

VALE OF WHITE HORSE LOCAL PLAN 2031
(Part 1 Strategic Sites and Policies)
EXAMINATION – STAGE 2

Matter 12 – District Wide Policies
Hearings 2nd – 19th February 2016

Statement from the
Keep Harwell Rural Campaign (KHR)

Keep Harwell Rural (KHR) is a residents' group independent of any statutory body. It was formed in 1998 to enable residents to express their views about changes that may affect Harwell, in ways that could augment and complement the views expressed by the Harwell Parish Council. KHR has inputs from a cross-section of villagers concerned about education, traffic and road safety, sustainability, the amenities provided by our nearest town, Didcot, and the preservation of the character of a village with a thousand year history.

KHR has responded to planning documents since 1998 and has taken part in Structure Plan and Local Plan Public Enquiries. KHR has also commented in detail during public consultations on other planning matters. (www.KeepHarwellRural.org)

January 2016

This statement refers only to (h) Landscape (CP44) in Question 12.3: Are the policies relating to protecting the environment and responding to climate change soundly based?

Our criticism of CP44 also relates to a statement in Section 5.57 - the blue box on page 68 of the Local Plan- which describes how the South East Vale Sub-Area will change by 2031.

Paragraph 5 in the blue box states: *"The countryside and villages will have maintained their distinctive character. The Larger Villages will have retained their separate identities....."*

The first part of Policy CP44 states: *"The key features that contribute to the nature and quality of the Vale of White Horse District's landscape will be protected from harmful development and where possible enhanced, in particular:*

- i. features such as trees, hedgerows, woodland, field boundaries, watercourses and water bodies*
- ii. important landscape settings of settlements*
- iii. topographical features*
- iv. areas or features of cultural or historical value*
- v. important views and visually sensitive skylines, and*
- vi. tranquillity and the need to protect and against intrusion from light pollution, noise and motion.*

Where development is acceptable in principle, measures will be sought to integrate it into the landscape character and/or the townscape of the area....."

CP44 is unsound because:

- For Harwell Village, the Plan has no effective mechanisms to deliver the aim stated in Core Policy 44 to protect *"important landscape settings of settlements.....important views and visually sensitive skylines..."*
- Similarly for Harwell, the Plan has no effective mechanisms to deliver the aim stated in Section 5.57 that: *"The countryside and villages will have maintained their distinctive character. The Larger Villages will have retained their separate identities....."*. There is nothing specific anywhere in the Plan which defines unambiguously and objectively what constitutes maintenance of distinctive character/separate identity for Harwell Village.

Under our statement for Matter 9 we have proposed how these deficiencies could be rectified, and also how the saved Policy NE 10 on *Urban Fringes and Countryside Gaps* should be updated. The modification to the Plan that is necessary is repeated below in the Annex.

Annex

The proposals map does not reflect the impact of impending planned and speculative development on open land surrounding the village of Harwell and does not adequately protect its rural character and separate identity from further erosion in all directions. As well as being necessary to update Saved Policy NE10, this is relevant to the overall Strategy for the South East Vale Sub-Area and the soundness of the individual sites proposed under Policies CP4 and CP15, because there are deficiencies in the soundness of other sections of the Local Plan 2031. In particular we refer to the problems with CP44 and Section 5.57 cited above under 12.3 (h).

To make the Local Plan effective, it must identify a rural gap right around Harwell Village where further development will not be permitted. This particularly applies to the approach to Harwell from the east, but is not confined to this direction. This is because developments proposed in the Plan at the Harwell Campus and Milton Heights now represent, in the language of Saved Policy NE10, significant 'settlements' whose potential growth in the future could threaten the 'important open gaps' with essentially 'open or rural character' between them and Harwell Village.

Other Planning Authorities use this sort of approach to designate specific distances and dimensions of rural gap to safeguard villages against coalescence with an expanding neighbouring town.

For example, Bedford Borough Council's Allocations and Designations Local Plan July 2013 Section 15.6 covers the topic of coalescence between settlements. This seeks to prevent the coalescence of Bedford with nearby rural settlements by means of Local Gaps via Policy AD42 on page 97/Section 15.7.¹

Another example is East Staffordshire Borough Council's Strategic Green Gaps Topic Paper September 2013. This seeks to prevent the coalescence of Burton-upon-Trent and Uttoxeter with surrounding villages by designating specific Strategic Green Gap areas.²

To protect its rural character and separate identity, the rural gap around Harwell Village should be that indicated by the hatched area on Figure 1, which represents a revised section of the proposals map to accompany Policy NE10.

An important component of preserving a rural gap between Harwell and Didcot is that there should be an impression of a natural green corridor along the B4493 to the east of the A34, between the A34 bridge and the edge of Great Western Park. This would significantly

¹ See

<http://edrms.bedford.gov.uk/OpenDocument.aspx?id=20ZDDprsHXZ1W7QI5noNVw%3d%3d&name=Allocations%20and%20Designations%20Local%20Plan%202013%20INTERACTIVE.pdf>

² See www.eaststaffsbc.gov.uk/filedepot_download/51226/520

reduce the urban impact of Valley Park on Harwell. This is included in Figure 1. Note that the plans for Valley Park extend up to the A34 from the east and Harwell village houses extend almost up the A34 from the west. It is therefore inappropriate and inadequate to rely on a trunk road (the A34) to provide the only separation between what is supposed to be a rural area (Harwell Village) and a decidedly urban area (Didcot, and its extensions of Great Western Park and Valley Park).

Apart from this essential green corridor, the boundaries of the whole hatched area are defined by:

- In other areas on the east, the A34;
- In the west and north, the boundaries of Harwell Parish, which in the west runs along the A4130/A4185. These mark areas of farmland that would traditionally have been regarded as 'Harwell';
- In the south, the Icknield Way. This is at the top of a rise out of Harwell Village, so protecting the slopes up to it would prevent new development on the AONB on these slopes.

Figure 1

