

The Bourtons Parish Council
Great & Little Bourton, Banbury, Oxfordshire

Cherwell District Council
Planning Department
Bodicote House
Banbury

Sent by email : November 10th, 2021

Dear Sirs,

Re : Cherwell Local Plan Review – Community Involvement Paper 2
Developing our Options Consultation Paper

Please find below our response to this consultation paper.

1. We welcome the publication of Paper 2, which provides a clear, ample and helpful narrative about the Council's perceived options for housing development in the Bourtons. This is particularly commendable as we know from our own experience how hard-pressed the planning department must be.
2. The exercise is further complicated by the fact that it must, in its final form, conform to the overall planning strategy adopted by Oxfordshire County Council which will include housing targets delegated to Cherwell for the county as a whole. We understand CDC will not know or be able to publish these targets until 2nd quarter 2022, which makes the CDC timetable challenging with a 'final' CDC plan expected in June 2022 for public comment, with a vote at council anticipated during Q4 2022 and the plan then finalised and published early in 2023.
3. A parish council from such a small parish as the Bourtons is even more resource-poor than CDC Planning, with very little money and one part-time clerk. This enormous document was published in September 2021 and received on the 28th September with a deadline for responses of November 10th. From the schedule outlined, it sounds like there may be an equally narrow window for responses to the final proposals next summer.
4. The call for sites has seen a torrent of housing proposals, mostly orchestrated by the major surveying firms in the district who stand to profit handsomely from such development. The constraints on responses from local council tax-payers contrast with the developer responses. More on these submissions below.
5. As well as dealing with the inundation of developer proposals, CDC is endeavouring to construct a coherent plan at a time when central government itself is in the process of moving the goalposts.
6. Considerable concern was expressed when the previous Secretary of State with responsibility for housing, Robert Jenrick, confirmed a top-down, target-driven approach, which would probably have had the effect of increasing the pace of house-building in Oxfordshire. However, Jenrick's replacement, Michael Gove, is seemingly sharply changing course. It would

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appear that the government White Paper, 'Planning for the Future' published in August, is nothing more than work in progress as reported very recently in the national press: see Appendix I.

7. So it seems entirely possible that housing needs for Oxfordshire, as mandated by central government, will not increase – although this may not become clear until next year when CDC's plan is due to be finalised.
8. We note also that the figures shown on page 18 of the options document show that the planned figures for 2011 – 30 determined a target of 3031 homes and by 2021, 2,541 had been delivered. Therefore in 50% of the plan term, 87% of the target number were delivered with only 13% still required with 50% of the Plan term left to run. We appreciate of course that 'delivered' may include homes where planning permission has been granted but not actually built.
9. With that preamble, CDC has asked for responses to the many thoughtful and thought-provoking questions posed in its September publication. Below are the Bourtons' provisional responses to those questions that we believe most directly impact our residents. These concern section 6.2, on Banbury, our local town; and section 6.6, on Rural Areas.

On Banbury, you ask:

10. Option 18: where in the surroundings might development be directed?
11. Bourtons **rejects** 'sites to the north of the town' – that's us.
12. We also **reject** 'sites to the east of the town'. The Cherwell valley cannot sustain further damage to its natural beauty from development. Furthermore, we are already seeing traffic from the A361 using Cropredy and Great Bourton as a preferred route into Banbury and any further development will only serve to increase this traffic.
13. Option 19: you ask '*should development in Banbury be limited to protect its landscape setting and maintain separation between the town and surrounding villages*'? Bourtons emphatically says yes, it should be so limited. We were particularly concerned to note the possibility raised in the document that Little Bourton, Hanwell and others – might become absorbed into Banbury: 'coalescence' is the word used. We trust CDC would not countenance such a wanton destruction of the villages in your care.
14. Option 21. You ask about the very substantial Canalside development area. We believe this area can and should provide much of the town's new housing needs for the foreseeable future. We further note that such development carries the additional benefit of allowing residents to access all the town centre's facilities without the need for a car – something that is sadly not true of our parish. For this reason among others, we support the progressive repurposing of brownfield sites within the town. Some of the buildings, with all their embedded carbon, may be readily repurposed; as may the many now redundant retail premises in the centre. Any development in the time period under consideration must embrace the need to reduce car use, in a town that is already choked with traffic.

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15. Option 30: You ask whether development should be limited in the villages to that required to meet local needs or opened up to development. We believe emphatically that development must be limited to preserve the character of rural Cherwell.
16. Option 31: You ask whether CDC should work with us to allocate specific sites to meet identified housing needs or provide a parish level figure. We support the latter approach: giving the parish itself determination of what development is appropriate.
17. Option 32: You ask about developing a rural settlement hierarchy, and how the availability of services, and public transport, might be weighted in such a hierarchy. For villages such as Great and Little Bourton these are huge questions, which require us to consult residents, and there is no time to do so prior to your November 10th deadline. We propose to do this and submit to CDC a vision statement for our villages, in time for the next iteration of CDC's plan. In the meantime, we note that the existing hierarchy of villages, and the resultant protections from untrammelled development of 'Category B' villages such as the Bourtons, is a very solid basis for decision-making, and the bias should be to preserve it.
18. This leads us to the 'Question' following Option 32: *'Do you think we should define settlement boundaries, beyond which development would not normally be permitted?'* To which the answer is emphatically yes. The extant approach is simple, clear, and respectful of the villages' character and history.
19. Finally on neighbourhood planning, you ask *'How could we best support Neighbourhood Planning through the Local Plan in those communities that wish to prepare a plan?'* We commented earlier about the lack of resources available to a small council like the Bourtons, and the profound and inequitable asymmetry between those resources, and the time and money that land-owners, developers and their agents are prepared to risk on potentially lucrative development proposals. Any help would be welcome, and in that respect, the very short timescales for response to these consultations is a hindrance not a help – while we acknowledge the external pressures conditioning CDC's timetable.
20. In the briefing provided to councils by CDC's Planning Consultations Manager, it was noted that responses to individual development site submissions were not required or expected at this stage in the process, and that CDC would be carrying out its own filtering, prior to the next stage of development of its Plan. We are grateful for the guidance, and for the implicit promise of a **planning standstill** while CDC composes its response to the submissions. To help that process, below are our initial and in principle responses to the multiple submissions impacting our two villages.
21. Over the last 5 decades, the Bourtons have recognised and approved, where and when housing development is appropriate and necessary to sustain what few amenities we have here, namely the church, the village hall and two public houses.
22. In the 1960's, in Great Bourton, 12 houses were built in Valley View, providing a mixed stock of family houses and bungalows. Ten bungalows for older and disabled residents were also developed in South View. In Little Bourton two developments, Uplands Rise and Buzzards Close provided 22 bungalows where the demographics show that more than 50% of its residents are retired or semi-retired.

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23. In the 1970s, 20 houses suitable for families were developed in Church Close and Manor Close in Great Bourton.
24. Throughout the 1980s and 90s a significant number of infill development was approved and in 2007, we approved the development of 15 houses in Little Bourton, 6 of which were affordable housing. This decision was based on the need to balance the demographic to include more young families.
25. So in the past, The Bourtons have approved modest developments which we believed supported the rural environment to which our residents agreed and which would add to the two communities in a positive way and did not breach the extension of our village boundaries to any degree.
26. Recognising the local need for further housing and a need to provide further affordable housing opportunities, in 2018 we approved a development of 33 houses of mixed stock and affordable housing in Garners Field, which was increased to 43 houses by the planning officer under the need for 'economic use of development land'. The Parish Council had no route to objection to this increase. Furthermore, we were aware that the South View field had already been identified for a possible development site for 80 houses in the CDC housing plan and it was understood that the agreement to the Garners Field site would eliminate the South View field as a potential housing development site.
27. Currently there are 7 houses under construction in Great Bourton: although 5 of which were originally presented as bungalows which might have met the need for such housing stock in the parish where residents would like to downsize but stay in the parish. This application was called in to be determined by the planning committee and such was the applicants' submission, one district councillor commented 'Yes, this is what we need as many residents are now elderly and now need a bungalow'. However the development was subsequently amended to what now appears to be high-end market housing.
28. Permission has also been granted for a further 3 houses in Great Bourton, which will also serve high end purchasers.
29. Our parish has recently seen something akin to a feeding frenzy. Remarkably, such is the enthusiasm to exploit the parish, that one agricultural land parcel has been subject to two separate submissions, each claiming a different owner for the land.
30. This is typical of the cavalier approach to reality that these submissions betray: these sites on greenfield land are, we are told, 'adjacent' to an 'urban' site; the 'excellent linkages' to Banbury is one way of describing an inadequate bus service; the village has 'extensive services and facilities' – which is one way of describing a village with no shop, no school, no doctor's surgery, and no employers. We could go on, but it is surely unnecessary to do so: we trust CDC, with its own local knowledge, to see through these shameless and empty claims. What makes these submissions worse, is that they are from surveyors and land-owners who actually (mostly) know the area, so ought to know how inaccurate their characterisations are. (Honourable exception is the submission from a consultant based in Gwynedd; whose proposal states that the road is to the west of the land concerned when it is in fact – as indeed his own attached map demonstrates - to the east).

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31. This number of applications is not however surprising, given the huge profits to be made from shifting land from agriculture use to housing development.
32. We are surprised to see that Land Parcel 2783 has been included on the list since if this site was developed it would risk the coalescence of the villages of Bourton and Cropredy, contrary to Cherwell's planning policy.
33. We urge CDC to perpetuate the categorisation of our villages which has prevailed hitherto and prevent development outside the existing village boundaries. These small villages have adorned the Cherwell landscape for many hundreds of years and are intrinsic to the area's character. To expand them by building – as the current crop of submissions in aggregate would generate – several hundred more houses, (nearly as many again as our parish current stock) would be to defile and denature the villages. Once the character of a rural parish has gone, through inappropriate and excessive development, it has gone for ever. It would be an act of vandalism that should not be contemplated by CDC.

As previously mentioned, we intend to construct a Vision Statement for the Bourtons Parish which we anticipate will contain some features one would normally see in a Neighbourhood Plan. We look forward to receiving the housing targets delegated to Cherwell for the county as a whole and a deadline date for submitting our comments before the next stage of CDCs decision making. We would also appreciate notification of any deadline changes which may result from revised government legislation in order to amend our strategy accordingly.

Steve Bowen

Clerk to the Council
for and on behalf of
The Bourtons Parish Council

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APPENDIX I

October 2021 Press reports

Two central proposals in the reforms, announced under his predecessor Robert Jenrick, are expected to be largely abandoned.

In particular, the “zonal” approach, which would have seen local people unable to reject housing in areas designated for development, will be dropped. “That’s gone,” said one cabinet minister.

Mandatory housebuilding targets, which caused widespread alarm among southern Tories, are also expected to be overhauled.

Gove, who is only a few weeks into the job, suggested he wanted to give the reforms a different focus. At a fringe event [at the Conservative Party Conference] on Monday, Gove said he had been struck by research that suggested the disparity between the lifetime costs of rents and of a mortgage was actually higher in Yorkshire and the north east, a hint at how he plans to reprioritise.

“Actually it shows that if you really, really want to help those who are currently in rented accommodation and want to own their own homes, then the focus shouldn’t necessarily be geographically where it’s been before,” he said.

The rejigged proposals are also likely to see communities given more of a share in the financial benefits of granting local developments, and tougher constraints put on developers to improve the local environment.

[The Guardian, October 6th, 2021.]