

Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Committee

Date:	7 November 2017
Title:	SODC and Vale of White Horse draft Joint Housing Delivery Strategy consultation
Contact Officer:	Graeme Markland, Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer

Purpose of Report

1. To provide a summary of the representations made by Thame Town Council to the District and Vale draft Joint Housing Delivery Strategy, October 2017.

Background

2. This will be a new document. It has been largely prompted by Government policy and guidance which is changing to ensure that local authorities become more proactive in enabling housing development. This will involve the District working with landowners, developers, local communities and infrastructure providers to bring sites forward.

The document suggests various activities the District could become involved in, such as giving clearer guidance to developers, encouraging small and medium builders and working to establish innovative housing types. These activities are split across a timetable of years, namely, 1-3, 4-6 and 7-10. In the short term, it is recommended that the District works to become a "housing enabler", with more complex projects and targets reserved for the later years. The housing enabler role involves items such as the coordination of infrastructure, an increase in the diversity of housing offered, the identification of obstacles and the Council becoming a land owner.

Thame Town Council Recommended Additions and Alterations

3. Comments on the strategy's aims and objectives:

No reference was made within the draft objectives to forming a development corporation that would better enable the delivery of infrastructure at Didcot Garden Town and Berinsfield. Such a body would help forge ties between the District, the LEP, the HCA and the wider development industry. This was recommended in the District's own research report, undertaken by Wessex Economics, that underlies the Strategy.

4. How far do you agree or disagree with the actions proposed for years 1-3?

No mention was made in either the Strategy or the Wessex Economics report of the District forming its own house building company. It is concerning that the possibility is not mentioned. Many LPAs are forming house building arms and aside from helping deal with tricky brownfield sites, or the build of necessary but less attractive housing types, they are also being used as a recognised source of revenue for local authorities.

The District will bring in a housing check list to ensure that where tenures or typologies vary for viability reasons from the recommended policies and housing mix a consistent approach will be taken. It was recommended that the list will need to be made compatible in some way with the very specific tenure/housing mix that NDPs might bring forward.

Due to the significant harm that under-sized one and two bedroom homes are causing across the District (overcrowding, poor living conditions of up to one-third of such properties) it was recommended that the national standards for general market one and two bedroom dwellings be adopted, regardless of any effect it might have on viability. The District are currently proposing a “where viable” approach.

No mention is currently made of the District engaging with community housing projects. This is currently missing from the draft, although it is recognised that the District will need to engage with private developers and institutional bodies. It was emphasised that the community, through independent work or via NDPs and NDOs, will be ideally placed to broaden housing choice in terms of tenure mix and financing.

The District are keen to deliver a range of small sites for SME builders across the District. The comment was made that the Town Council knows of no such sites being put forward by developers and land owners and, therefore, such a supply may not be relied on from each of the constrained market towns and larger villages.

5. How far do you agree or disagree with the actions proposed for years 4-6?

No mention has been made of the necessity to engage with housing community projects. Diversifying housing delivery mechanisms has been pushed into this timeframe, without the recognition that community groups will be approaching SODC with various proposals, much sooner. The District should recognise within the document that communities other than Berinsfield may well wish to bring forward community housing projects. As outlined above, recognition of the choice in housing mix and financing these models will bring should be recognised.

It was reiterated that it is disappointing that no mention was made of a development corporation/local delivery vehicle. It was pointed out that the Homes and Communities Agency were more likely to look favourably upon any LPA that did so.

With the role of enabler established, monitoring of housing that does not come forward through the planning system should be undertaken. This can be done via the land and property gazetteer and gives “early warning” of any unlawfully converted / sub-divided premises. These are often built poorly, with inappropriate room sizes. Those built to a decent standard can be brought via enforcement into the planning system, and then claimed against OAN. This work can of course be undertaken sooner, resources allowing; new homes bonus may be able to be claimed for these homes.

6. How far do you agree or disagree with the actions proposed for years 7-10?

It was suggested that text be amended for one objective; it currently reads that all work should be finished by year 7.

Action Required

7. To **note** the report.