

Council's Opening Statement

Vale of White Horse District Council

Local Plan 2031 Part 1

Examination in Public – Stage 1

Tuesday 22 September 2015

Welcome

- 1.1 Good morning. My name is Matthew Barber and I am the Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council.
- 1.2 I would like to welcome you Sir, all the participants around the table and members of the public who are observing today, to the first day of the Examination in Public for our Local Plan 2031 Part 1 and I hope that you will find the forthcoming discussions both helpful and constructive.
- 1.3 The District Council is pleased to be here today and to be given the opportunity to discuss matters raised by the Inspector to our emerging local plan. To do this, my staff, Sophie Horsley, Planning Policy Manager, Wendy Hague, Planning Policy Project Lead, our Senior Planning Policy Officers Andrew Maxted and Clare Roberts, and Ronan Leydon, our Planning Policy Officer are here to lead on matters on behalf of the council. They will be joined throughout the proceedings by Simon Bird (QC), other members of staff and consultants who have prepared a range of evidence which have informed important elements of the plan.

Local Plan - The Journey

- 1.4 The journey which the council has taken up to this date has been a long one. It has been close to eight years since the council first consulted on its Issues and Options, back in November 2007, as part of the review of the existing Local Plan 2011. Further consultations on our preferred options and

additional options took place in 2009 and 2010 respectively, before the first complete draft Local Plan was consulted on in February 2013.

- 1.5 An additional consultation, the “Housing Delivery Update” took place in February 2014 in response to the Strategic Housing Market Assessment for Oxfordshire. It concluded that significant additional housing was required for the period up to 2031, to support strong planned economic growth within Science Vale, and to meet the Objectively Assessed Needs of the district. This is unwelcome by many and challenging for all.
- 1.6 The publication version of the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 was consulted on late in 2014 prior to it being submitted to the Secretary of State in March 2015 for examination.
- 1.7 Eight years is a long time to prepare, governments have changed, the law has changed, and national policy and guidance have also changed, all of which we have had to accommodate.
- 1.8 The journey has not been easy. Throughout these past eight years, there have been tough decisions made at all levels, in cooperation with a wide range of authorities and bodies, none more so than by the elected members of the council.

Our Challenge

- 1.9 The Local Plan has been prepared at a time of challenge and opportunity for Vale of White Horse District Council. The Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), produced by the Local Enterprise Partnership, has set the stage for transformational change in Oxfordshire. It focuses on our unique economic assets, in academia and ‘big science’ across Science Vale and it sets an ambition to place Oxfordshire at the forefront of the UK’s global growth ambitions by 2030.

- 1.10 We are here today to deliver the government's ambition for economic growth, building on our strengths, and to play a key role in making Oxfordshire successful as a place to live and work. Through our local plan we will ensure that economic and housing growth in our district is delivered in a timely and co-ordinated manner alongside the provision of infrastructure, services and community facilities.

Growth

- 1.11 The Council has a responsibility to unlock growth in a way that benefits existing and future residents of Vale, Oxfordshire and the nation. The district is proud to be home to two internationally important employment areas, Harwell Science and Innovation Campus and Milton Science and Business Park both designated Enterprise Zones in 2012. Harwell campus houses over £1 billion of world-leading research facilities, and Milton Park has one of the biggest bio-science clusters in the UK. Between them the two sites employ over 11,000 people in circa 500 organisations specialising in:
- Space and satellite applications
 - Life sciences and healthcare
 - Big data and supercomputing
 - Energy and environment
 - Advanced engineering and materials

The designation of Enterprise Zone status in 2012 for these two sites is testament to the support given by Government to growth in Science Vale, and the designation is intended to last until 2037/38, beyond the period of our local plan

- 1.12 Supporting these key sites is a wide range of strategic and non-strategic employment land capable of accommodating all forms of business right across the district. This maximises the ability for the district to support growth while still allowing sufficient flexibility to support the rural economies also.

Housing Delivery

- 1.13 The Local Plan seeks to deliver, in full, the housing needs of the district within its boundaries. It steps up to the mark, responding to the challenge of addressing the shortfall of past years while meeting the needs of future generations also, and in a manner that maximises the ability to deliver this in the plan period.
- 1.14 The council has consistently lacked a housing land supply since 2012. That has been long enough. The housing needs of the district have grown significantly and it is more important than ever that it is addressed as soon as possible in a sustainable way.
- 1.15 A small portion of the housing need, about five per cent, remains to be identified. In the spirit of localism we are making this available to those who wish to prepare neighbourhood plans, to enable growth where local demand remains within communities. The remaining need will also be addressed through Local Plan 2031 Part 2.

Infrastructure

- 1.16 Fundamental to sustainable growth, is the timely provision of infrastructure. The Council considers that the infrastructure required to deliver Local Plan has been identified, assessed, prioritised and costed as far as it can be at this stage. In view of our commitment to growth, this requirement remains significant, but is achievable and deliverable. It is imperative that infrastructure to support growth is implemented in a controlled, phased manner.
- 1.17 Accompanying the Local Plan is our Infrastructure Delivery Plan - a living factual document that will monitor infrastructure requirements and provision, identify any shortfall, prioritise spend and focus bids for external funding. The adoption of the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 will be followed closely by the Examination of our Community Infrastructure Levy. This will provide greater

clarity to developers, and to our community on how much each scheme will contribute towards the necessary infrastructure.

Collaboration

- 1.18 Vale of White Horse District Council has engaged actively, constructively and on an ongoing basis with the community, statutory bodies, prescribed bodies, neighbouring authorities and key stakeholders throughout the journey of the local plan.
- 1.19 While the local plan seeks to accommodate the needs of the district in full, it recognises and accepts that Oxford City are unable to meet their own needs. The Vale of White Horse District Council, through the Oxfordshire Growth Board and supporting processes, will continue to cooperate proactively to ensure the unmet need is addressed; a process which is ongoing and needs to be robust, transparent and sustainable for the whole of the county. Indeed we have recently started the process through our own Council and Scrutiny processes to plan for the various post-SHMA scenarios, looking at how best to accommodate Oxford's unmet need.
- 1.20 The local plan commits to this process to ensure that the resulting outcomes are effective and deliverable, and consistent with the approach adopted by other local planning authorities in the area.

We recognise through the collaborative process that some matters remain outstanding, and it is our intention to discuss these proactively through the upcoming sessions

- 1.21 In short we believe that our Local Plan 2031 Part 1 presents a sound, deliverable and sustainable blueprint for development in our district, balancing the competing priorities of economic growth, environmental protection, infrastructure provision and community concerns.
- 1.22 That, Sir concludes the Council's introductory statement.