



Gladman Developments Ltd

Vale of White Horse Local Plan Part 1 Examination

Stage 2 Hearings

Matter 6: Proposed Housing Sites in the North Wessex Downs AONB

6.1 Having regard to the exceptional circumstances and public interest tests set out in Para 116 of the NPPF, are the Strategic Housing Allocations (sites 12 and 13) proposed in the AONB soundly based? In particular:

(a) What is the need for the housing development, including in terms of national considerations?

1. AONBs were originally established under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, though the legislation was reformulated in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Section 85 of the Act contains a general duty on all relevant authorities to 'have regard to the purpose of conserving or enhancing the natural beauty' of AONBs when coming to any decisions or carrying out activities relating to or affecting land within these areas.
2. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is the principal document setting out the Government's national policies on land use planning, and contains policies specific to protected landscapes (including AONBs) at paragraphs 115 and 116. These make a distinction between major developments and other proposals. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) helps provide further clarity on policies set out in the NPPF.
3. NPPF para 115 states that "great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty". Furthermore, paragraph 116 states that:

“Planning permission should be refused for major developments in these designated areas except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an 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.”

4. Core Planning Principle within Paragraph 17 of the NPPF also states that: “Allocations of Land for Development should prefer land of lesser environmental value, where consistent with other policies in this framework.”
5. Gladman considers that, having regard to national planning policy, it is clear that housing allocations in the AONB should only be made exceptionally and when absolutely necessary. In the case of the South East Vale sub area, it is evident that there are alternative sites in sustainable locations outside the AONB which can deliver housing in a sustainable and sound manner.

(c) Is there scope for providing for the housing development outside of the AONB?

6. Gladman agrees with the objective of endeavouring to locate homes and jobs in reasonably close proximity which will assist in reducing the need to travel by car. The overall objective therefore of providing significant development in the Science Vale is therefore supported. Gladman has an interest in land to the north east of Harwell a settlement which is close to the geographic centre of this area and therefore in our view suitable for further expansion. In particular the area is not one within the AONB.
7. The site which is identified in Figure 1 below, is located to the north of Didcot Road and extends to approximately 9.3 hectares and has the capacity to accommodate around 60 dwellings. It is currently in agricultural use.
8. Harwell itself has a number of services and facilities which are within easy walking and cycling distance of the site, including: Harwell Primary School, local newsagents, butchers, village hall, pub, playing fields and playground, and church. To the south of Harwell is Harwell Science and Innovation campus, a leading science, innovation, technology and business campus, which provides employment opportunities.

9. Harwell is a settlement with good public transport links and the site is accessible by a variety of modes of transport. The nearest bus stop is located on the site boundary, along Didcot Road. These link the site to Didcot and Didcot station, Oxford and Harwell Campus at very regular intervals from early morning to early evening Monday to Sunday. The nearest railway station is located at Didcot Parkway c.4.3km to the north east of the site. The station is well connected and services run frequently to Oxford, London and Reading.
10. The site itself is not the subject of any formal historic or environmental designations, and is not within Harwell's Conservation Area, which lies at approximately 10 metres to the south-east of the Site, nor are there any listed buildings within its boundaries.
11. The site is therefore in a sustainable location, is available, achievable and deliverable with no technical constraints and could contribute to the Council's 5 year housing land supply in the short term.

Figure 1. Land at Didcot Road Harwell.

