

Agenda Item IMD13

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION REFERENCE IMD: 2016/13

TITLE	WBC response to Wycombe District Council on their Draft Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Site Assessment Methodology
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	John Kaiser, Executive Member for Planning and Highways
DATE AND TIME	14 March 2016, 11.40am
WARD	Non-specific
DIRECTOR	Heather Thwaites, Director of Environment
REPORT TO BE PUBLISHED ON	4 March 2016
VENUE	Room SF2, Council Offices, Shute End

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To ensure that Wycombe District Council's Draft Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Site Assessment Methodology has minimal negative impacts upon Wokingham Borough and that any positive benefits are maximised.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive Member for Planning and Highways

- 1) approves the comments outlined in this report; and
- 2) approves that they be submitted as a formal response to the consultation from Wycombe District Council on their Draft Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Site Assessment Methodology.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report details the proposed response of Wokingham Borough Council to Wycombe District Council on their Draft Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Site Assessment Methodology.

The content of this report includes the following:

- Considering the impact of Wycombe District Council's Draft Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Site Assessment Methodology on Wokingham Borough Council.

Background

The evidence underpinning the housing requirement within a local plan must be based upon full objectively assessed need (OAN) as stated in paragraph 159 of the National Planning Policy Framework. Paragraph 47 of the NPPF states that the local plan must meet the full OAN in the housing market area. The OAN is assessed at the functional housing market area.

In March 2015, Opinion Research Services Ltd (ORS) completed a Housing Market Area (HMA) and Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA) assessment on behalf of the Buckinghamshire local planning authorities. The report concluded that the “best fit” for the Central Buckinghamshire housing market area comprises Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern and Wycombe districts. The report also concluded that South Bucks should be within a Slough and Reading HMA consisting of the local authority areas of South Bucks, Reading, Wokingham, Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire, Slough and RBWM.

In October 2015, the main findings of the Berkshire (including South Bucks) Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) were made publicly available in the form of a power point presentation. The Berkshire (including South Bucks) Strategic Housing Market Area (SHMA) identifies two Housing Market Areas (HMAs), which are:

- the Western Berkshire HMA (consisting of Wokingham, Reading, Bracknell Forest and West Berkshire) and
- the Eastern Berkshire and South Bucks HMA (consisting of Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead and South Bucks).

In October 2015, ORS published a report considering the impact of Chiltern and South Bucks producing a Joint Local Plan. The report concludes that when taking both Chiltern and South Bucks as a local plan area into consideration, the “best fit” functional housing market area for the combined authorities is the Central Buckinghamshire HMA. Therefore the Central Buckinghamshire HMA would comprise of Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, Wycombe and South Bucks.

Wokingham Borough Council has recently advised the relevant local planning authorities that it is unable to support the conclusion that the Chiltern and South Bucks local plan area is within the Central Buckinghamshire Housing Market Area. The Council is seeking clarification regarding the calculation of the Objectively Assessed Need within the Buckinghamshire Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment. The Council is also seeking further information on Chiltern and South Bucks ability to meet its Objectively Assessed Need.

Wycombe District Council’s Local Plan specifies an OAN of 15,000 dwellings for the Plan period of 2013 to 2033. Wycombe DC published its Draft Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) in November 2015, which identifies capacity for approximately 9,100 new dwellings, therefore showing a significant shortfall in supply.

It is with this information in mind that Wokingham Borough Council must consider Wycombe District Council’s consultation.

Analysis of issues

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are designated by the Government for

the purpose of ensuring that the special qualities of the finest landscapes are conserved and enhanced. In policy terms they have the same planning status as National Parks.

The NPPF identifies that development should be restricted within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (footnote 9 to paragraph 14). AONBs are identified as protected areas, where the presumption in favour of sustainable development (set out in paragraph 14) does not apply. Paragraph 115 of the NPPF states that great weight should be given to conserving the landscape and natural beauty in designated AONBs, which should have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.

Paragraph 116 of the NPPF states that planning permission should be refused for major development within an AONB: *'except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated that they are in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include as assessment of:*

- *the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;*
- *the cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*
- *any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated'.*

The NPPF provides no definition of what constitutes 'major' development in the context of the AONB. Major development is therefore a matter of judgement, when considering the individual circumstances of a specific site.

Assessment of AONB

Wycombe District Council is proposing to carry out an assessment of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) within their administrative boundaries to determine whether any of it has development potential. In the consultation document, Wycombe District Council states: *'It is important that all options for development are considered as where development needs cannot be met within the district, they will need to be elsewhere through the duty to cooperate'.*

Wycombe District Council state: *'It is considered that the Local Plan should not be allocating major development in the AONB as the exceptional circumstances in paragraph 116 are not justified. The need for development must be considered within the wider housing market area (consisting of Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe districts). As such where a site is considered to be 'major' this will not be found suitable in the assessment. 'Major' development may vary from site to site depending on the setting and context'.*

Wokingham Borough Council seeks clarification about what is meant by 'major'. WBC considers that the reference in paragraph 116 of the NPPF relates to development management decisions rather than the Local Plan making process. Therefore, Wokingham BC considers that the review should consider all of the AONB and then consider whether any of this land is suitable for development.

Wokingham Borough Council considers that Wycombe should review whether there is any potential for development within the AONB, including major development, in order to meet their housing needs rather than pre-empting any such results of a review. Wokingham Borough Council would ask that the methodology is revised to ensure that an impartial assessment of the AONB is undertaken.

Conclusions

The Council requests that Wycombe District Council considers major development within their AONB, in order to attempt to accommodate their housing requirement within the Housing Market Area (HMA), as any unmet need will otherwise have to be considered by others outside of the HMA. The Council requests that Wycombe District Council continues to consult with Wokingham Borough Council about this matter, through the Duty to Cooperate.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

N/A

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including property and priorities?)

N/A

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Director – Finance and Resources	No comment
Monitoring Officer	No comment
Leader of the Council	I support the recommendations

List of Background Papers

Draft Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Site Assessment Methodology (January 2016)

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