

Response to the West Oxfordshire District Council's Consultation on its Core Strategy Interim Position for its local Development Framework by the Carterton Fast Forward Partnership

Introduction

The Carterton Fast Forward Partnership was originally set up in 2002 by Carterton Town Council. Between 2003 and 2006, funded by the Countryside Commission, Carterton Town Council and West Oxfordshire District Council, the partnership undertook a Market Town Healthcheck, developed an Action Plan and delivered a range of projects. Since 2006, the work of the partnership has been primarily funded by Carterton Town Council, and has focused on a few major projects. However the Project Officer has continued to involve both key partners and the wider community, through community meetings and informal contacts.

She is currently undertaking a review of the work of the partnership, and it is expected that this will result in proposals for priorities for future projects and actions. The need to be aware of and contribute to the formation of strategies and policy documents of key partner organisations such as the district council is well understood. In particular it is recognised that the district council's Core Strategy will play a decisive role in shaping Carterton's future development.

The Core Strategy

We note that your work is still in progress on the scale of development of MOD housing in Carterton. We would emphasise the need to keep abreast with MOD thinking, as it appears that the downturn in the economy has led to the original proposals being reconsidered. There is considerable concern about the future of the remaining sub-standard MOD housing scheduled to be demolished. It is crucial that there is close liaison between those making decisions about the future of defence housing and those developing the strategy for the district's future development.

Shaping the Future in West Oxfordshire: Our Vision

We do not accept your vision that Carterton will 'consolidate its role' as opposed to 'strengthen' as in the case of Witney and Chipping Norton. This implies that Carterton is not expected to grow and develop. We feel that in order for Carterton to remain part of a '*network of safe, inclusive, vibrant and prosperous market towns*' like Witney and Chipping Norton, it will need to strengthen its position and role.

The Spatial Strategy

We do not disagree with your three main objectives, but as will become apparent, there is a significant disagreement with your proposals as to how this can be achieved. You refer to the earlier Consultation in 2008 on Issues and Options. We note that the most popular first and second choices for the distribution of further growth are for Witney, Carterton and Chipping Norton. In addition the views of the first two towns in the district appear to have been ignored. Carterton stated it wished to see increased growth and population and Witney chose the option of dispersed development as it believed 'it

was in danger of becoming over developed, spoiling its historical character’ also expressing concern about flood risk. There appears to be little weight given to the views expressed in this consultation, as the section on *‘realistic and deliverable options for the future*’ moves almost immediately to the statement ‘The main option for making a sizeable contribution to the SE Plan strategy is at Witney through expansion of its existing built-up limits’. (3.7)

Section 3.10 dealing briefly with Carterton states that *‘the potential for major expansion is very constrained.’* While development is clearly currently constrained to the south by RAF Brize Norton, and we accept there is a need to prevent coalescence with neighbouring villages to the east and west, we do not believe that this rules out significant future development, particularly to the north and east, with a smaller amount of especially sensitively designed development also possible to the west. We are surprised, given these points and the strong views expressed by the Town Council that the possible sites for development in and around Carterton, have not been subject to the same detailed scrutiny as those in Witney. Only when this has been undertaken, will there be robust evidence from which proper judgments can be made about the main focus of future development.

Meeting the specific housing needs of our communities

We support the Core Strategy Objective for this section. We have identified that Carterton has a particular need for larger, more expensive properties, and it is possible that a small, well designed, low density housing scheme to the south west could be accommodated. Carterton also needs more affordable housing, and we would encourage the district council to operate as low a threshold as is financially sustainable, in requiring developer contributions to meet this need.

Sustainable communities with access to services and facilities

We agree with the seven objectives for this section, but disagree about how they could be achieved.

We would stress the importance of working closely with the local community when negotiating the provision of developer contributions to the infrastructure costs and also highlight the need for good liaison between the district and county councils in this area of their work. (5.1)

While we appreciate that the county council has not requested safeguarding of land which could provide access to the A40 to the west from Carterton, we believe that this is important, even if it is not currently a planned scheme. The changes at RAF Lyneham, with the likely increase of traffic to RAF Brize Norton, support this view. (5.6) We have been told that such a scheme will require a large amount of funding, but we have not seen any costings and believe it should be a priority to undertake a proper survey (work recently undertaken on the Curbridge Downs road could contribute to this).

We have examined the settlement sustainability weighting, when considering the hierarchy of the district’s main towns and future development. We note that the two measures which separate Carterton from Witney are the existence of a fire station and access to major roads. You will be aware that the location of fire stations is based on historic, rather than operational reasons, and that Carterton has long been arguing that the community should contain a fire station. In fact the Town Council has offered a suitable site and it is understood that the County Council will be appraising a number of

sites in the town later in the year. There is good access to the A40 to the east, and again it is a key priority for the town to create a four way junction to allow access to the west.

It is also the case that Carterton has spare capacity in a number of key service areas, such as schools. It would appear more sustainable to place new development where use could be made of existing services, which would also support their longer term viability. Carterton's Community College, in particular, has been recognized for its excellence in Engineering, and we understand that discussions are taking place about the provision of continuing education for the 16 + age range.

While we support the emerging '*town centre first approach*' we would argue that with more development, Carterton's town centre would be better placed to expand. As has already been noted, Carterton offers a good range of services and convenient, normally congestion free shopping, but would clearly benefit from a wider range of retail outlets. We believe that it is important that the policy in the Local Plan to protect the town centre, particularly from food retail developments on the edge or out of town, should be retained.

Carterton has seen additional employment opportunities through the development of a new business park, but is anxious not to increase its role as a commuter town. There is also a need for more commercial and industrial provision at the higher end of the skills market. Carterton scores significantly lower than the county and regional averages in the more senior levels of occupation, which is also reflected in the lower than average qualifications for the population at the higher levels (4/5) The presence of RAF Brize Norton provides a unique opportunity to host specialist enterprises associated with the aeronautical industry – Air Tanker being a good example. We believe we should be capitalizing on a highly skilled labour force coming out of the RAF, often choosing to settle in the town and looking for employment and business opportunities. This also indicates a need for start –up units for small developing businesses.

Carterton has long expected phase 2 of its leisure centre to be developed, and this is seen as a priority to be linked to future development (5.17)

Conclusion

Carterton is a modern town within the largely traditional Cotswold setting of the district. It is unusual, in that it has taken a pro-active approach, in general welcoming appropriate new development. We do not feel that the policies, as currently proposed in the Core Strategy Interim Position Statement, reflect the potential contribution that the town can make in shaping the future of the district.