

NNGO Meeting with Oxon Party Political Leaders in run up to County Council Elections, May 2017 - Briefing Note

In its letter to County Council election candidates, NNGO identified five key areas that need to be addressed:

1. **Realistic housing targets** - the right homes in the right places and at the right prices;
2. **A move away from the concept of Oxford/Oxfordshire as the most appropriate location for a growth hub;**
3. **Changes in the national planning system** to ensure local decision-making takes priority (not greedy developers) and the value of land allocated for development is captured for the public benefit;
4. **Return to a Plan-led system;** and
5. **Robust strategic planning for Oxfordshire as a whole** - including a county-wide Structure Plan, open to full public scrutiny and ongoing public engagement.

Below is a summary of some of the answers provided by the Leaders of the main political parties in Oxfordshire:

Conservative (Cllr Ian Hudspeth – Woodstock)

1. **Realistic housing targets** – No, Oxfordshire needs more houses not less (new OAN methodology may lead to higher targets for the county – not a bad thing), we need larger, more sustainable developments, in sustainable locations, with adequate infrastructure (Green Belt should not stand in the way) – ‘we need the right houses, in the right place with the right infrastructure’;
2. **A move away from the concept of Oxford/Oxfordshire as the most appropriate location for a growth hub** – No, ‘success generates success’, there is no constraint to growth, but provision of appropriate infrastructure is key to making growth successful;
3. **Changes in the national planning system** – Yes, ‘NNPF is failing’, it is ‘not as good as it should have been’ (personally committed to land value capture, but it is not a party policy);
4. **Return to a Plan-led system** – Yes, we need Local Plans in place to prevent developer-led system/Neighbourhood Plans are key to providing realistic levels of development, with community support (we need to protect smaller villages from ‘pepper pot’ development), and developers need to be pressurised to build out land with planning permission;
5. **Robust strategic planning for Oxfordshire as a whole** – Yes, ‘a structure plan for county is needed’, where planning for housing, infrastructure and health is joined-up.

NB: Ian Hudspeth expressed a desire to meet with coalition members again.

Labour (Cllr. Liz Brighouse – Churchill and Lye Valley)

1. **Realistic housing targets** – No, Oxford needs more houses not less, in particular, affordable housing for key workers and those on a low income, inc. council housing (less student housing in the city centre and better use of land, ie for houses not jobs), and in favour of urban extensions/building on the Green Belt;
2. **A move away from the concept of Oxford/Oxfordshire as the most appropriate location for a growth hub** – No, growth should be centred around Oxford, where there is the knowledge and expertise;
3. **Changes in the national planning system**– Yes, NPPF ‘needs to be renewed and changed’, and a land use plan is needed;
4. **Return to a Plan-led system** – Yes, including a greater say for local people (sees LEP as an ‘undemocratic and unelected’ body);
5. **Robust strategic planning for Oxfordshire as a whole** – Yes, impossible to plan effectively at the local, District level – a wider, county perspective needed/a joined-up approach (in favour of One Oxfordshire).

Liberal Democrat (Cllr Richard Webber – Sutton Courtenay and Marcham)

1. **Realistic housing targets** – Yes, SHMA is ‘undeliverable’, not enough builders or construction materials to meet targets - ‘wrong sort of houses, in too many places’, causing sprawl and coalescence (building will not bring prices down), high density housing is needed (eg taller buildings in Oxford to include luxury flats and starter homes) – a commitment to come out publicly against the SHMA after the General Election (provided new Lib Dem Cllrs in agreement);
2. **A move away from the concept of Oxford/Oxfordshire as the most appropriate location for a growth hub** – No, although we musn’t have ‘growth at all costs’ eg growth should be focused on scientific research, not warehousing;
3. **Changes in the national planning system** – Yes, ‘NNPF an unholy mess’, supportive of land value capture and compulsory land purchase, also concerned about air pollution, mentioning Marcham and its AQMA;
4. **Return to a Plan-led system** – Yes, accompanied by devolution of lower powers – Neighbourhood Plans play a crucial role in empowering local people;
5. **Robust strategic planning for Oxfordshire as a whole** – Yes, we need an ‘Oxfordshire wide vision’ - where planning for housing, environment, education and health is joined-up (supportive of Unitary Council).

NB: Richard Webber expressed a desire to have continued engagement with NNGO, and was keen for NNGO to hold a Seminar for new Lib Dem Cllrs on planning issues.

Green (Cllr David Williams – Iffley Fields and St Marys)

1. **Realistic housing targets** – Yes, rejects SHMA figures (and jobs target in SEP) – consider Oxfordshire Growth Board and LEP as ‘undemocratic’;
2. **A move away from the concept of Oxford/Oxfordshire as the most appropriate location for a growth hub** – Yes, regarding Oxford: the Party believes any

employment growth needs to take place in locations outside Oxford in other districts because employment land concentration has created unacceptable levels of commuting/air pollution/congestion and renders parts of our countryside communities into dormitory settlements. The party believes in a better spatial dispersal of employment in the County. However, it is unconvinced by the particular 'need' for employment growth in Oxfordshire in principle. Other areas in the West Midlands (eg Stoke on Trent) and in the valleys of south Wales - as examples - need employment growth in sustainable livelihoods both public and private sector;

3. **Changes in the national planning system** – Yes, the combination of its countryside and local planning policies (details at: www.policy.greenparty.org.uk) would strengthen landscape protections against development and force more use of brownfield sites and existing buildings for development;
4. **Return to a Plan-led system** – Yes, Local Plans used to have more authority within medium term planning by local authorities and rather than the NPPF, the party would favour returning to a system in which such Plans do help to direct development, bearing in mind the answer to Q3., but committed to land value capture (implicit in party's long standing commitment to land value taxation);
5. **Robust strategic planning for Oxfordshire as a whole** – Yes, opposes One Oxfordshire proposal which party believes would lead to less local control over planning decisions - this follows from the two previous answers. An overall planning system constrained by sustainability considerations and rigorously enforced protection of greenfield sites for biodiversity, food, horticulture, agriculture, forestry, recreation and greener tourism would be under a strategic imperative to focus development of a genuinely sustainable and desirable nature in the most rational and least damaging sites imaginable.

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