



UPDATE ON HOUSING PLANS FOR WOODSTOCK

With what can only be described as a mad flurry of pronouncements recently about further housing development in Oxfordshire, residents can be excused for feeling bewildered about what it means for them. The Local Economic Partnership has predicted a need for 100,000 new homes in the county as a whole by 2031. The four rural District Councils have had to accept a proportion of that number to cater for Oxford City's unmet housing need and this has meant all having to augment their planned housing allocations beyond the number envisaged originally after an exercise known as the Strategic Housing Market Assessment conducted countywide had been taken into account.

What does this mean for Woodstock? We recently circulated to all households in the town a copy of the Vision Statement prepared by the Town Council last year together with a questionnaire, the answers to which are being taken into account in making our submission to the West Oxfordshire District Council's revised Local Plan. Residents will be aware from that exercise that 670 new homes are now proposed in West Oxfordshire territory. However, a part of Woodstock falls into Cherwell District Council territory and this council is now looking at the possibility of developing the land previously described as Woodstock East for which 1200 new homes were planned. Additionally the field east of Sansom's Lane (the border with the new estate at Marlborough Place, Shipton Road) is also now earmarked as a possibility for development. Should this additional territory fall prey to the developers (and it is all land owned by Blenheim Estates) it would mean that the combination of the West Oxfordshire and Cherwell Local Plans would result in some 2,000 new homes, or more, being built in Woodstock by 2031 – in effect, more than doubling the size of the town in 15 years.

Some may think that this means more affordable homes for young people, encouraging them to continue to live in the area and boosting the local economy. Unfortunately, experience tells us that 'affordable homes' which usually work out at 20% below the market value are not truly affordable for those on average incomes or lower. We need homes that are not expensive to purchase or rent so that people on modest incomes can live in the area as well, but such initiatives seem to be far from the developers' minds.

More employment possibilities may enhance the local economy but without substantial infrastructure upgrading that would be futile. Again, experience tells us that major infrastructure projects are a long time in the planning – just think of how long congestion on the A40 and A44 has been a problem with no radical solution yet in sight. Parking is another problem with no easy solution apparent – all our efforts to persuade Blenheim Estates to contribute to a solution have fallen on stony ground. Schooling and medical facilities will need a much more radical rethink if all the development comes to fruition in the next 15 years.

The problems facing us are only exacerbated by the plans for neighbouring areas. The substantial growth proposed for Witney, Chipping Norton, Eynsham, Kidlington and Oxford Northern Gateway points to a nightmare scenario, which we can only escape by making the strongest possible representations to the planning authorities and our M.P's to reduce the scale of development proposed. When responding to the planning authorities please help us by addressing the following issues in particular:

1. Do you think the scale of development proposed for Woodstock is reasonable?
2. Do you think it will produce more truly affordable homes?
3. Do you think the necessary infrastructure will materialise with the housing development?
4. Are there any other priority issues you consider essential?