Oxford Local Plan 2040 – developing more land for employment likely to worsen housing stress

Oxford's draft local plan risks increasing housing stress by pushing for the development of more land for employment. That is the view of the POETS group (Planning Oxfordshire's Environment and Transport Sustainably) who are this week writing to all district and county councillors in Oxfordshire about the latest consultation by Oxford City Council on its 2040 Local Plan.

Though POETS welcome many of the suggested policies that the Council is suggesting (for instance on climate change and transport priorities), they are concerned (based on recent precedents) about serious shortcomings in the city's approach to growth and housing – not least because of their potential impact on the county as a whole.

POETS' Katie Barrett explained

"There has been an historic imbalance of jobs and housing in Oxford. Recently this has put pressures on the surrounding district councils to provide housing land – which is also putting immense pressure on all kinds of supporting infrastructure."

"We think that the city council needs to look hard at its growth forecasts; for instance, one option favoured by consultants suggests employment space needs of up to 10 times greater than the increase in the City over the last decade. This seems implausible given trends such as the increase in remote working, and is likely to continue the friction with other districts that occurred in the recent tranche of Local Plans."

"In the same vein, we also think that the real housing need is for social and genuinely affordable decent quality housing; this could be met much more sustainably within the City, by giving priority to housing on vacant and underused employment sites."

POETS argue that issues around climate change, biodiversity loss, and public well-being should be at the forefront of all planning, and that this should trump notions of dashing for traditional GDP (Gross Domestic Product) based growth.

POETS' David Young added

"Oxford and its hinterland are largely interdependent. The City Council should engage constructively with the surrounding districts to ensure a transparent approach to forecasting – not least the need to choose consultants who do not have a vested interest in growth. This is particularly important given the breakdown of discussions on the now abandoned strategic Oxon 2050 Plan, which were understood to centre around the use of forecasting methods which overstated growth needs."

POETS also consider that very many issues of level and distribution of possible growth are dodged in this consultation – and that a further, and transparent, round of consultation is needed before any firm decisions are taken.

ENDS.

Note for Editors:

Oxford City Council is consulting on its Local Plan 2040 Preferred Options - see

https://consultation.oxford.gov.uk/planning-services/oxford-local-plan-2040-in-depth-questions/

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