

Hearing Statement: Matter 3 (SPATIAL STRATEGY AND HOUSING SUPPLY RING FENCE)

This document comprises RPS's Hearing Statement for Matter 3 on behalf of the Valley Park Development Consortium, comprising of Hallam Land Management Limited, Taylor Wimpey PLC and Persimmon Homes PLC.

The proposed Valley Park allocation covers around 181 hectares of green field land between Didcot and the A34. The developer consortium has submitted an outline planning application for 4,450 homes on this site. That application is following the normal development control process. The scale of the development is representative of the full potential of Valley Park rather than the level of development that is expected to be provided within the plan period.

3.1 Is the proposed distribution of new housing and employment land (policies CP4 and CP6) soundly based? In particular:

- (a) **Does the proposed distribution of housing set out in policy CP4 appropriately reflect the settlement hierarchy (policy CP3) and the core planning principle of the NPPF (para 17) to actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling, and focus significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable?**

We consider that the proposed distribution of new housing and employment land is soundly based. The former takes into account broad locations that offer the most suitable and sustainable locations for development; the latter focuses development within the Science Vale area.

The distribution of housing appropriately reflects the settlement hierarchy through focusing development within or on the edge of Market Towns, Local Service Centres and Larger Villages, where Core Policy 4 makes provision for the majority of future housing supply to be delivered within these areas through strategic allocations identified in the policy. This distribution will serve to enhance and protect the services and facilities provided by these settlements, in keeping with the presumption of in favour of sustainable development set out in Core Policy 1 and Paragraph 14 of the NPPF.

Core Policy 4 rightly concentrates housing distribution at these settlements within the Science Vale area (with the Valley Park site also located on the urban edge of the town of Didcot, that is located outside of the Vale of White Horse Council's administrative boundary), that will help to improve the self-containment of the area, a key growth area set out within the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan that is a focus for significant investment.

Focussing strategic housing allocations within the Science Vale area on this basis will appropriately reflect the core planning principle of the NPPF in question, with opportunities for future residents to live closer to larger settlements as well as existing and proposed employment centres, such as Milton Park – destinations that are accessible via public transport, walking or cycling.

Didcot is at the heart of Science Vale UK. Valley Park in particular is close to the key employment sites in Science Vale UK, namely Milton Park, Harwell Campus and Culham Science Centre, which accommodate a significant level of jobs and will have enhanced roles as the Council's aspirations for Science Vale UK in the Local Plan are taken forward through the Plan period. Valley Park is accessible to these locations by cycle and public transport, as well as having good road access, minimising the distance travelled and the need to travel by private car. Valley Park is also accessible by foot, cycle and public transport to Didcot Parkway railway station, which provides frequent services to Oxford and London, the former of which is a significant employment centre for residents of the Vale of White Horse. It makes good planning sense to allocate the largest housing sites in close proximity to these jobs and excellent rail services.

The distribution of housing will support the vitality and viability of the area and help to facilitate the delivery of a package of new or enhanced infrastructure, services and facilities, which will again support the wider aspirations of the Local Plan. The new housing allocated to this area will be in balance with the forecast new jobs thus helping to support sustainable growth.

(b) Does the distribution appropriately reflect the role of Oxford in providing for employment and services for the residents of Vale of White Horse?

We consider that the distribution does reflect the role of Oxford in providing for employment and service needs, taking into account the good availability and accessibility to Oxford, particularly from Didcot by public transport routes.

3.3 Is it feasible that a significantly different distribution of housing development from that proposed could be delivered?

It is not feasible that a significantly different distribution of housing could be delivered. The Science Vale area comprises a self-contained area of employment growth in specific defined sectors and supporting housing development. Any alternative development or expansion in other locations in the Vale outside of Didcot, including the other towns and larger villages, would be constrained by lack of infrastructure, limited public transport links, Green Belt and/or environmental constraints, in particular the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This would lead to a significantly less sustainable distribution of housing.

3.4 Is the “housing supply ring fence” approach of policy CP5 to the delivery of housing in the Science Vale area (a) adequately explained in terms of its practical operation, (b) justified, (c) likely to be effective and (d) in accordance with national policy?

We consider that this housing supply ring fence approach is adequately explained in general terms, with Core Policy 5 read in conjunction with the supporting text to the Plan that precedes it. However, it would be helpful if the preceding text could explain exactly

how the requirement of 11,850 homes has been derived with reference to land consented as well as allocated, and for it to be clarified that rural areas outside of the ring fenced areas (as identified on Figure 2.3) will be assessed in housing land supply terms in the same way as other non-ring fenced areas outside of the Science Vale.

This approach is justified for reasons given in the text accompanying the policy, where it will help to enable the growth potential of the Science Vale area to be realised and to help to achieve sustainable development. As the text points out (Paragraph 4.19), it will also improve the Council's ability to seek external funding to support infrastructure delivery and accelerate housing growth.

This approach is likely to be effective, subject to clarifications highlighted above relating to its practical operation.

Lastly, in terms of compliance with national policy, the NPPF states (Paragraph 47):-

“To boost significantly the supply of housing, local planning authorities should.... for market and affordable housing, illustrate the expected rate of housing delivery through a housing trajectory for the plan period and set out a housing implementation strategy for the full range of housing describing how they will maintain delivery of a five-year supply of housing land to meet their housing target.”

The NPPF does not specifically state that a district cannot be broken down into discrete sub-areas each with its own housing trajectory and implementation strategy, and therefore to this extent it is policy compliant.

RPS Planning & Development
20 August 2015