

1. INTRODUCTION

PARAGRAPH NUMBERING

Objections 247/374, 571/1120 & 1141

Issue

The adequacy of the paragraph numbering used in the plan and the status of the ‘policy checklist’.

Conclusions

1.1 I agree with the Council (*CD1/27*) that this is a matter for re-formatting at the final stages as part of the adopted plan. From my experience during the Inquiry the referencing to individual paragraphs would have been easier had they been unique rather than duplicated in each chapter of the plan.

1.2 This is largely a matter of style and it is unfortunate that I should have to be involved but these are duly-made objections. As the Council’s officers “do not disagree” with the point made (*374*) I formally recommend a modification. There are different ways in which unique numbering could be achieved, either by using a third level (1.1.1) or by eliminating the numbering for the headings and numbering all paragraphs in each chapter consecutively, e.g. paragraph 2.2 in chapter 1 would become paragraph 1.5. The latter is simpler, and more conventional.

1.3 The HBF (*1141*) refer to a ‘policy checklist’ but it is unclear to what this refers unless it is the list of structure plan policies in appendix 7. This is simply the written statement of the adopted County Structure Plan. It does not require further explanation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.4 **R1.1 Modify the paragraph numbering in the plan so that each paragraph is uniquely numbered.**

1.5 **R1.2 Make no modification to the list of structure plan policies in appendix 7.**

SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE

Objection 503/737

Issue

Whether Village Appraisals and Plans should be in Supplementary Planning Guidance and referred to in the Local Plan.

Conclusions

1.6 Advice on the treatment of Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) is contained in paragraphs 3.15-18 of PPG12. It should be published separately to the Plan and is not “incorporated” in it as the objection suggests. It is also only the land-use aspects of parish plans which are appropriate for SPG. There is no requirement for such plans to be mentioned in the Local Plan although it should be clear which Local Plan policies form the “umbrella” for SPG.

1.7 The objection does not, actually, call for a change to paragraph 6.2 of Chapter 1. As the Council state (*CP054*) the plan could be expanded but it is important for it to be as concise as possible. No change to the text is warranted.

RECOMMENDATION

1.8 R1.3 Make no modification to paragraph 6.2 of chapter 1.

OMISSION OF CHAPTER ON WOODSTOCK

Objections 400/625, 402/629

Issue

Whether there should be a separate chapter in the plan for Woodstock.

Conclusions

1.9 These objections do not appear to have been addressed by the Council, but this is not surprising because both objectors are otherwise concerned with Housing Proposal 3 – Woodstock East. No argument has been advanced in favour of a separate chapter for Woodstock other than that there is one in the 1997 adopted plan. I note that the adopted plan also includes chapters for Burford, Chipping Norton and Eynsham.

1.10 Obviously, if there was to be a chapter for Woodstock it would be logical that the other larger villages should be treated similarly. Plans should be as concise as possible and I can find no convincing reason why it should be necessary to include detailed policies in the plan itself. The important land use policies covering all settlements are included and, should it be considered necessary, SPG could be

prepared containing much of the detail in the 1997 plan. The reduction in the plan from 313 to 178 pages tells its own story. My opinion is that, if anything, the plan is probably still too long. The text should be restricted simply to a justification of the policies with any necessary elaboration elsewhere.

RECOMMENDATION

1.11 R1.4 Make no modification to the plan in respect of a separate chapter for Woodstock.

2. GENERAL STRATEGY

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES (2.1)

Objections 104/158, 503/738-40, 571/1141, 578/1226

Issues

- (a) The lack of emphasis on rural aims and objectives and the need for links to the Plan’s overall vision:
- (b) The omission of environmental objectives;
- (c) Whether the first housing objective gives the impression that the Structure Plan housing requirement does not have to be met;
- (d) Whether the second housing objective should include reference to nature conservation considerations.

Inspector’s Reasoning and Conclusions

2.1 I am not convinced that the Countryside Agency(738) fully appreciate the limitations posed by the current land-use based Development Plan system, as opposed to the broader “spatial” remit introduced by the 2004 Act. In that respect much of the force of their arguments about the need for a greater rural focus and the links between the aim, individual objectives and policies for action will no doubt be applied as part of a core strategy DPD for the District.

2.2 By its very nature an aim (or vision) has to be generally worded. I agree with the Council (CP054) that the aim does not have an urban focus but seeks to recognise the balance of interests in the area, which may be largely rural in terms of land area but not in population terms. An aim is not the place to include a development strategy, rural or otherwise.

2.3 Turning to the objectives, in section 1.2, (739) I accept that the environment is an “over-arching” consideration and is clearly a factor which underlies all of the objectives which are set in terms of those activities which give rise to land-use demands. The objectives relate to each chapter in the plan and I consider it to be

reasonably clear how each set of policies gives effect to those objectives. I cannot fault this approach.

2.4 One of the points that the Countryside Agency (740) make is that there are conflicts between different parts of the same objective. I consider that this is adequately resolved through the policies themselves. Thus the second part of the first housing objective has to be interpreted in the light of the wider Government policy objective to provide the necessary infrastructure to support sustainable communities. The Council do not refute the suggestion (1226) that this may mean that the structure plan requirement is not met. Housing provision is very important objective, especially in the south-east region, but I agree that the “numbers game” should not be seen as an end in itself. I find no reason to alter the balance of this objective.

2.5 Finally on the objectives, in response to English Nature’s objection (158), I agree with the Council that the word ‘resources’ in the second housing objective encompasses nature conservation resources as well as a wider range of what might be termed ‘environmental capital’, to use the Countryside Agency’s terminology.

RECOMMENDATION

2.6 **R2.1 Make no modification to the plan’s aims and objectives.**

THE STRATEGY (2.2)

Objections 104/147, 163/264, 247/375, 503/740, 552/961, 557/1039, 578/1220&4, 589/1294 & 3440, 594/1347&8
104/159&160 have been treated as withdrawn on the basis of letter of March 2002 (CP054, appendix).

Issues

- (a) The priority given within the strategy to sustainable development and the extent to which this is adequately expressed through references to the development of brownfield land and the focus on the larger, more sustainable (group C) settlements;
- (b) the appropriateness of the emphasis in paragraph 2.7 on the concentration of major new development to achieve the effective provision of new infrastructure;
- (c) the appropriateness of further development in Witney pending the provision of supporting infrastructure;
- (d) whether conservation areas should be shown in figure 2.1;
- (e) the inclusion of Bampton in paragraph 2.5;
- (f) the absence of a strategy and policies for the integration of people with disabilities in society.

Conclusions

2.7 The Council accepted the thrust of English Nature’s objection (147) through the introduction of additional wording in paragraph 2.23 on sustainable development. However, there is a specific objection to that change (3440) and several other

objections to the overall strategy and whether the approach taken is entirely compatible with Government policy advice.

2.8 I consider that the problem is primarily one of presentation and emphasis rather than of substance. For example, placing the section on sustainable development at the beginning of section 2, rather than at the end as in the draft plan, would give it the priority it deserves. Even so, whether or not the strategy and policies of the plan do represent a sustainable ‘package’ is a matter of judgement and any doubts cannot undermine the additional statement in paragraph 2.23.

2.9 The CPRE (1039) are correct to point out that PPG3 suggests that districts should take account of brownfield development opportunities in adjacent areas as well as their own in seeking to minimise green field development but I agree with the Council that that is a matter to be considered at the strategic planning level when it might lead to a shift in overall provision between districts. However, the wording of paragraph 2.15 might be interpreted as meaning that the use of previously developed land is the Government’s priority rather than that of this plan. That section also should be given more emphasis.

2.10 I do not agree (1220) that paragraph 2.10 does not give sufficient focus to development in the group C settlements; the text clearly states “*progressively less restriction*” and that must be right in any settlement hierarchical approach. I address the matter as to whether the balance is correct in chapter 5.

2.11 Turning to issue b) it is clear that the context for objections 1294 and 3440 is the major challenge posed to the allocation of a large green field site at North Curbridge for housing and whether that should be regarded as a sustainable location. The associated objections are fully considered in chapter 9 rather than here but it became clear to me at an early stage in the Inquiry that the position on the requirement for major green field development in Witney, at least within the plan period to 2011, had changed significantly since the preparation of the plan. As a result, I consider that there is a need to correct the, perhaps unintentional, impression given in paragraph 2.7 that major green field development is the only way to achieve the provision of supporting infrastructure. This can be done through the inclusion of the priorities stated in paragraph 31 of PPG3 although I recognise that the paragraph is not dealing exclusively with housing development.

2.12 Briefly, on issue c), it is at the strategic level that the overall scale of development appropriate to Witney and the West Oxfordshire district must be decided (961). As for issue d) it would not be appropriate, in my view, to include conservation areas on the strategy diagram (264) because such a diagram must be kept simple and the areas are fully listed in figure 3.1.

2.13 I have to include issue e) because objection 375 is but “conditionally” withdrawn. The original objection appears to have been met in spirit by the addition of Bampton to the “key service centres” in paragraph 2.5. However, I feel I must draw the Council’s attention to the fact that this flies in the face of all of the evidence presented to the Inquiry about the sustainability of Bampton. Simply because the village was considered suitable for an affordable housing development would not change its status. It is clearly not in the same league as the other named settlements for service provision and should be dealt with differently. Although there is no

objection to this amendment in chapter 2, many objections are raised to a similar statements in paragraph 2.4 of chapter 5 which I recommend be deleted (R 5.1). There is a need for consistency.

2.14 In a similar vein, the evidence presented by the Council (*CD1/101*) is that Eynsham is also one of the key service centres in the District. It may not have been selected for further development, although I comment upon this later (see paragraph 5.282), but I suggest that the introductory section on the strategy should parallel the Topic Paper in explaining how the strategy was developed.

2.15 Issue e) arises as a result of objections (*1347&8*) to the omission of a strategy for dealing with the access needs of those with disabilities. Although it is appropriate to have a strategy for such matters it is not the focus of this section of the plan which concentrates on the main land-use distribution issues. I agree with the Council’s response which was to add a new paragraph (2.27a) in chapter 3 of the plan.

2.16 My main conclusion on the strategy section, which will require some re-writing in any event to give effect to my conclusions on the housing strategy in chapter 5, is that the local strategy should be seen as deriving from the application of national and strategic priorities to the local area. Thus, it would lead with sustainable development which derives from global and international policy priorities through national policy on brownfield land and the PPG3 sequential approach and mixed uses to the structure plan context and finally the local plan strategy itself.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.17 **R2.2 Re-structure section 2 of chapter 2 to lead with a discussion of sustainable development principles leading through national and regional policy priorities to a discussion of the achievement of those priorities through the local plan strategy.**
- 2.18 **R2.3 Modify paragraph 2.2.5 by the deletion of the words “and Bampton” in line 11 (*reverses amendment no. 2*)**
- 2.19 **R2.4 Modify paragraph 2.7 by the inclusion of a reference to the priorities given in paragraph 31 of PPG3 in making new housing provision.**
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