

## Comment

Consultee	Mr Ian Page (872051)
Email Address	[REDACTED]
Address	Cross House Church Hill Chilton OX11 0SH
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**Q1 Do you consider the Local Plan is Legally Compliant?** Yes

**Q2 Do you consider the Local Plan is Sound (positively prepared, effective and Justified)** No

**If your comment(s) relate to a specific site within a core policy please select this from the drop down list.** N/A

If you think your comment relates to the DtC, this is about how we have worked with the Duty to Cooperate bodies (such as neighbouring planning authorities)

**Q3 Do you consider the Local Plan complies with the Duty to Co-operate?** Yes

**Q4 Please give details of why you consider the Local Plan is not legally compliant or is unsound or fails to comply with the duty to co-operate. Please be as precise as possible. If you wish to support the legal compliance or soundness of the Local Plan or its compliance with the duty to co-operate, please also use this box to set out your comments.**

Paragraph 6.113: ?Core Policy 44 will be applied using the most up-to-date landscape studies available from Natural England, the District and County Council, and from the North Wessex Downs AONB Board. These include: National character Areas, Vale of White Horse Landscape Strategy 2006, the

Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study, Oxfordshire Historic Landscape Characterisation, and documents produced by the North Wessex Downs AONB Board such as the AONB Landscape Character Assessment. Reference should also be made to the Council's Design Guide SPD. The LANDSCAPE & VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT FOR PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT SITE - EAST HARWELL CONTINGENCY SITE 17, CHILTON ON BEHALF OF NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY, WHLANDSCAPE Consultancy Ltd. March 2014 states the following: 3.3.2 As a result of the moderately deep and fertile soils, the land within the general location has been graded 2 according to the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC), which indicates that the land is of high agricultural quality. 3.7.6 (Extracts from): Of particular importance to the assessment of the suitability of the site for development are the key management requirements which are as follows: The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet, rural character of the Hendred Plain, which provides a transition between the Vale of White Horse and the high downs. Particular consideration should be given to the impact of new development on the boundary of the AONB (at Harwell and Wantage) on the character of this part of the North Wessex Downs and views from this area. 3.8.3 The NPPF is clear about the selection of suitable sites for development and states at paragraph 110: In preparing plans to meet development needs, the aim should be to minimise pollution and other adverse effects on the local and natural environment. 3.8.7 It is also incumbent on the Local Authority to take account of Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 which states: In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty. A relevant authority for the purposes of this section includes...3(a) Any public body includes a county council, borough council, district council. 3.9.2 (Extract from): It was identified that there would be extensive local views into the site from the surrounding road and PRow network but that landform and vegetation cover would rapidly reduce these to the northeast and west. However, there would be extensive long, open views into the site from the scarp and Ridgeway on the high chalk downland to the south. It was also identified that all significant views into the site were likely to be located within the North Wessex Downs AONB. This is largely as a result of the open arable nature of the site and the gentle south facing slope towards the downland scarp.

4.2.3 Therefore, in the case of residential development at East Harwell it is clearly demonstrated that the development is of a large scale and would be difficult to integrate into AONB landscape without significant and irreversible changes to the landscape and visual character of the area and the AONB. Given the factors discussed above, the actual ZVI (that is, with trees and buildings given due consideration) is unlikely to be appreciably different from the theoretical ZVI. Therefore, the calculated ZVI indicates that the development of East Harwell will potentially have a significant impact on the intrinsic natural beauty, character and appearance of the AONB as a whole. RECEPTOR: LOCAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA It is a comparatively small area but has a very distinct character forming a transition between the high downs and the clay lowlands of the Vale of White Horse. The site forms an important open landscape between the Harwell Campus, Harwell village and urban Didcot. RECEPTOR: NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY The site falls entirely within the AONB, a high value landscape of high sensitivity. It does not comply with the stated aims of the AONB, AONB guidance and policy, or Vale of White Horse Core Policy 34 relating to the protection of the AONB. RECEPTOR: STRATEGIC RIGHTS OF WAY The Icknield Way regional cycle path passes through the site. The Ridgeway National Trail is located a short distance to the south. Both of these strategic rights of way are of high value and are located within open landscapes of high value. The characteristics of The Icknield Way will change from open landscape to urban through the development of the site. The Ridgeway will not be directly affected, but there will be an indirect urbanisation of the landscape context in which the route is located. 5.2 SUMMARY OF LANDSCAPE IMPACTS 5.2.1 (Extract from): The site is a characteristic of the Hendred Plain Landscape Character Area and is entirely within the North Wessex Downs AONB. The proposed development of East Harwell will be out of scale with the small scale developments in the surrounding villages. 5.2.2 (Extract from): The Icknield Way is a popular cycle route that runs east to west through East Harwell within a highly characteristic open and expansive landscape. Development of the site will result in the loss of the open character and the route running through an urban area.

5.2.2 Overall, the landscape impact of the proposed development will be Major Negative. In landscape terms, the potential residential development of East Harwell will have significant and irreversible Negative Impacts. This conclusion is commensurate with the findings of the Vale of White Horse District Council Landscape Capacity Study. 6.4 The above disregards the Significant

Negative impacts identified with a major development in the AONB. In the justification, there is nothing more than a 'consideration' that the benefits of providing housing next to the Harwell Campus outweigh the Negative Impacts on the AONB. This is not a structured justification and should not override the AONB designation. The justification makes no reference to the loss of high quality agricultural land, which should also have been taken into consideration. The proposed site fails to comply with Core Policy 34 in that it ignores the AONB Management Plan, Integrated Landscape Character Assessment, and the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study. It also disregards the recommendations of their own Landscape Capacity Study which states: It is recommended that no part of this site is considered further as a contingency site on landscape and visual grounds. The capacity of Site 17 is determined by the need: (1) to avoid impact on views from the AONB, particularly from the Ridgeway footpath; (2) to avoid loss of open character and visual separation between Harwell Campus and Didcot. Furthermore, little consideration appears to have been given to the flora and fauna of the site, apart from noting that bee-orchids and white helleborine are present (URS SA Report Appendix 14). No mention is made that the site supports skylarks, which have been observed during the breeding season 2014 (April to early August). Skylarks are presently on the Red List of threatened bird species and are in dramatic decline. The UK population has halved during the 1990s and declined by 75% between 1972 and 1996 (Figures: RSPB). They are birds of farmland and open countryside with specific habitat requirements in order to breed successfully. They are not capable of adapting to a developed or residential environment and no amount of mitigating planting schemes can compensate for destruction of natural habitat. Loss of this arable farmland can only have a further detrimental effect upon skylark numbers. Therefore, the Local Plan does not comply with Paragraph 6.113, or Paragraph 115 of the NPPF and is unsound.

**Q5 Please set out what modification(s) you consider necessary to make the Local Plan legally compliant or sound, having regard to the test you have identified above where this relates to soundness. (NB Please note that any non-compliance with the duty to co-operate is incapable of modification at examination). You will need to say why this modification will make the Local Plan legally compliant or sound. It will be helpful if you are able to put forward your suggested revised wording of any policy or text. Please be as precise as possible.**

In order to make the Local Plan sound and legally compliant, the following modifications are necessary: ? Remove the entire allocation of 850 homes from the Harwell East Campus. ? Remove the additional allocation of 150 homes from the North West Harwell Campus (eg reduce the number of houses from 550 to 400( including the 125 already given outline permission)). ? Include provision of up to 400 new homes at the North West Harwell Campus( including the 125 already given outline permission), provided that all development is contained within the perimeter of the Harwell Oxford Campus and is controlled by the Harwell Oxford Campus. ? Reallocate the 850 homes from the Harwell East Campus and the additional 150 houses from the North West Harwell Campus (1,000 houses in total) to other sites already identified by the Vale of White Horse, for example: ? (a) Valley Park (which has already been assessed as having additional capacity for up to a further 1,200 homes) ? (b) Didcot A (capacity for 425 houses), or ? (c) Rowstock (capacity for 515 houses), or ? (d) Land West of Steventon (capacity for 350 houses), or ? (e) Distributed throughout the West Vale in order to encourage and support economic growth and prosperity more equally across the district. ? Or reduce the total SHMA allocation for the District by 1000 ? Remove the North Wessex Downs AONB entirely from the Science Vale ?Ringfence? in order to protect it from future speculative development should the Science Vale fall behind in delivery of its housing targets.

**Please note** your representation should cover succinctly all the information, evidence and supporting information necessary to support/justify the representation and the suggested modification, as there will not normally be a subsequent opportunity to make further representations based on the original representation at publication stage.

**After this stage, further submissions will be only at the request of the Inspector, based on the matters and issues he/she identifies for examination.**

**Q6 If your representation is seeking a modification, do you consider it necessary to participate at the oral part of the examination?** No - I do not wish to participate at the oral examination