

SODC MONTHLY REPORT – April 2021

Cllr Caroline Newton

Planning

Joint Local Plan

At Full Council on 25 March, the SODC administration proposed that the next Local Plan (LP 2041) – the spatial strategy for the district – should be created as a Local Plan with the Vale of the White Horse District Council. The motion carried with a very small majority.

Work will now start on creating the LP2041 (and if it seems we've only just finished the last one you'd be right...). Over the coming months, officers will be in discussion with potential developers in the search for sites. The number of houses we will need to allocate will be driven by the work of Oxfordshire 2050 which is due to report this June/July. Oxfordshire 2050 is, in turn, framed by the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, the Government's regional strategy for economic development.

LP2041 is due to be adopted in 2024. It will overlap with – and largely replace – LP2035. But it will almost certainly not reduce the scale of homes and employment sites etc in that current Local Plan, nor remove any specific sites. On the contrary, as it covers a longer period it is very likely to require SODC to identify more space for development. It will also give an opportunity for the two councils to introduce policies to define how that development must take place.

Housing Land Supply

Local Planning Authorities (such as SODCs) are normally expected to be able to demonstrate a 5 Year Housing Land Supply (ie that they have an up-to-date strategy for ensuring sufficient houses will be completed within a rolling 5 year period). As part of the Growth Deal agreement with Government (£215 million funding for infrastructure in Oxfordshire), for 3 years from March 2018, local authorities in Oxfordshire were required only to show a 3 YHLS. That 3 year period has now concluded, and all local authorities are now back to a 5YHLS.

Some local media coverage has misleadingly indicated that this was unexpected. In fact, it has been anticipated since 2018 and the council has planned its housing land supply accordingly.

Bioabundance

Following SODC's adoption of LP2035 in December, an environmental pressure group, Bioabundance, applied for a judicial review of the decision. On 30 March, that application was refused and costs awarded against Bioabundance. On 1 April, Bioabundance appealed the decision, and SODC await notification from the court of the hearing date.

Virtual Meetings

The regulations allowing local council meetings to take place virtually expire in early May. Ministers' position is that an extension of these powers would require stand-alone primary legislation, and that there is no time in the legislative calendar. But a legal challenge to this position argues that virtual meetings can continue without additional legislation. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is now conducting a consultation to consider whether – if necessary – to introduce legislation. It can be found here: <https://consult.communities.gov.uk/local-government-stewardship/local-authority-remote-meetings-call-for-evidence>