

Hearing Statement: Matter 16 – Five Year Supply of Deliverable Housing Land

“Where , in this small island, in the next 45 years, are we going to find accommodation for a further 20 million people, or even more?” wondered Sir Colin Buchanan in his 1963 *Traffic in Towns* report. In fact, the population rose by about eight million in that period.”

Jon Reeds, *Smart Growth: From Sprawl to Sustainability*.

Answer to 16.1 and 16.3 (first bullet)

As our Hearing Statement for Matter 14 pointed out, there is a large discrepancy between OCC projections of population growth and those of ONS. And as the quotation above indicates, projections are often exaggerated and fail to come to pass. For example, after a steady rise over several years, net migration into the UK fell by 84,000, or 25%, in 2016. It is too soon to say whether this is a blip or the start of a longer-term trend, but the Brexit effect seems to be a likely explanation of the fall.

The table below gives another illustration of how ONS and OCC projections differ. For England as a whole, over a longer period (2014–2034), the percentage increase in population is 13.8%, roughly half of the OCC projections for Oxfordshire (27%) and West Oxfordshire (28%).

Table 1: Estimated and projected population of the United Kingdom and constituent countries, mid-2014 to mid-2039

	2014	2019	2024	2029	2034	2039
United Kingdom	64.6	66.9	69.0	71.0	72.7	74.3
England	54.3	56.5	58.4	60.2	61.8	63.3
Wales	3.1	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.3	3.3
Scotland	5.3	5.4	5.5	5.6	5.7	5.7
Northern Ireland	1.8	1.9	1.9	2.0	2.0	2.0

Source: Office for National Statistics

Furthermore, the 2014 Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan (pp.137–8) recognises that: “The baseline forecasts suggest that if historical trends in the relative growth performance of the Oxfordshire economy were to continue, employment in the county would increase by 36,400 jobs by 2031 (approximately 0.4% p/a growth between 2011–2031).” In other words, less than half of OCC’s latest projections of 85,000 jobs. The document goes on to say that two-thirds of additional growth (at OCC’s higher rate) is expected to be in the period to 2020, which has implications for five-year housing supply.

In relation to both short- and long-term housing supply, the growth in different categories of household is of equal importance. The following *pre-Brexit* statistics from the Department for Communities and Local Government’s (DCLG’s), *2014-based Household Projections: England, 2014–2039*, 12 July 2016, give interesting insights into the logical priorities for the types of house construction that will be required to meet needs:

- The number of households in England is projected to increase from 22.7 million in 2014 to 28 million in 2039 – an *average* of 210,000 a year. The growth rates of population and households slow over the projection period. The percentage change in the number of households from 2014 to 2029 is 15%, again well below OCC projections for Oxfordshire.
- Of these, about 33% is accounted for by the increase in one person households. Couples with dependent children are projected to account for 19% of household growth.
- Average household size is projected to fall from 2.35 in 2014 to 2.21 in 2039.
- **By 2039, households with no dependent children will account for 81% of total households;** with one dependent child – 15%; with 2 children – 3%; and with 3+ children – 1%.
- Households headed by someone aged 65 or over are projected to increase by 155,000 per year – 74% of total household growth up to 2039.
- Households headed by someone aged 25–34 [ie, a lot of people who want to get onto the housing ladder, with or without children] are projected to *decrease* by 9,000 per year up to 2039 (the percentage of total households accounted for by this age-group will *reduce* by 4%).

So the question to ask is whether WODC's, and Oxfordshire's, housing plans fully reflect these projections. For example, the increase in households consisting of couples with dependent children is just 19%. Even with the current need for this category, family houses are not the highest priority.

One suspects that the most profitable houses to build are family homes with nice gardens on greenfield land, but what is required is more densely built smaller homes (including apartments) closer to existing facilities, both for an aging population and for affordable starter homes, thereby keeping housing developments mixed-aged. As the government knows, there are plenty of family homes being occupied by one or two aging people. Further incentives – financial and/or attractive availability of more appropriate accommodation – are required to encourage these people to downsize and vacate their family homes for families to live in.

Thus, in answer to your question

Is it appropriate for the plan to have separate housing requirement figures for West Oxfordshire's own housing needs and for the unmet needs of Oxford City? . . . Should there instead be a single housing requirement figure for the plan reflecting both needs?

no, there is no need for a separate housing requirement for Oxford City, because the projected growth has been greatly exaggerated, and any natural growth can be accommodated – as it has been up to now – both in the city itself and around the county. A single housing requirement figure is sufficient. The priority should be to ensure that the infrastructure is in place in time to cope with this natural growth (see postscript below).

And in answer to your question

Does the overall supply of housing land place too much reliance of large, strategic sites?

yes, it does, because large strategic sites are not necessary in West Oxfordshire, especially as the county is already having two new 'Garden Towns' built, at Bicester and Didcot, which may themselves be unnecessary. (Incidentally, Oxfordshire currently has more garden towns/villages planned for it than any other county in England – with Essex a close second. See Appendix.)

Furthermore, it has been pointed out that it is by no means certain that all the people who constitute Oxford's supposed unmet housing need in West Oxfordshire will want to live, or will end up living in Eynsham – unless there is some kind of Orwellian social engineering planned.

A note on infrastructure

DCLG's prospectus, *Locally-Led Garden Towns and Villages*, states at para 29: "We would like to ensure that infrastructure needs are clearly assessed and met as part of any proposal." It is far from clear that such needs have been fully assessed, let alone met, in relation to WODC's EoI or its Local Plan generally.

For example, how is WODC going to overcome the following shortfalls:

- Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) recently asked for £50 million to expand and maintain 21 surgeries in Oxfordshire. They were granted only £2 million (4% of what they requested). Deer Park Medical Centre in Witney recently closed.
- Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership recently put in a bid for £382 million for major road improvements, revamps to railway stations, and support for business, technology, education and training. They were granted £24.18 million (6% of what they requested.)

Finally: lack of scrutiny and accountability

The consultation process for the preparation of the Eynsham Neighbourhood Plan (ENP) was very thorough and effectively engaged the local population, particularly on the development of West Eynsham. WODC's sudden double imposition of an SDA of 1,000 new houses on West Eynsham (where a good number were already envisaged in the ENP), and of the Garden Village, by contrast showed an extraordinary lack of consultation. Eynsham, which had all along been willing to work constructively with WODC on development, was instead presented with a fait accompli on which it was only allowed to comment; there was no prior discussion of whether such major development decisions, with such an enormous impact locally, were appropriate, feasible or necessary.

We therefore seriously question whether due process was followed; and we have serious misgivings about the (to us) obscure criteria and methodology used in the economic and population forecasts that led to such maximalist projections.

Submitted by EPIC (drafted by Nigel Pearce).

Appendix to Hearing Statement: Matter 14

The 24 Garden Towns and Garden Villages, by county

Two points for a Garden Town, and one point for a Garden Village. Essex and Hertfordshire share a Garden Town, for which they are given 1 point each.

Counties are identified as being in the northern (N) or southern (S) half of the country, in the context of a dividing line at Coventry.

County	No of Towns	No of Villages	Total points
Oxfordshire (S)	2	1	5
Essex (S)	1½	1	4
Kent (S)	2	–	4
Hampshire (S)	1	1	3
Northamptonshire (S)	1	1	3
Buckinghamshire (S)	1	–	2
Somerset (S)	1	–	2
Hertfordshire (S)	½	–	1
Cheshire (N)	–	1	1
Cornwall (S)	–	1	1
Cumbria (N)	–	1	1
Derbyshire (N)	–	1	1
Devon (S)	–	1	1
Lancashire (N)	–	1	1
Lincolnshire (N)	–	1	1
Merseyside (N)	–	1	1
Surrey (S)	–	1	1
Warwickshire (S)	–	1	1

There are no Garden Towns or Garden Villages (yet) in the following:

- Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, Durham
- North Yorkshire, East Riding of Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, Greater Manchester
- Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Rutland, Staffordshire, Shropshire, West Midlands
- Worcestershire, Herefordshire, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire
- Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire
- Dorset, West Sussex, East Sussex, Berkshire, Greater London, Isle of Wight

Note how:

- Oxfordshire is bearing a greater burden than any other county. Why?
- The top eight counties, by share of burden, are all in the southern half of the country.
- All the Garden Towns are in the southern half of the country (more London commuters).
- Even with the Garden Villages, there are more in the south (8) than the north (6).
- There were 58 local authorities that submitted Expressions of Interest (EoIs) in the Garden Villages programme, although a few EoIs were submitted by more than one council. Of the 58, 29.6% out of 27 were successful in the south, and 19.4% out of 31 in the north.
- In sum, out of the 24 Garden Towns and Garden Villages, 18 (75%) are in the south and 6 (25%) in the north. This bias runs counter to the greater need for investment in the north and midlands. The south gets the majority of the money and investment yet again.