

Science Vale Area Action Plan Issues and Scope Document

February 2015





With thanks to the following organisations for images included within this document: CCFE, EUROfusion, ESCAT, Williams F1, UKAEA and Activate Learning

Foreword



Councillor Angie Paterson South
Oxfordshire District Council Cabinet
Member for Planning Policy

Councillor Mike Murray Vale of
White Horse District Council Cabinet
Member for Planning Policy

We are delighted to present the first stage in developing the Science Vale Area Action Plan. This is the first joint planning policy document to be prepared by South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils. We are working together to ensure that our shared vision for this cross boundary area known as Science Vale, is realised.

As a major centre of science and innovation in the UK, Science Vale will be the main source of new knowledge-based job opportunities in both districts over the next 15 years. We need to create the right environment for business to develop and improve the quality of life for our residents.

The scale and pace of growth will require significant investment in local infrastructure, for example, roads, cycleways, water supply, and schools. To achieve the potential for Science Vale, we will need better strategic rail connections to Heathrow airport, improved local connections to Oxford, further improvements at Didcot and Culham stations, and to seek the provision of a new railway station at Grove. We are also seeking additional major pieces of road infrastructure that cross our district boundaries, such as a new Thames river crossing at Culham.

We will achieve this through the councils working together and alongside the three centres for science (Culham Science Centre, Harwell Campus and Milton Park), key stakeholders, partners and local residents. Our Science Vale Area Action Plan is one of the key tools that will help us coordinate the delivery of growth, particularly the infrastructure we need to support a successful community.

This consultation is the first of several key stages in preparing the area action plan. It sets out what we think are the main planning challenges and opportunities facing Science Vale, and asks what you think should be included in the area action plan.

We look forward to receiving your comments.

Handwritten signature of Angie Paterson in black ink, enclosed in a thin oval.

Handwritten signature of Mike Murray in black ink.



Science Vale will consist of thriving communities that have benefited from sustainable growth underpinned by the successful delivery of major infrastructure.

It will be an area for internationally competitive science-based employment, which continues to attract investment. It will have a range of high quality housing supported by community facilities and an enhanced infrastructure.

Didcot will be a vibrant, modern town and the attractive market town of Wantage will be enhanced. The attractive countryside will continue to be an important asset for Science Vale. It will be maintained and where needed, improved to support a high quality of life for residents.







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What is Science Vale?



Science Vale is an area located in southern Oxfordshire, with the city of Oxford to the north and the M4 to the south. It is a key part of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership's Strategic Economic Plan (SEP). The SEP identifies Science Vale as having the highest concentration of science research facilities and development activity in Western Europe, and also one of the most successful internationally competing science hotspots in the UK¹.



The research and development activity that takes place in Science Vale is primarily located within the three centres for science, at Harwell Campus, Culham Science Centre and Milton Park. These centres contain certain facilities that are unique to the UK, including the Diamond Light Source (the UK's national synchrotron facility), the ISIS neutron facility and the JET (Joint European Torus) facility. Outside these centres for science, there is an array of businesses that complement and support the science growth. This includes Williams F1 headquarters at Grove, a focus for innovation in the transport and motor racing industry.



Science Vale is well connected. Heathrow airport is under an hour away by car and Didcot is connected to London, Oxford, Birmingham and Bristol by rail. Significant rail improvements are planned including electrification of the Great Western Mainline and the creation of the Heathrow Western Rail Link. The A34, M4 and M40 provide excellent road links to London, Bristol and Southampton. As well as being a location with major centres for science and with good connections, Science Vale has the added benefit of being set within attractive countryside.



Delivering the Science Vale Vision

In order to deliver the Science Vale vision stakeholders will need to work closely in partnership. There is already a strong commitment at a local, national and international level, to ensure Science Vale is successful across the public and private sectors.

¹ Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan, March 2014, p.107

Regional commitments

The Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) highlights Science Vale as one of three strategic priority areas within the 'Oxfordshire Knowledge Spine'⁵. Produced by the public and private sector Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), the SEP sets out the ambition for Oxfordshire to 2030:

"to drive accelerated economic growth to meet the needs of the science and knowledge rich economy placing Oxfordshire at the forefront of the UK's global growth ambitions"⁶.

The plan is focused on achieving objectives across the themes of Enterprise, People, Place and Connectivity. Science Vale has a significant role to play in delivering these objectives.

Local commitments

Key organisations within Science Vale are working together to realise the economic potential of 20,000 new jobs by 2031. They are preparing a Science Vale Strategy for Growth.

The planning system is an important tool that can help achieve the potential of Science Vale vision by positively guiding and influencing development. Our local plans seek to align economic and housing growth within Science Vale. They have proposed strategic development sites to accommodate the housing and employment growth.

We are producing a Science Vale Area Action Plan to support the implementation of the Science Vale vision and delivery of these strategic sites. This will be a positive planning tool that will help shape, coordinate and deliver sustainable growth across the area. It will add to the policies in our local plans and provide more detail about sustainable development that supports the vision for Science Vale. It will clearly set out what is and what is not appropriate development in Science Vale and will help us protect long term plans for the area from being undermined by speculative applications, big or small.

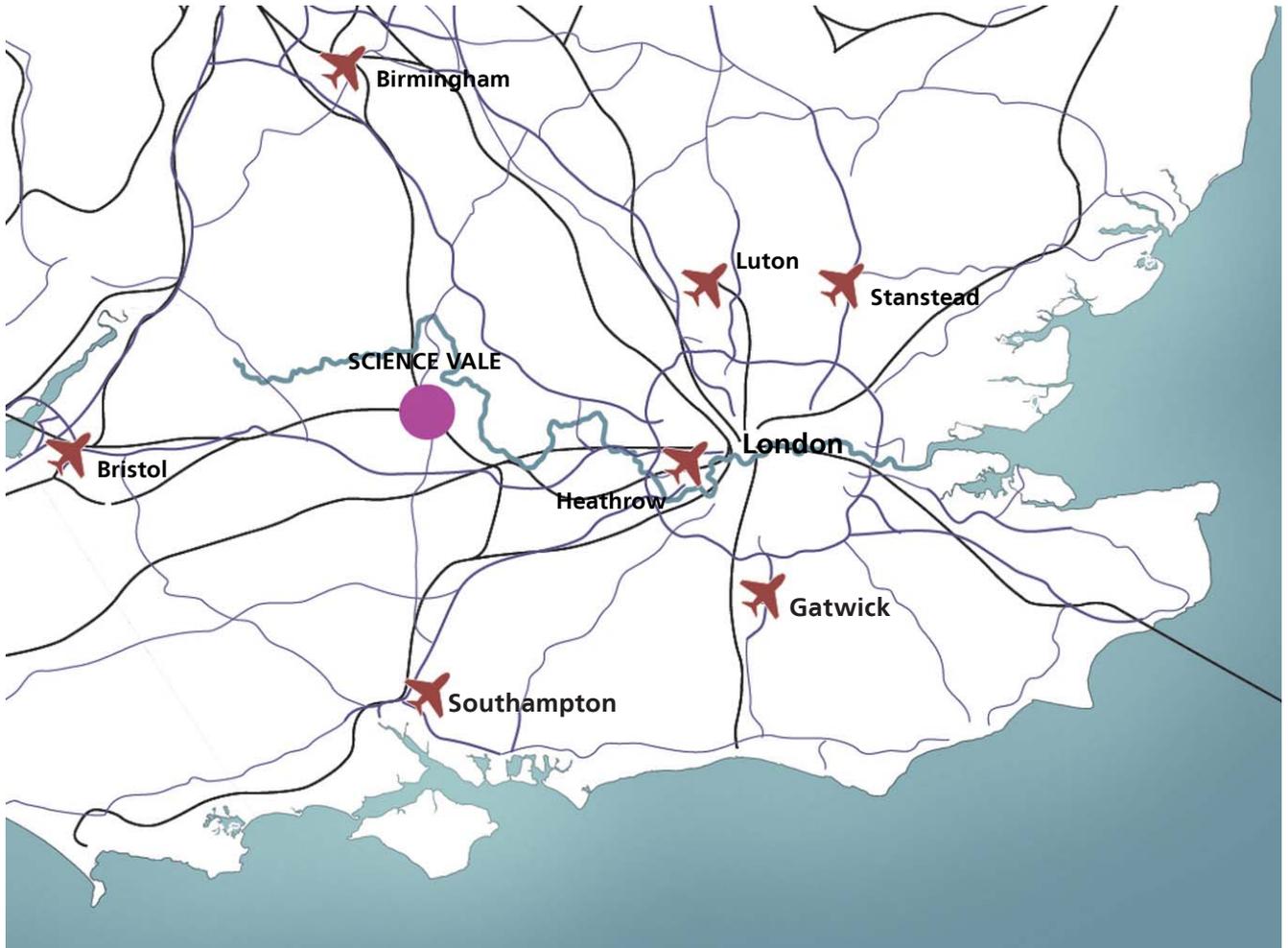
The role of the area action plan and its relationship to the other work that is ongoing is further explained in appendix one.

⁵ Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan, March 2014,

⁶ Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan, March 2014

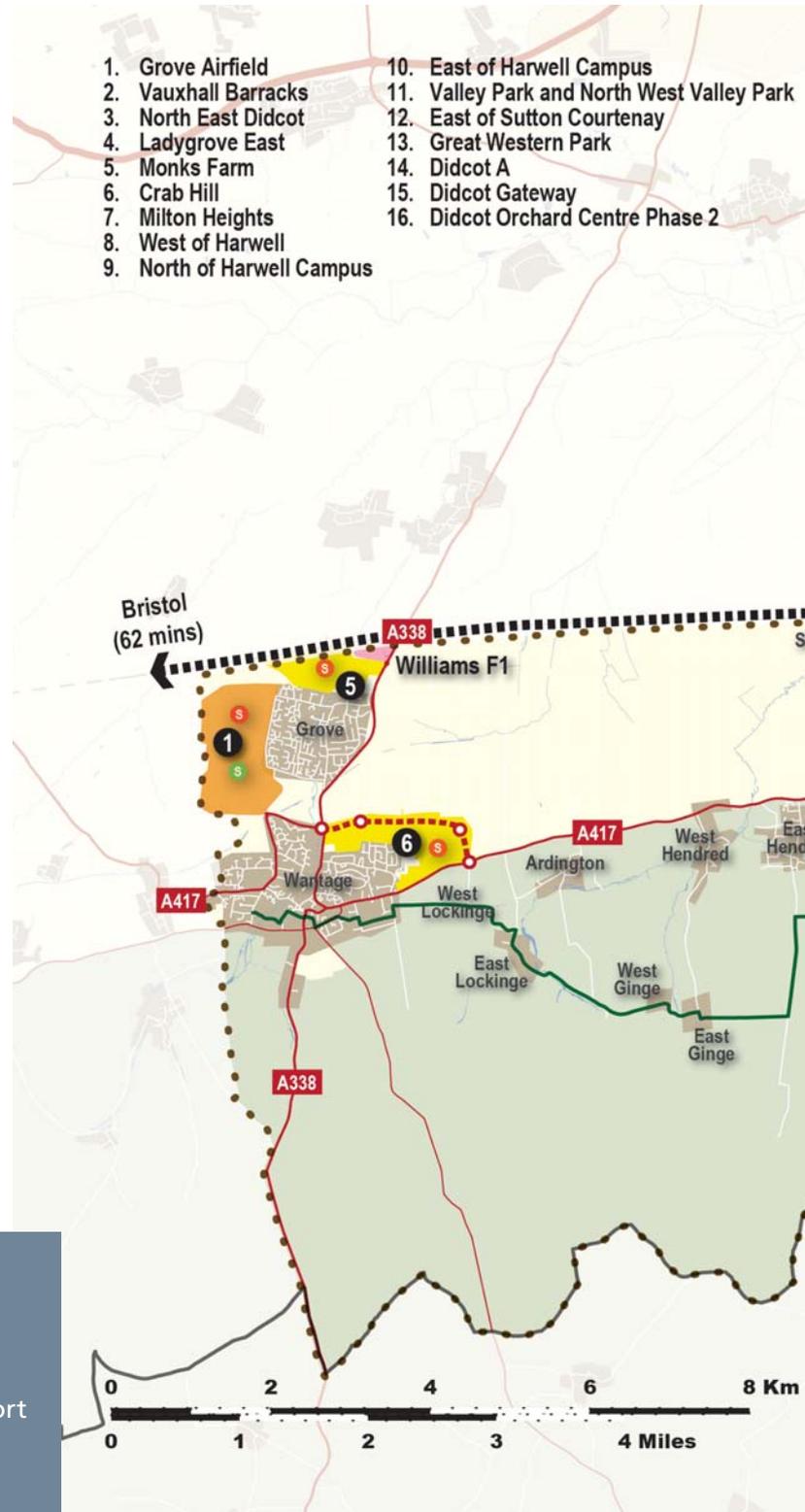
Why are we consulting?

This consultation is seeking to identify the key issues and scope of the area action plan before more work is undertaken to develop specific planning policies. We are seeking your views on the proposed scope, the plan boundary, whether we have identified all the correct issues and our vision and objectives.



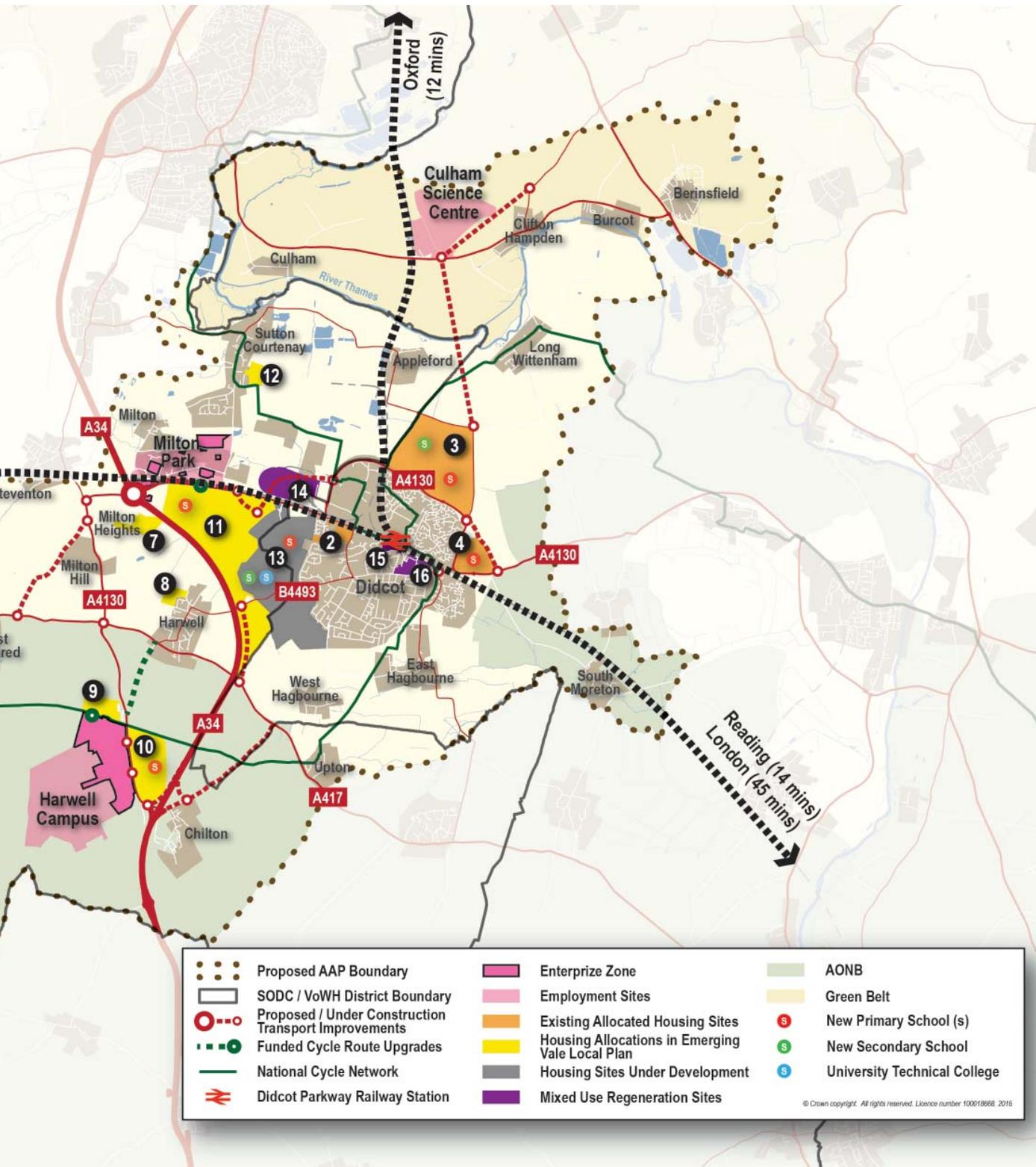
Proposed Science Vale Area Action Plan Boundary

The proposed area to be covered by the Science Vale Area Action Plan is shown in the contextual map below. This proposed boundary captures the key components of Science Vale, in particular the three centres for science and supporting settlements and infrastructure. A justification for this proposed boundary is set out within appendix two.



Question 1

Is the proposed Science Vale Area Action Plan boundary appropriate for the development of planning policies to support the economic growth in Science Vale?



Although Science Vale is currently a successful place, it has a number of challenges. The area action plan is an opportunity for us to facilitate or resolve these key issues, which are summarised below.

Issue 1: Ensuring new neighbourhoods integrate with our existing communities and countryside, and meet the lifestyle expectations of residents and investors.



Building on the spatial strategies contained in our local plans, the Science Vale Area Action Plan will take a more focussed approach to place making, urban design and masterplanning. We need a high quality of development to attract investment. There also needs to be a variety of housing options for both sale and rent. With the large amount of development proposed for Science Vale, it is important that we create places that function well and provide attractive places to live and work. This is a particular challenge for the large scale strategic sites. They need a distinct character and sense of place to positively contribute to the function and overall quality of Science Vale.

We think the area action plan should include a clear framework for Science Vale, setting specific urban design principles and design briefs to inform and prepare masterplans for housing and employment sites. This will clearly articulate our vision in a tangible way.

Issue 2: Didcot has not yet reached its potential as a vibrant centre for Science Vale.



Didcot town centre and its new neighbourhoods are a focus for regeneration and transformation. Didcot is the main service centre and gateway entrance for the wider Science Vale. It has the potential to be improved making it a place that will attract investment and one that the community will continue to be proud of. So this opportunity is not diminished it is important that developments achieve high quality urban design.

Didcot railway station area is the gateway to Science Vale, and should provide an appropriate sense of arrival and a transport hub well connected to both local and wider destinations.

We think the area action plan should include a comprehensive framework for Didcot to ensure that all new development meets the needs and aspirations for this important hub.

Issue 3: Achieving more diversity in the range of employment space and supporting facilities to attract and develop knowledge economy growth.

To meet the growth potential for Science Vale and secure inward investment we must provide the right type of employment space and supporting facilities. This will continue to attract 'big science' but also provide for smaller start up private businesses enabling them to grow and benefit from the specialised science based employment cluster Science Vale offers. At present, given Didcot's location close to the A34 and readily available land, there is significant market pressure for further storage and distribution warehouses in Didcot. The area action plan will review whether this will deliver the right type and scale of jobs needed to support the knowledge economy in Science Vale. Outside of the centres for science we need to ensure that conditions are right for general business to thrive, including availability of premises, and so support a sustainable Science Vale community.

We think the area action plan should:

- support the creation of well networked, designed and master planned environments at our centres for science;
- develop a strategy for mixed use development and regeneration of large brownfield sites, such as the former power station site at Didcot A to provide an opportunity to help improve Didcot; and
- develop a strategy to support a variety of more general business in the towns and villages within Science Vale to meet this need.





Issue 4: Achieving growth without compromising one of its foundations of success – its natural beauty, historic and rural character.

Science Vale is fortunate to be home to world class research facilities within high value scenic countryside. If these qualities are lost, then the attraction of Science Vale to employers and their employees could be diminished. The attractive network of thriving villages and the surrounding countryside provide an important asset to Science Vale that needs to be preserved and enhanced.

We think that as part of the area action plan, the roles of different settlement types will need to be recognised along with the levels of growth that are appropriate, within the policy context of the local plans. We should seek to improve access to green infrastructure and the countryside as one of the benefits of growth in Science Vale.

Issue 5: Ensuring the timely delivery of infrastructure to support growth.

To support the current planned growth within the area, significant investment for transport infrastructure improvements is being committed. Further investment will be required in, for example, transport, digital, utility, health and community infrastructure.



To ensure the maximum benefit is realised from infrastructure improvements and that these come forward at the right time to support homes and jobs, we think a phasing and delivery programme should be a part of the area action plan.

Question 2.

What do you think about the issues we have identified at this early stage?

Are there any additional issues that we have not covered?

Issue 6: Encourage skills in the local workforce to meet the growing demands of the knowledge economy.

Employment growth in Science Vale is expected to be largely focused on research and development in high tech sectors including Space, Life Sciences, Advanced Engineering and Cryogenics. To support this, there is a need to grow our already highly skilled workforce. The first Oxfordshire University Technical College, due to open in September 2015, reflects our commitment to provide a step change in facilities to help local learners gain the scientific and internationally relevant skills our businesses need.

We think the area action plan should support opportunities for further science and internationally relevant educational facilities, if needed.



Question 3.

Are some issues more important than others?
What might influence their relative importance over time?

Science Vale is already an international location for science and technology businesses. From this strong starting point we need to capitalise on Science Vale's opportunity to provide an even better environment to enable business to flourish. Our vision for Science Vale in 2031 is grounded in continuing this story of economic success:

Science Vale will consist of thriving communities that have benefited from sustainable growth underpinned by the successful delivery of major infrastructure.



It will be an area for internationally competitive science-based employment, which continues to attract investment. It will have a range of high quality housing supported by community facilities and an enhanced infrastructure.

Didcot will be a vibrant, modern town and the attractive market town of Wantage will be enhanced. The attractive countryside will continue to be an important asset for Science Vale. It will be maintained and where needed, improved to support a high quality of life for residents.

1. We will provide the right environment for science-led business to flourish:



- Companies will benefit from a network of employees who share research and innovation at our centres for science and employment hubs.
- We will continue to attract 'big science' facilities such as the Joint European Torus reactor and Diamond Synchrotron. These will provide access to unique pieces of research equipment, which due to their cost and scale, provide access to unique scientific research facilities that place Science Vale at the forefront of innovation at international level.
- Science Vale building on the exceptional research capacity at Harwell and Culham we will lead the UK in the level of business growth and international investment we will achieve.
- Science Vale will provide a range of employment spaces accommodating small start ups and spin off companies, through to the largest spaces needed for 'big science' facilities.

2. We will secure facilities to provide a well educated local work force specialising in science and technology:

- The new University Technical College will specialise in science, maths, engineering and technology courses for students over the age of 14. We will aim to home-grow the next round of Science Vale's scientists and engineers.
- Our employers will have a pool of eager students seeking apprenticeship positions in Science Vale.
- New purpose built primary and secondary schools will help embed the science culture from an early age and serve an international need.



3. We will provide excellent places to live by developing vibrant neighbourhoods whilst ensuring our villages and countryside maintain their distinctive character:

- Didcot will become the urban centre of Science Vale providing all the housing, recreation, leisure, retail, health and civic facilities of a typical thriving science town.
- Science Vale will offer a unique mix of living environments for residents, ranging from its villages to its towns.
- Science Vale will capitalise on the natural environment that has made it so successful in the past.
- Science Vale will be home to a number of vibrant and mixed new neighbourhoods that are well integrated and designed to an exceptional quality.



4. We will provide well connected and easily accessible places:

- Science Vale will be less than an hour by rail to Heathrow airport and have shorter trip times and more frequent services to London, Oxford, Bristol and Reading.
- Didcot Station will be expanded to allow trains to Birmingham and the north to stop at the town.
- We will encourage the enhancement of existing stations, for example at Culham and the development of new stations, for example at Grove.
- All of Science Vale will have an enviable digital infrastructure of superfast broadband and 5G data coverage.
- We will have excellent strategic road connections to the M40 and M4 and an improved A34.
- We will secure new, high quality bus routes to and within Science Vale
- Science Vale will have excellent internal road connections.
- Science Vale will be well served by direct, safe cycle routes between our towns, villages and employment centres.



Objectives

To achieve our vision, we have set out a number of measurable objectives. As with Science Vale's issues and vision, these are grouped around the four key themes of Enterprise, People, Place and Connectivity:



1. In order to provide the right environment for science-led business to flourish, we must:

- Develop masterplans for Harwell Campus and Culham Science Centre to guide change and enable swift planning decisions to be made.
- Develop policies that encourage, or allocate, a sustainable balance of businesses and commercial activities at strategic sites in Science Vale.
- Ensure development sites create a vibrant locality and contribute to the wider economic vision for Science Vale.
- Ensure land is available for 'big science' facilities and general business in appropriate locations, including incubator and grow on space.

2. To secure facilities to provide a well educated local workforce specialising in science and technology, we must:

- Ensure that new local schools are built to keep pace with new housing and jobs
- Create a network of "Science Schools", focused around the University Technical College and seek to cater for identified international need.
- Enable a new, publicly accessible, science and innovation centre in Didcot.
- Be responsive to the needs of the new University Technical College.
- Facilitate easy connections between the key employment sites and our schools.

Question 4.

Will our vision and objectives for the Science Vale Area Action Plan help to achieve the economic growth set out in our local plans? If not, what is missing?

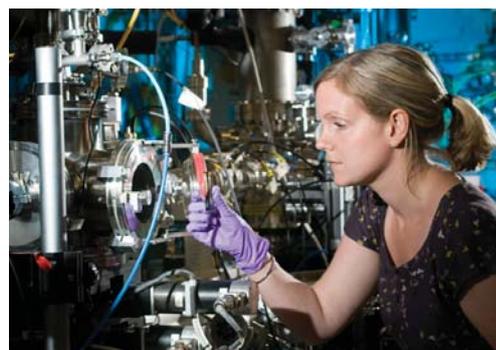
3. To provide excellent places to live by developing vibrant neighbourhoods whilst ensuring our villages and countryside maintain their distinctive character, we must:

- Ensure excellent design is embedded throughout Science Vale.
- Refuse development proposals that degrade the built and natural environment.
- Create an urban design framework focused on key sites, setting out a coordinated approach to new development in Science Vale.
- Improve Didcot to be the well serviced and high quality centre of Science Vale.
- Achieve balanced and sustainable employment and housing growth.
- Deliver diverse, high quality, attractive housing developments, enjoyable to live in and appropriate to the surrounding environment.
- Ensure that the location of new services and facilities are coordinated.
- Consider the needs of people who wish build their own homes in appropriate locations.
- Protect the distinctive character and heritage of Science Vale’s market towns, villages and countryside.



4. In order to provide a well-connected and easily accessible place, we must:

- Encourage new developments to contribute to a ‘step change’ in travel choices away from car travel towards public transport, cycling and walking.
- Seek a package of rail measures that will expand Didcot’s role as a major rail interchange and provide rail services direct from Grove and Wantage.
- Enable people to reliably travel between our towns, villages and their jobs by means other than the private car.
- Facilitate targeted investment in necessary strategic road infrastructure.
- Better manage increased transport demand from new jobs and homes.
- Support the provision of superfast broadband across all of Science Vale by 2031.
- Support the provision of improved data connectivity across all of Science Vale by 2031, for example 5G.



Question 5.

Is the proposed scope of the plan, sufficient to adequately plan for and deliver the growth agenda for Science Vale?

Your views



Throughout this document we have asked for your views. The consultation period for the Science Vale Area Action Plan, Issues and Scope, will begin on Friday 27 February 2015 and finish at 5pm on Friday 17 April 2015.

A list of public consultation events being held during this period is available on our websites.

The responses received to this consultation will be used to inform a draft of the Science Vale Area Action Plan. Engagement with key stakeholders will continue on an on-going basis to ensure that an effective area action plan is produced.



If you would like to comment on any of the questions in this document, or raise any other points, we encourage you to fill in the questionnaire on our website. If you prefer, you can send us your comments by email, post or fax.

Website:

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Post:

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South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils
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Abbey House, Abbey Close
Abingdon
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OX14 3JE

What Happens Next?

1

After this consultation we will analyse all the responses and produce a consultation summary of what we've learnt from what people told us.
Issues and scope consultation, February – April 2015



2

Preferred Options

Using the data gathered we will investigate and test through evidence and sustainability appraisal and to develop draft policies. We will prepare a preferred options document, showing the options we have considered and the policies we recommend taking forward. There will be a public consultation on the preferred options, and again we will produce a consultation summary from this showing the results.

Preferred options stage consultation, November 2015



3

Publication of the draft Science Vale Area Action Plan

Then we will prepare a submission plan and hold a further public consultation on it.

Publication stage consultation, May 2016



4

Submission and Examination

We'll then submit it and all its associated background evidence and consultation responses for examination by an independent Planning Inspector, who will hold public hearing sessions.

Submission of plan to Secretary of State, October 2016

Examination in Public, January 2017



5

Adoption

Once we've received the inspector's report and if necessary consulted on any recommended changes, we'll adopt the plan.

Adoption of Science Vale Area Action Plan, May 2017



6

Monitoring and Implementation

We then monitor to check whether the plan policies and allocated sites are being implemented as planned.



Appendices



Appendix one: Planning context

National planning policy context

National planning policy and guidance makes it clear that Government's preferred approach is for each local planning authority to prepare a single local plan for its area. Additional local plans, such as an area action plan should only be produced where there is clear justification for doing so¹. The justification for preparing a Science Vale Area Action Plan is explained later in this section.

In preparing a planning policy document, there is a requirement for local authorities to both notify interested bodies and persons of their intentions, and give opportunity for them to give their views on what they feel a local plan should contain. Guidance on duty to cooperate makes clear that local planning authorities should engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis throughout the development of their plan, with several other Government organisations who are required to co-operate as part of this process².

Local planning policy context

Science Vale is located both within Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire districts. Therefore, local plan policies from both districts are relevant to its growth. Both the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy and the draft Vale of White Horse Local Plan, recognise that an area action plan is necessary in order to fully implement their strategies in Science Vale.

South Oxfordshire's Core Strategy, adopted in 2012, has a strong focus on the growth of Didcot and Culham within Science Vale. Policy CSS1 focuses major new development within the growth area of Didcot, so that the town can play an enhanced role in providing homes, jobs, services and improved transport networks. The strategy identifies that the improvement of the area around the railway station is key to the regeneration of the town. It also includes an allocation for a mixed use retail led development, to form an extension to the existing Orchard Centre development in the town centre.

A total of 6,300 homes have been allocated to Didcot up to 2027. These will be based at the strategic sites of Didcot North East, Great Western Park, Ladygrove East, Vauxhall Barracks and the Orchard Centre Phase 2. Policy CSEM1 states that an environment must be developed which positively and pro-actively encourages sustainable job growth. Policy CSEM3 identifies Culham Science Centre for redevelopment and intensification for research and science based businesses, with the creation of about 1,000 new jobs³.

¹ National Planning Practice Guidance

² www.planningportal.gov.uk

³ South Oxfordshire Adopted Core Strategy, Dec 2012

The draft Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 focuses sustainable growth within Science Vale (the South East Vale sub area). Policy CP6 identifies Science Vale as the focus of main employment growth, identifying Harwell Campus, Milton Park and Didcot A as the main strategic employment sites able to accommodate growth in the number of new jobs. Policies CP4 and CP15 further identify Science Vale as a main location for housing growth, with approximately 10,320 homes to be delivered at the strategic sites of Crab Hill, Grove Airfield, Monks Farm, Valley Park, North-West Valley Park, West of Harwell, East and North of Harwell Campus, Milton Heights and East of Sutton Courtenay. Policy CP16 identifies Didcot A Power Station as a re-development opportunity suitable for mixed use development⁴. Strategic development sites and infrastructure identified within the district local plans are shown opposite.

Science Vale Area Action Plan

Whilst the district local plans provide the high level planning and strategic allocation policies for Science Vale as set out above, the area action plan will address the delivery and implementation of strategic growth set out in those plans, and may help allocate smaller development sites within the area. In particular, the area action plan will:

- enable a co-ordinated approach to managing the high levels of planned employment and housing growth in Science Vale across the administrative boundaries of South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse districts;
- help in delivering planned growth in a timely way through addressing issues such as the phasing and funding of infrastructure, which may prevent development coming forward; and
- support and create successful and appealing places in Science Vale, through developing a strategic urban design framework, from which urban design briefs and masterplans can follow.

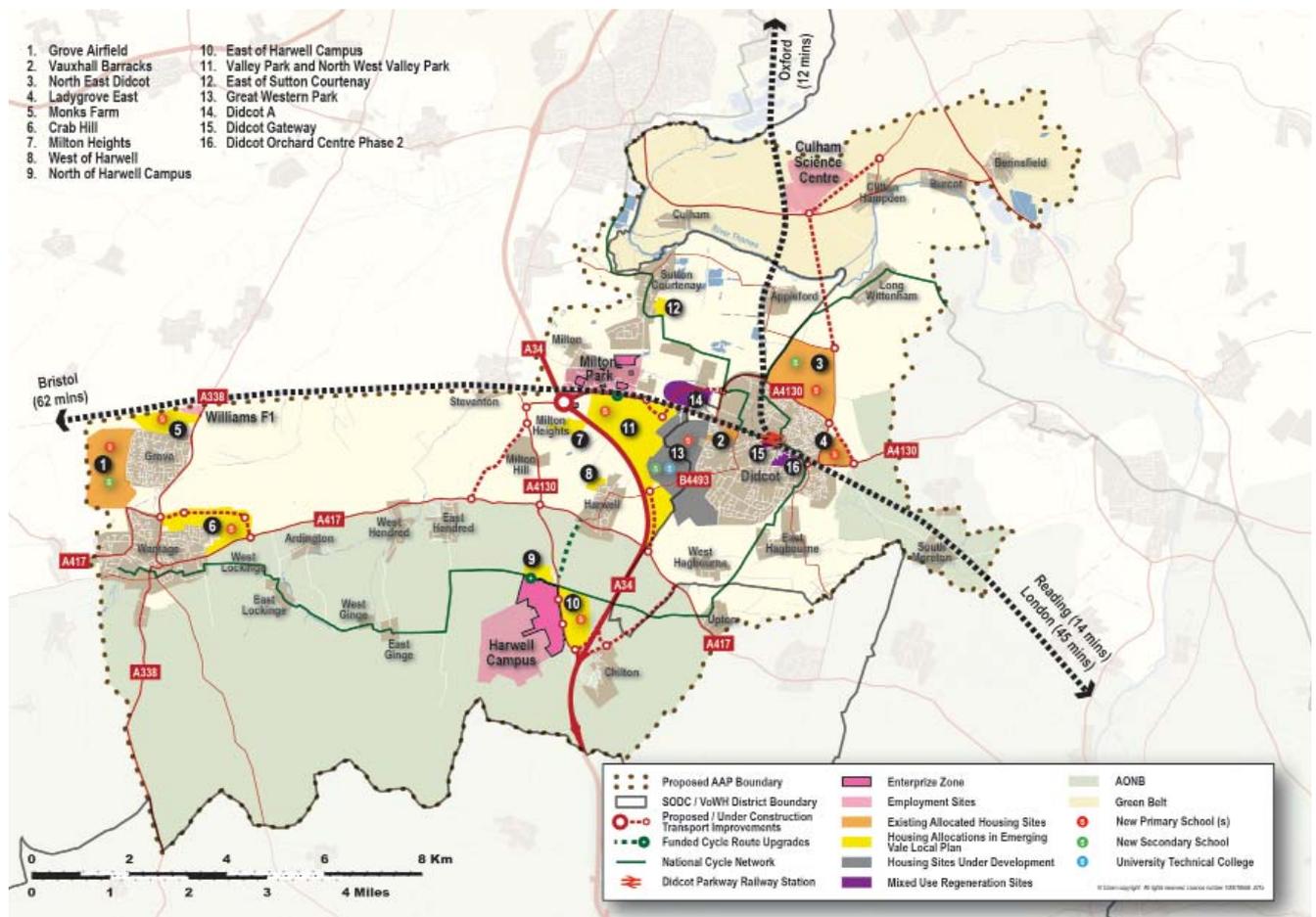
Once adopted, the Science Vale Area Action Plan will have the same status as our local plans. This means that it will be a material consideration in deciding planning applications in both districts and developing neighbourhood plans.

Sustainability appraisal

We are preparing a sustainability appraisal alongside the area action plan to help us identify important sustainability issues and how our plan will affect them. The assessment will tell us how sustainable the proposals within the evolving area action plan are. It will also consider how we could further develop our proposals to ensure sustainability is achieved. This will fulfil the requirements of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations as required by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act and the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive.

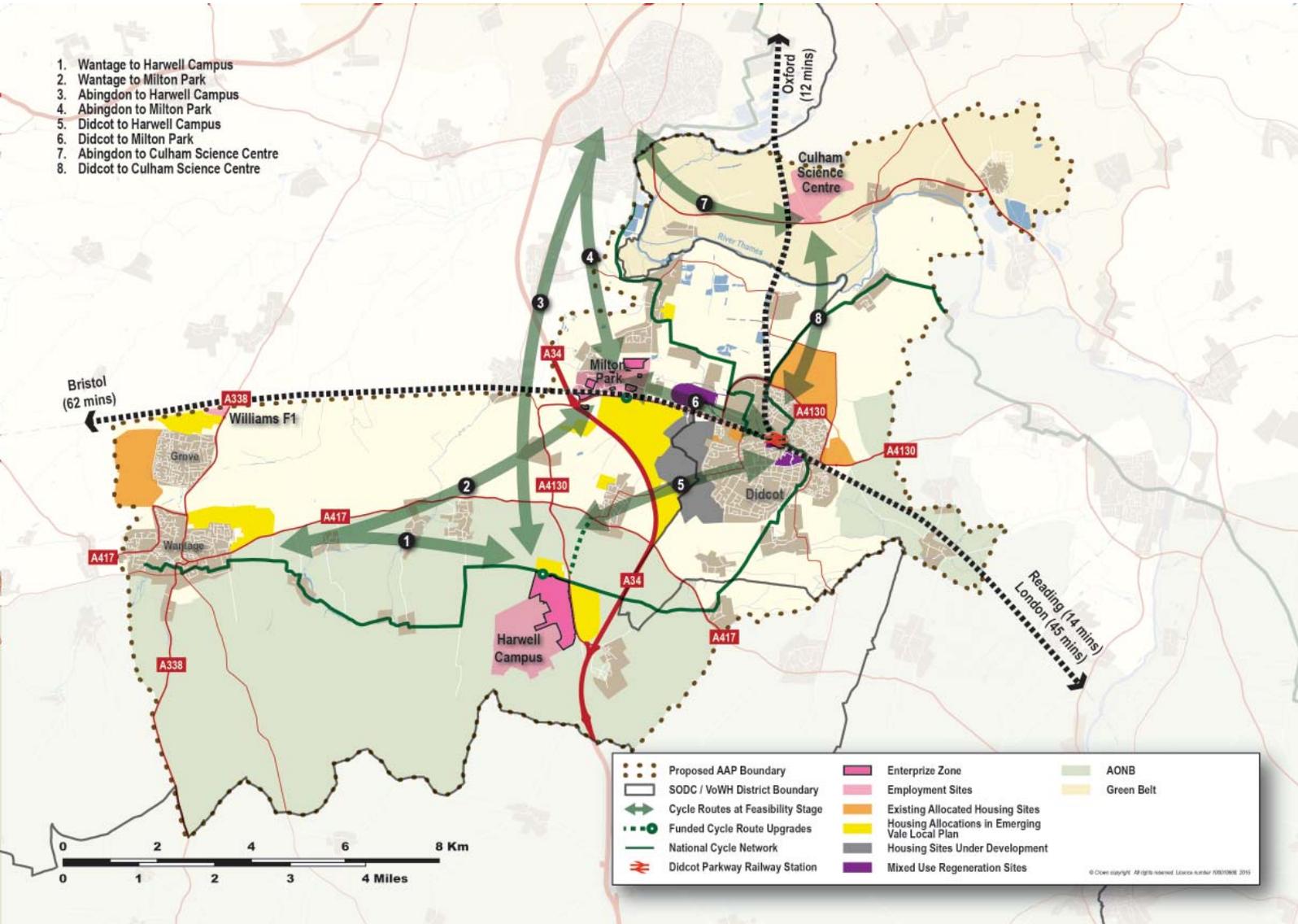
⁴Vale of White Horse District Council Local Plan 2031

Science Vale Context Plan



Ref	Location	Site Name	Number of homes
1	Grove	Grove Airfield	2500
2	Didcot	Vauxhall Barracks	300
3	Didcot	North East Didcot	2030
4	Didcot	Ladygrove East	640
5	Grove	Monks Farm	750
6	Wantage	Crab Hill	1500
7	Milton Parish	Milton Heights	400
8	Harwell	West of Harwell	200
9	Harwell Campus	North of Harwell Campus	550
10	Harwell Campus	East of Harwell Campus	850
11	Harwell and Milton Parishes	Valley Park / North West Valley Park	2550 / 800
12	Sutton Courtenay	East Sutton Courtenay	220
13	Didcot	Great Western Park	3300

Science Vale Cycle Improvement Plan



Appendix two: Plan boundary

Proposed boundary of Science Vale Area Action Plan

In order to ensure clarity about which policies developed within the area action plan are relevant to particular locations, a specified geographic boundary for the plan is required. A suggested boundary is set out on page 12 of the main report. Strategies such as the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan, Local Transport Plan, the South Oxfordshire Local Plan Issues and Scope consultation, and the draft Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1, have already given a general outline area for Science Vale. This includes the centres for science and the settlements of Didcot, Wantage and Grove. However, an exact boundary for the area across the two district areas is to be defined.

The purpose of this boundary is to define where the area action plan policies will apply. Other boundaries exist within the proposed boundary, such as local plan housing ring fence boundaries. The area action plan boundary does not affect these other boundaries. The area action plan boundary has been defined in the context of current and emerging policy, and the growth plans already set out. For example, it includes existing allocations within the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy and the emerging allocations within the draft Vale of White Horse Local Plan (November 2014). It has also been influenced by options for future growth in Science Vale within the emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan (July 2014 and February 2015).

So the boundary can be clearly interpreted, it follows defined physical features, such as parish boundaries, railway lines, water features and roads. The councils would welcome views on whether this is the correct boundary for the Science Vale Area Action Plan.

The Science Vale Area Action Plan's primary focus is the delivery and implementation of policies in our local plans relating to growth in Science Vale. The local plans have a clear focus on growth around Didcot, Wantage and Grove. The reason for selecting these settlements for growth is to support the economic potential of the three centres for science, which are core to the rationale of Science Vale.

As a result, there is a clear logic for Science Vale to include these growth settlements and the centres for science. The growth points and the centres for science are supported by a network of villages and smaller settlements, some of which have also been given housing allocations in the local plans. Some of the network of settlements are currently home to many science and technology employees⁵.

The more rural elements and character of Science Vale, and their relationship with the key settlements and centre for science are equally important to its current and future success. For this reason, the Science Vale Area Action Plan will specifically consider and develop policies relating to these areas we are going to support, protect and enhance because they have an important role in the future attractiveness, vitality and success of Science Vale.

⁵ Census, 2011

Appendix three: Developing policies and evidence

Science Vale needs places that can provide the mixture and variety of uses and infrastructure on different scales. These are essential if they are to become successful and vibrant communities.

In order to fulfil the vision for Science Vale we need to ensure that detailed policies are in place to positively guide the step changes required during the plan period. Our local plans have strategic evidence and policies at a district wide level. The area action plan seeks to develop these into comprehensive evidence and policies specific to Science Vale. Some examples of what the area action plan could address are summarised below.

Place, environment, urban design and masterplanning

As identified in the section entitled 'issues', there is a need to ensure the quality of our strategic sites meets the expectations of our future residents and investors. To achieve this, we will prepare a spatial framework for Science Vale to guide new development. A team consisting of architects, urban designers, masterplanners, property consultants and transport consultants will undertake this work. This will build upon the spatial strategy and relevant policies contained in the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy, draft Vale of White Horse Local Plan, emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan and the councils' design guides. It will also sit alongside emerging neighbourhood plans.

The purpose and aims of this project are to provide a clear and intelligible evidence base to enable successful placemaking for Science Vale. The objective is to provide a clear urban design framework and a comprehensive masterplanning approach to Science Vale, to ensure high quality development in our strategic sites.

The outputs will consist of a vision and high level spatial framework for Science Vale. It will include a strategy for Science Vale to set the context for detailed design briefs, design codes and masterplans for key strategic sites. It will cover the whole of Science Vale and will focus on key sites such as Harwell Campus, East Harwell Campus, Culham Science Centre, Didcot A (former power station site), Valley Park, Didcot North East, Ladygrove East, and Didcot town centre. These sites are shown in appendix one.

This evidence base will be used to inform the preparation of the area action plan, and will be translated into policy requirements. It will sit alongside the design guides and design related policies in the local plans. It will also be used to inform the masterplanning process for several sites that are currently underway. The outputs from this project will be vital in securing the right type and quality of development and ultimately, enabling our vision for and the potential of Science Vale to be realised.

Science Vale Infrastructure Delivery Plan

Individual infrastructure delivery plans exist for both South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, along with a joint Didcot infrastructure delivery plan. The purpose of these documents is to set out identified infrastructure requirements and so enable the planned new development, funding sources, their phasing and delivery to be achieved. To accompany the area action plan, a Science Vale infrastructure delivery plan will be prepared. This will build on the existing infrastructure delivery plans to provide a single plan covering the Science Vale area. As part of this process, we will work with infrastructure providers to add further detail to the phasing and prioritisation of infrastructure.

Science Vale Retail and Leisure Strategy

As Science Vale straddles the administrative boundary between the two councils, a bespoke retail and leisure needs study will need to be undertaken. This will consider how retail and leisure needs can be met when considering the area as whole. It is not intended that this will duplicate the findings of similar studies for the whole of South Oxfordshire and the whole of the Vale of White Horse but rather examine in detail the Science Vale area in the context of these wider studies. It will consider how retail and leisure need can be most effectively met when considering a cross boundary area.

Science Vale Green Infrastructure Strategy

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are currently preparing a joint green infrastructure strategy that covers the whole of both districts. The area action plan will use this strategy to further develop detailed policies for Science Vale.

Science Vale Employment Strategy

The evidence base that supports our local plans and the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan has identified the job numbers needed for Science Vale. It also identifies, at a strategic level, the sectors that will be growing over the plan period to 2031. The local plans have ensured that there is sufficient business land available to meet the overall need⁶.

Due to the strategic location of Science Vale there is significant pressure on this land for warehouse development. These trends could narrow the employment base of the area and affect the delivery of the more economically valuable knowledge economy growth. The area action plan will seek to ensure that key sites are not lost to uses that do not contribute to and/or undermine the ability to deliver sustainable economic growth.

Another area for review is the amount of space available for smaller businesses. The area action plan will review the evidence and land available for smaller businesses and consider whether there is a need for non-strategic sites to meet any need identified.

⁶ Science Vale Housing and Employment Study, 2014
(Oxfordshire Economic Forecasting Report, Feb 2014)

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