

District Councillor's report for July

'The main order of business at SODC remains the new administration's plans for the Local Plan (submitted on 29 March and awaiting inspection). At the time of writing, it seems likely that after much discussion of the options, Cabinet is likely to bring forward proposals to Full Council in the autumn.

The options under consideration by the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet have stretched from leaving the emerging Local Plan unchanged to withdrawing it and starting again.

The first option (recommended by officers) seems unacceptable to the LD/Green administration as they collectively want reduce dramatically the number of houses to be built, and disagree with all the proposed strategic sites.

The fourth option is very risky as it leaves SODC with an increasingly outdated Local Plan for a number of years which puts us at risk of speculative applications.

Some measure of protection against speculative building seems to have been offered by recently published figures for housing supply which indicate a 9.7 year supply of sites. However the figures are less comforting in two or three years' time when, without the LP2034 as currently drafted, the land supply is projected to crash well below 5 years.

My opinion is that whereas the former administration reluctantly accepted the objectively assessed need, and added in our proportion of Oxford City's unmet need, the current administration seems to be relying on *wishing* the objectively assessed need to be lower, without the evidence to support it.

Some hope for lowering numbers can be found in the Inspectors of Oxford City's LP questioning its level of unmet need. And that is something the inspectors of the SODC LP would take into account.

One of the costs of reducing the number of houses in the SODC LP is the loss of the Growth Deal (£215 million) and Houses and Infrastructure Fund (£218 million) for infrastructure both of which were awarded to Oxfordshire alongside the commitment to build the necessary houses. The Administration seem likely to propose at Full Council this Thursday (18 July) that it appeal to Government for agreement to keep that infrastructure funding even if it reduces the number of houses in the LP. It is unlikely that the Department of Housing will agree to this but that remains to be seen.'

Caroline Newton, District Councillor, Haseley Brook Ward