

# Thames Valley planning news

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## Headline news

### Oxfordshire growth proposals featured in Autumn Budget

On 22 November, the Chancellor of the Exchequer delivered the 2017 Autumn Budget, which featured major announcements for Oxfordshire, which has agreed a housing deal with the Government.

Prior to the Budget, on 17 November, the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) had published its final report on 'Partnering for prosperity: a new deal for the Cambridge – Milton Keynes – Oxford Arc'. The Budget welcomed many of the NIC's recommendations and underlined overall Government support through an 'ambitious integrated programme of infrastructure, housing, business investment and development' for the Cambridge – Milton Keynes – Oxford corridor ('the corridor').

Strategic planning is considered important: the NIC report recommends 'reconstituting the Oxfordshire Growth Board [comprised of Oxfordshire councils, the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and other partners] as a planning joint committee by April 2018, ensuring it is empowered to take decisions on the development, adoption and delivery of a strategic statutory spatial plan'. And the Budget confirms that 'the Government has agreed with Oxfordshire that it will work toward the adoption of a new joint statutory plan (JSP)'.

The Government will also encourage authorities in the corridor to explore the introduction of a Strategic Infrastructure Tariff (a new tariff announced in the Budget, see below) in addition to the community infrastructure levy (CIL).

The Government's housing deal with Oxfordshire is mentioned in the Budget in the context of the corridor (para 5.25); the Government also says it will consider the potential for 'significant new settlements' and the role development corporations could play in delivering them, using private finance.

In terms of infrastructure, the Government commits to completing the western section of East West Rail by 2024, which will 'allow' services between Oxford and Bedford, and Aylesbury and Milton Keynes. The Government aims for the Expressway between Oxford and Cambridge to be open by 2020.

Oxford City Council has provided further information on the housing deal or 'Outline Housing and Growth Agreement', which will secure £215 million towards building infrastructure, delivering new homes and increasing economic growth. The programme is to be overseen by the Oxfordshire Growth Board, with partners including the Homes and Communities Agency (Homes England) and Highways England.

The funding is allocated for the next five years, and will be used in part for building 100,000 new homes across the County by 2031. A Local Industrial Strategy will be prepared, and growth of the Science Vale and Didcot Enterprise Zones supported.

The deal includes £60 million for affordable housing and £150 million of funding for infrastructure improvements. Further funding will support the development of a Joint Strategic Spatial Plan.

## National news

### Other Budget announcements

Budget announcements badged as housing include proposals relating to developer contributions, a reaffirmation of the Government's commitment to the Green Belt, ►►

## QUOTE OF THE MONTH



Oxfordshire is getting its act together to meet the real challenges of economic growth and providing homes for the people of Oxfordshire, now and for future generations. Now we need to quickly provide government with a credible plan for housing growth to get the cash.

**Councillor Ian Hudspeth, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council, commenting on the Oxfordshire Growth Board's outline Housing and Growth Agreement with Government, 22 November 2017**

## THE LICHFIELDS PERSPECTIVE

The Oxfordshire Growth Board has demonstrated that strategic planning is possible in the absence of regional planning, if there is a pro-active approach between local authorities. The potential Joint Structure Plan and Strategic Infrastructure Tariff should strengthen this more, all-in-all representing huge changes to the planning system in Oxfordshire.

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and other measures which are potentially of wider interest.

- Retail and commercial property continues to be considered an untapped source of housing land. Policies supporting conversion or redevelopment - and the extension of permitted development rights for commercial buildings to include demolition and rebuild - are to be consulted on, as well as the following:
- 'strengthening policy to be clear that allocated land should be taken out of a plan if there is no prospect of a planning application being made';
- 'a policy expectation that local planning authorities permission land outside their local plan [other than Green Belt land], on the condition that a high proportion of the homes are offered for discounted sale for first-time buyers, or for affordable rent' – a policy which would seem to be at odds with the plan-led approach strongly advocated by Government;
- minimum densities for housing development in city centres and around transport hubs (not defined), with greater support for the use of compulsory purchase powers for site assembly; and
- measures intended to allow earlier starts on-site post-planning permission, to include: strengthening the Housing Delivery Test proposed in the *Housing White Paper*; expecting local authorities to bring forward 20% of their housing supply as small sites; and removing the exemptions from the types of planning condition that benefit from deemed discharge rules.

The following measures were committed to:

- CIL will not be replaced by the 'Local Infrastructure Tariff' proposed in the independent CIL review but a Strategic Infrastructure Tariff similar to Mayoral CIL in London will be introduced for use by Combined Authorities and planning joint committees. Details of

the proposed amendments to CIL that are to be consulted on are set out in this *Lichfields'* blog;

- five 'new' garden towns (one or more potentially being in the Oxford – Milton Keynes – Cambridge corridor);
  - support for 'more strategic and zonal planning approaches through housing deals in the South East', in addition to the housing deal negotiations elsewhere; and
  - use of the Government's purchasing power 'to drive adoption of modern methods of construction', with a 'presumption in favour of off-site construction by 2019 across suitable capital programmes, where it represents best value for money'.
- Lichfields' *Economic Outlook* provides further Budget analysis, including details of additional monies for various housing, planning, and infrastructure funds.

### Javid asks 15 councils to explain why no up to date local plan

In his wide-ranging house building speech made on 16 November, Communities Secretary Sajid Javid also put 15 authorities on notice that in the continuing absence of an up to date local plan – and no reasonable justification for that absence – he would be left with 'no choice but to start the formal process of intervention that we set out in the White Paper'.

On the same day, a written ministerial statement (WMS) was made in the House of Commons, confirming this course of action, and the Communities Secretary wrote to each of the 15 councils involved, including Runnymede, informing them directly of his intentions.

The councils now have an opportunity to respond by 31 January next year, citing any mitigating circumstances; the SoS will then make a final decision.

## Local news

### Reading Borough Council reduces unmet need

Reading Borough Council is preparing its new Local Plan. The Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan, approved for consultation at the Council's Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee meeting on 22 November 2017, contains a number of amendments following consultation on the previous version of the Plan earlier this year.

Included in the changes is an increase in the number of homes to be provided within Reading over the plan period, changing from 658 (as identified in the previous draft Plan) to 671 dwellings per annum, meaning the Council is closer to meeting the objectively assessed housing need of 699 dwellings per annum. This reduces the overall shortfall of housing need which needs to be accommodated outside Reading from 943 dwellings to 644 dwellings over the plan period.

Consultation on the draft Plan began on 30 November and ends on 26 January 2018. ■