Joint Vale/SODC Local Plan Preferred Options Consultation (Regulation 18 Part 2) 2024

Consultation Response by Planning Oxfordshire's Environment and Transport Sustainably (POETS)

February 2024

POETS (Planning Oxfordshire's Environment and Transport Sustainably) is a group of senior planning, environment and transport professionals and academics focussed primarily on planning and transport in Oxfordshire.

For more information go to *www.poetsplanningoxon.uk*

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POETS broadly welcome the new draft LP and the policies it proposes to recognise the climate emergency and the need to move towards a more sustainable future and enhanced health of the population. We have the following specific comments to make:

1. Co-operation

POETS welcome the move towards more strategic planning represented by the joint working between the two councils to produce the draft plan, but are disappointed by the failure of all Oxfordshire councils to deliver an Oxfordshire 2050 plan that would have enhanced the effectiveness of many of the policies proposed.

We note and agree with the criticisms made by the two councils of the process and content of the recent Oxford Local Plan Reg 19 consultation. (See https://www.poetsplanningoxon.uk/poets-oxford-local-plan2040-consultation-response-040124.pdf for the POETS full response to that).

2. Climate Change and Improving Environmental Quality

POETS generally support the more ambitious policies, referred to as Option A. These better reflect the urgency of the climate emergency, and the increasing pressures on natural resources, sustainability and health.

3. Housing

POETS have long been concerned about the unjustified and damaging high levels of housing provision brought forward as part of the recent 'dash for growth' under the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth deal. These have placed huge pressures on infrastructure and services. We therefore welcome the stance taken by the two councils on the more considered approach to housing in the Local Plan consultation. In particular, given our severe concerns about the way in which housing need forecasts have been massaged in the Oxford Local Plan, we support the councils' view that it would be inappropriate to make further provision for Oxford's housing 'overspill'.

With regard to Policy HOU1, whilst we understand the reasons for the councils' choice of Option A, we suggest that there is still a case to be made for limiting housing growth below this, and hope that the councils will consider the desirability and feasibility of getting a level of growth based at most on the government's Standard Methodology.

The councils will be aware of POETS' views on the need for social and genuinely affordable houses (see https://www.poetsplanningoxon.uk/poets-planning-and-the-housing-crisis-paper-180921.pdf and https://www.poetsplanningoxon.uk/poets_affordable_housing_final_nov2019.pdf). Accordingly, we support the ambitious targets set out in Policy HOU3. We also hope that the councils will put pressure on central government to change national housing policy to allow councils to build decent social housing, which would go a long way to alleviate current pressures for housebuilding.

4. Site Allocations

POETS welcome the deletion of the Chalgrove Airfield site which is in a totally unsustainable location and would have resulted in a car-dependent community and significant environmental harm across a wide area.

5. Transport Infrastructure and Safeguarding

POETS welcome the county wide move to a Decide & Provide approach to transport infrastructure and fully supports the county council's LTCP5. If pursued effectively, this will result in increases in use of active travel and public transport, while resulting in substantial reductions in car use. POETS therefore support Policy IN2, Option A.

As a consequence, many of the safeguarded schemes to increase highway capacity in Policy IN3 will be unnecessary and should not be pursued further. We hope that working in conjunction with the county council, much of the safeguarded land which is currently under threat of inappropriate development for expansion of highway capacity will be released from protection over the life of the Plan. As allocated sites come forward for development, the priority for new infrastructure must emphasise the provision of enhanced public transport and active travel and not the current practice of prioritising increased capacity for private cars over other modes.

Specifically the councils will know that POETS are objecting at the current HIF1 Public Inquiry, as we believe this road scheme to be predicated on the 'Predict and Provide' methodology abandoned in the county council's Local Transport & Connectivity Plan, and contrary to a range of national and local policies, including those on climate, green belt and health.