

INTRODUCTION

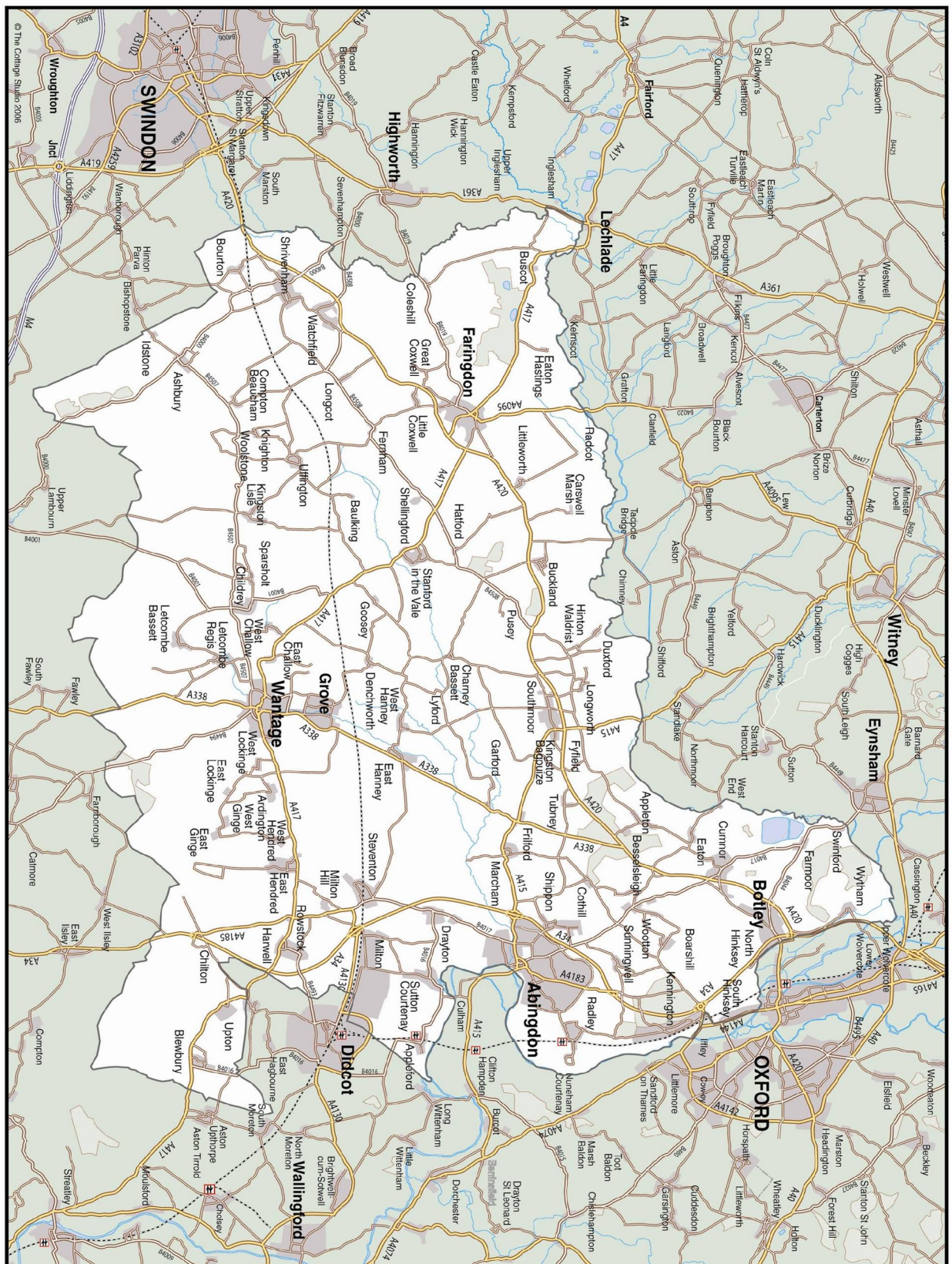
The Purpose of the Local Plan

- 1.1 The Vale of White Horse Local Plan is a statutory document prepared by the District Council to meet the requirements of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended by the Planning Compensation Act 1991. Until it is replaced by the Local Development Framework it, together with the Structure Plan and Minerals and Waste Local Plan prepared by the County Council, forms the Development Plan for the area, the essential framework for planning decisions. In accordance with legal requirements the Local Plan covers the whole administrative area of the Vale of White Horse District, some 580 square kilometres (224 square miles). The area of the District and its main settlements are shown on Map 1. The Vale is an attractive and prosperous district and, like many similar areas, experiences considerable pressure for development. The land use planning system seeks to control and direct this pressure in the community's interest. The Local Plan's role in this system is to co-ordinate development at the local level and to set out detailed policies and proposals for the use of land, which will guide day-to-day planning decisions. The local plan process brings local and detailed planning issues before the public and enables them to participate in the future planning of their area.
- 1.2 In setting out its detailed land use policies the Council's main challenge has been to balance the protection of the existing high quality environment and the heritage and natural resources of the district with its objective of meeting the social and economic needs of the people who live and work in or visit the area. The Local Plan is an important corporate document. It will help to guide the work of the Council's Executive and other committees, in particular the Development Control Committee. It has taken into account other strategies of the Council including those for housing, economic development, leisure, tourism and arts ensuring that the land use issues emerging out of these strategies are addressed.

The Local Plan Timescale

- 1.3 The Local Plan supersedes the plan adopted in 1999 which looked ahead to 2001. This Local Plan covers the period up to 2011, which corresponds with the timescale of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan to 2011. For some purposes, such as Green Belt policy and a number of transport, housing and employment issues, the policies have a longer perspective.

Map 1 - The Vale and Surrounding Areas



Key Stages of Consultation

- 1.4 An Issues Report was published and widely circulated in November 2000. The report presented the main issues and choices to be made in reviewing the Plan; in particular it put forward options for locating the new housing development proposed for the district in the Oxfordshire Structure Plan. The responses were taken into account in preparing the first deposit version of the Local Plan.
- 1.5 The First Deposit Draft Local Plan was published in November 2002. A period of six weeks was allowed for representations. The Council carefully considered all the representations and responded by making a number of changes to the plan. The changes were the subject of further consultation at the Second Deposit stage in the Local Plan process in June 2004. A public inquiry into all the objections to the local plan closed in September 2005. The report of the inquiry made a number of recommendations and further changes were made to the local plan based on these recommendations. The local plan, as amended, was adopted in July 2006.

Format of the Plan

- 1.6 The Local Plan consists of a proposals map and a written statement. These should be read together to achieve full understanding of the policies and proposals.
- 1.7 The proposals map identifies the proposals referred to in the written statement; it shows the sites put forward for development and those areas to which specific policies will apply. In order to show the detail in built-up areas and to ensure important policy boundaries are clear, large-scale insets have been produced. These cover Abingdon, Faringdon, Grove and Wantage, parts of Botley, settlements in the Green Belt and those parts of the western expansion of Didcot which will be built within the Vale. Although the existing settlement of Didcot is within South Oxfordshire District, future development, put forward in the Oxfordshire Structure Plan, will extend into the Vale. The extent of this development is shown on Local Plan Proposals Map.
- 1.8 The written statement sets out the policies and proposals, which are distinguished from the rest of the text by the use of capital letters, and explains the reasons for them. The written statement is in four parts. Part One outlines the background and general strategy which underpins the Plan. It includes the general development control policies that will apply to most forms of new development. Parts Two to Four include chapters and policies which deal with environmental, social and economic issues respectively.

Using the Local Plan

- 1.9 Depending on the type of development proposed, many or only a few of the policies in the Local Plan will be relevant. Development proposals will be assessed against all relevant policies. Consequently the Plan needs to be read as a whole.

Just because a proposal accords with one policy does not mean it will be given permission. There are inevitable conflicts between policies and judgements will need to be made as to whether the overall objective of the Local Plan would be harmed by a particular development proposal.

- 1.10 The Local Plan cannot provide a policy for every eventuality; it would become far too long. Development proposals which are not addressed by a specific policy will be judged against the Plan's objectives and goals as well as against relevant government planning advice and the Local Plan strategy and general policies for development set out in Chapters 3 and 4.

Supplementary Planning Guidance

- 1.11 The Local Plan, together with the Structure Plan, includes most but not all of the planning guidance which will be used in assessing development proposals in the Vale. The Council has also prepared supplementary planning guidance in the form of design advice and site-specific planning briefs to give more detail to particular policies and proposals. This guidance is published separately but needs to be read in conjunction with the adopted Local Plan. Supplementary planning guidance carries less weight than the policies in the Plan itself; nevertheless it will be an important factor when planning applications are being considered.

Sustainability Appraisal

- 1.12 Government advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note 12: *Development Plans* requires local authorities to carry out a full environmental appraisal of their development plans. The purpose of the appraisal is to assess, in a systematic way, how the proposed policies and proposals in those plans contribute to the objectives of sustainable development.
- 1.13 In March 1999 the Council set up an independent panel of five experts from a range of backgrounds to carry out the assessment of this Local Plan. The panel met on a number of occasions during the preparation of the Plan and its views helped the Council in its decision-making process. The panel's findings have been written up and are published in a separate document alongside the Local Plan.

Monitoring

- 1.14 The Council recognises that it is important to monitor the implementation and effects of its planning policies and proposals to ensure they are achieving their intended purpose. A lot of monitoring work, particularly on housing and employment trends, is carried out in association with the County Council and it publishes a series of monitoring reports on an annual basis. The District Council will continue to support this work and will publish its own annual monitoring report to show how the local plan strategy guiding the location of development is performing. It will also assess how the policies are achieving the seven aims for the Local Plan set out in Chapter 2 of this Plan.