Woodstock Community and Infrastructure Delivery Plan

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

v14.3.19

* **How can we ensure that the commitments agreed by Blenheim (or other developers) will be upheld?**

Blenheim Estate isn’t going anywhere, has a long-term vision for Woodstock set out in its business plan and is committed to sustainable social, environment and economic development in the town. The plan asks the community to tell Blenheim how their housing developments could contribute to improvements. They could have worked up planning applications without going through this consultation exercise. Therefore, why would they do so to simply ignore it, with all the risks of local annoyance that would bring and the negative implications for the Blenheim ‘brand’?

* **Will we get everything we ask for?**

Some projects that emerge from the community conversation may be achievable through what’s called the Section 106 process. This process leads to an agreement whereby a developer will agree to pay for certain things to make a proposal acceptable in planning terms. Things like new community buildings and schools can be included in Section 106 agreements.

Another way to achieve a project is to directly design it into new developments. The specific routes for foot and cycle paths, for example. Some projects may need a different approach, more long term.

We will likely begin to get a sense quite early on of emerging priorities. As these emerge, CFO will seek discussions with the main organisations and agencies who would have to be involved to take these projects forward. These might include, for example, WODC, the County Council, and The Clinical Commissioning Group. It is important to investigate practicalities and do-ability from an early stage in order to be realistic about what can be achieved.

Because it is important to say that the sky is not quite the limit. It is not reasonable to expect all projects to be achieved via forthcoming development.

* **Will we encourage further development through this process?**

Three development sites are already allocated in the WODC Local Plan. Blenheim will be bringing forward specific planning applications on these sites.

Therefore, these developments will happen (Woodstock East has already started) and would have happened without the Woodstock Community and Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

The Plan is an opportunity to shape the detail of planning applications and developer contributions on these allocated sites, and potentially to ‘tweak’ already agreed contributions on the Woodstock East site.

* **Can you explain what is happening with the Cherwell DC site?**

This site at South-East Woodstock (adjacent to Woodstock East) is an allocated site in the draft *Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 2011-2031 Partial review: Meeting Oxford’s Need*.

This Plan is currently being examined with a decision expected c. July. Development is opposed by Woodstock Town Council. Until we get the examiner’s report, we cannot be certain that this development will happen.

* **Will there be a co-ordinated development strategy?**

That is a definite aspiration of the plan. The big development sites are all owned by Blenheim Estate, presenting a unique opportunity with a single landowner, with an ongoing interest in the town, to implement holistic, joined-up infrastructure improvements in the town.

The first step, of course, is finding out what people want.

* **Will there be houses allocated to key workers?**

In the Section 106 agreement with West Oxfordshire DC on the Woodstock East site, it is stated that the council may approve an affordable housing scheme which provides for ‘variations to the Local Connections Requirement’. This opens the door to key worker allocation (which is already happening on a Blenheim development in Long Hanborough).

* **Can Blenheim ensure housing is affordable?**

When people talk about affordable housing they often mean cheaper housing. So being able to buy a 2-bed semi for £100k instead of £300k. However, the price of homes is to a large extent driven by market forces and developer expectations of a certain financial return (profit).

However, there is an expectation on the allocated Woodstock sites that 50% of homes will be for affordable housing.

In this context, affordable has a specific definition as set out in the government’s National Planning Policy Framework. It means housing for sale or rent, for those whose needs are not met by the open housing market. It includes:

* Affordable housing for rent: the rent is set in accordance with the Government’s policy for Social Rent or Affordable Rent (or is at least 20% below local market rents) and the landlord is a registered provider. A Registered Provider is more commonly known as a housing association. *NOTE: West Oxfordshire DC has agreed that delivery of affordable housing could be made by a provider which is not a RP. This could be Blenheim Estate.*
  + Affordable rented properties are let at a rate that is no more than 80% of local rents.
  + Rental costs for social rented properties are based on relative property values compared to the national average, and on relative local earnings compared to the national average.
* Shared Ownership: shared ownership properties are usually offered for sale by housing associations. You buy a share of a property and pay rent to the housing association for the remainder. Monthly outgoings will include repayments on any mortgage you have taken out, plus rent on the part of the property retained by the housing association.
* Starter Homes: the Starter Home scheme is a new government plan, where 200,000 new build homes will be available to first-time buyers under 40 years old with at least 20% off the market price.