

Bletchingdon Parish Council

Response to Cherwell Local Plan Review: Community Involvement Paper 2

Bletchingdon Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Local Plan Review. We will focus our response on the matters which affect the rural parts of Cherwell, the potential planning implications of the Local Plan, and the priority matters for our Parish.

Our vision for Bletchingdon is for our parish to be safe, attractive and well maintained; and for our parish and the rural community to be resilient and sustainable. We support the 3 themes and the draft vision for Cherwell described within the Local Plan Review

Our response will now focus on the Local Plan priorities for our parish.

1) Sustainability

We support the overarching intentions in the Oxfordshire Plan and the draft Cherwell plan to deliver sustainable communities within acceptable levels. The inclusion of a site in Bletchingdon listed for development possibilities in the future is providing an additional 4.58 hectares of development which we feel is as much as should be accommodated, especially as we are in a green belt area. Whatever new development does proceed in the future, we would want due consideration given to the local traffic infrastructure to ensure that we can sustain the additional traffic that housing on new sites would bring and ensure that we can keep our pedestrians safe.

Bletchingdon has accommodated a recent new development at Duchy Fields, increasing the size of the village by 20%. Whilst the new Bletchingdon residents at Duchy Field are welcomed to our community, the additional dwellings have increased traffic volume and the poorly designed access to the development from Station Road has created a danger spot. Therefore, in response to the question in the Local Plan Review regarding Traffic Management Policies, we urge Cherwell District Council to develop a specific policy to assess the traffic impact of new developments in rural communities. It should be mandatory that this assessment is undertaken and published.

2) Safe roads, walkways, cycle paths and public spaces

This is a priority for Bletchingdon Parish. The B4027 runs through the parish, this is a main Oxfordshire route providing access to the A34 with high traffic volumes. Bletchingdon village primary school, village hall, and Co-op are on the North side of the B4027 with much of the housing on the South side of the B4027. There is significant footfall across this road, including school children, and frequent passage by HGVs – for which this route is highly unsuitable due to the proximity of housing and a narrowing of the road at the Eastern point.

Bletchingdon Parish Council remains very concerned about traffic management along this busy route. We have met with officials on several occasions and are in regular dialogue with the County Council and our local Councillors. We are concerned that insufficient consideration is given to the implications of new developments on existing traffic routes in rural areas at the planning stages. Traffic management and calming measures for villages where new development is taking place should be considered at early planning stages, and funded by developers. We believe that the traffic implications of Bletchingdon's recent development were foreseeable and mitigations should have been planned and funded as part of the development.

3) Connectivity and transport

Bletchingdon is currently served by the 250 bus route, running through the village from Bicester to Oxford. This service is well used by local residents, pre-pandemic the peak time buses were often full. We understand that the long term sustainability of this route is in jeopardy and are concerned that without this route Bletchingdon Parish will be inaccessible except by private car. This is unacceptable and contrary the environmental and sustainable aspects of the Cherwell Local Plan Vision.

For Bletchingdon Parish residents, access to our neighbouring villages is only possible by private car. This is particularly challenging for accessing medical care, we do not have a GP practice in the village and many residents travel by car to Islip for medical and pharmacy services. It is vital that transport strategies consider not just access to main urban areas but also access between villages. This is also key to developing the rural economy; it is only possible to support businesses in villages if it is possible to access them.