responsive rural transport. Perhaps one route is to work with Parish Councils to provide every parish with a mini-bus for them to use as the community wishes.

Car Clubs

Having invested a lot of money to buy a car people tend to use it as much as possible to justify the investment. One way of encouraging less car ownership is to run effective car clubs. We suggest that SODC set up a car club to operate at evenings and weekends using its own vehicles. We suggest they contact Commonwheels who would look after the cars. Sustainable Wallingford would like to work with SODC on this.

5. Background Environmental Issues

There is a requirement to reduce carbon emissions to prevent the planet warming in excess of 2° with the catastrophic consequences that that will entail. Since the international consensus on this requirement, carbon emissions have continued to rise. It is considered likely by the majority of climate scientists that temperature rise will exceed 2° within 50 years.

To reduce carbon emissions, further development of the built environment should be minimised; and any new development should, at worst, be carbon-neutral, and better, be net generators of green energy.

North Sea oil and gas reserves are now depleted and the UK is no longer self-sufficient in fossil-fuel. Global resources of fossil fuel are also waning. In the short-term, oil will become increasingly expensive, and in the longer-term, it will run out. Our current lifestyle requires high oil-input, not only for heating and travel, but also for the

production of clothing and food.

For future developments to be sustainable beyond 30 years, it should be ensured that:

- a) they generate sufficient energy to be independent of fossil-fuels, for reason of its future scarcity and to prevent adding to carbon emissions, and
- b) sufficient land is made available to individuals to grow food, in the absence of future oil for intensive agriculture

The Current Plan

The current plan, for 850 houses in Wallingford, will increase the population of Wallingford by approximately 25%, from 8000 to 10,000. In the last 15 years, the town has already seen a population increase of approximately 25%, from around 6500 to 8000. There has been no extra service provision for the increased population.

Impact on Current Environment

There will be an immediate detrimental impact on the current environment as these houses are to be built on green fields.

Both of SODC's choices for the development, at Slade End Farm or Winterbrook, will have a negative environmental impact on the local areas. Existing houses near both sites are individual, generally detached, residences that enjoy a beautiful outlook over fields.

It is unclear why building to the north, at Shillingford Road, has been ruled out. Houses there are already organised in estates, the land was classified as 'poor agricultural' in the Inspector's report of 15 years ago, the by-pass could be completed, and the land is already in Wallingford Parish - Wallingford will bear the brunt of supporting this new community whereas the rates for a Winterbrook development would go to Cholsey, and of a Slade End Farm development, to Brightwell. This massive increase to the town size might be better centred around the secondary school.

Carbon Footprint

Wallingford is interestingly placed to spearhead environmental change and be a model for sustainable living. We are at the centre of environmental research, housing the Environment Agency, the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, and CABI (formerly, Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux International).

At a time when the UK is endeavouring to reduce carbon emissions, it is surprising that large-scale developments are being considered. However, it would be an exciting proposition if these houses were to be incorporated successfully into the town without

any net carbon-emissions. Quite a challenge!

House build

One of the most intensive carbon-dioxide producing activities is the production of concrete. The building of these houses and streets will therefore increase carbon emissions. Furthermore, the soaking up of carbon dioxide by the green fields will be eliminated.

It is important that any houses built should be constructed of environmentally-friendly materials, such as straw bricks and recycled tyre-rubber slates for roofs.

Most importantly, they should be built to the highest standards, with zero-carbon emissions, and with energy micro-generation that fulfils and even exceeds the requirements of the developments. For this town-of-the-future, housing must be built to a Level 6 standard.

Facilities in houses and properties

Laundry-hanging areas should be incorporated into houses so that it is not necessary to use electric clothes-driers. These consume the most energy of any household appliance.

Gardens should be provided to each property. These should incorporate sufficient space for clothes drying, recreation, and for food-growing.

Cellars should be provided to increase space for residents and perhaps to provide for car storage. (This may not be possible considering the concerns over flooding).

Energy generation

It is difficult to see how sufficient energy can be produced to maintain this housing density. Wet-system solar heating panels and photovoltaic cells should be incorporated into all sun-facing surfaces.

A development of this size would also benefit from one or more wind turbines. These would have to be large, to bring them above the levels of interference from buildings.

Archimedes screws in the river could also be considered.

Outdoor Environment: Green Spaces and Vegetation

Housing density at 4 units per acre is too dense. Recent developments in Wallingford have already produced dense living areas. New development should be sufficiently low to

allow for open park spaces, uncultivated 'wild' patches, hedges, gardens and parking.

It is essential that there is sufficient access to open land for children, the elderly, walkers and dog-owners. None of these should be expected to have to travel to parkland. There are already dogs being taken in cars across town to be walked; this practice should not be encouraged.

Trees in towns are considered to be beneficial to people's wellbeing, and are startlingly absent from many new developments. All streets should be tree-lined with native tree species. Parks should be rich in trees to provide habitats for native animals and plants, and natural play-grounds for children.

Land should be made available as allotments for residents to grow their own food. This reduces the distance that food has to travel (food-miles) and mitigates against the effects of inevitable increases in food-prices from the requirement to import food, or to import oil for agriculture.

Sewerage, Drainage and Flooding

There are tremendous difficulties in Wallingford with sewerage and drainage. For example, tankers are frequently required to remove sewage at Wantage Road with its link to Mackney; the pumping station at Lower Wharf in the centre of town frequently overflows, polluting the water-course; the Priory Mews development in the old town has suffered overflows of drains and resulting flooding.

Any new development would require a new pumping station and completely independent drainage systems.

There are concerns that any development in Wallingford would encroach upon the water-table and put the whole of Wallingford at increased risk of flooding. According to the Environment Agency's (albeit large-scale) flood-risk maps, the whole of the southside of Brookmead Drive is an at-risk area for flooding.

Flood-risk should be carefully assessed. Attention should be paid to potential run-off into local water-courses.

Water

It is unlikely that current water provision will be adequate. The piecemeal increase in size of Wallingford has gradually encroached on the water (and sewerage) provision.

Traffic

On the one hand, any new development should look to Wallingford for shopping and entertainment, and so good road links into the centre should be ensured. (These green fields, any of those chosen, are too far away from the centre for most people to consider walking).

On the other hand, more traffic in the centre of town would be undesirable; the car parks are usually full at peak times in the week. It might therefore be better to channel traffic out onto the by-pass. It is likely that business would be lost to the town thereby.

The best advantages to the traders and service-providers in the town would be for the houses to be sited in Crowmarsh. From there, the closest facilities, by car, would be in Wallingford, as opposed to Didcot which may turn out to be the destination of choice once residents have got onto the by-pass.

Noise and Light

Noise from the by-pass would be quite a consideration. The by-pass was originally built a distance from existing houses to reduce the impact on residents. Residents were also encouraged to bring their own trees to grow up a screen alongside the by-pass.

Houses built right up to the by-pass will be subject to a lot of traffic-noise, and could, therefore, only be thought of as low-grade housing. Development should resist going close to the edge. Perhaps a massive wall would help.

Light pollution from the Sports Park should be considered. Family homes likely to contain young children should be sited away from this.

Street lighting should be 'intelligent', with movement sensors to bring them on. They should be powered by photovoltaic batteries.

Service provision and the community

It is difficult to understand where children will be schooled from these large developments. It is difficult to comment on a core strategy which gives no indication of how services will be provided.

Wallingford has a higher proportion of social housing than Berinsfield. Wallingford New Town will hugely increase the population of a town which has already had to incorporate a 25% increase in population in recent years. An 850-unit development will put huge strains on existing social structures and should not be being considered without a full plan showing where new services will be developed.

Once it is understood how completely the nature of Wallingford will be altered, the plan

should be put honestly and openly before the people of Wallingford who should have a right to decide whether this is what they want.

....And finally

Many of the aspirations in the Core Strategy are hedged with caveats like “where practicable” and “if possible”. We encourage you to be bold, using legislation and public pressure, to ensure that environmental targets are set by SODC and met by developers.

We believe a future that works for all of us and our descendants has to be sustainable.