

## Vale of White Horse Draft Local Plan 2031 (“the Plan”)

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### 1. Introduction

- 1.01 I am a town and country planner with 40 years experience of working in the public, private and voluntary sectors. Representations were made on previous consultations carried out in the preparation of the Plan but there is no evidence that these have had any impact on the content of the latest draft. The following representations continue to make the case that the Plan fails to adequately define and then plan for sustainable development. The following detailed analysis of the Plan is required to understand not just what has gone wrong but why, and to consider what changes to the approach and to the Plan might be required to make it sound. These objections include innumerable points made during the preparation of the Plan to which have been rejected without any adequate or intelligible reasons.
- 1.02 The failure to adequately plan for sustainable development should result in the Plan being found **unsound** for the following reasons:
- The plan not been **positively prepared** as sustainable development is more likely to occur in spite of the Plan rather than due to its policies.
  - The Plan does not include a strategy which seeks to meet **objectively assessed requirements** of the Climate Change Act and the related carbon reduction budgets.
  - The plan is not **justified** because it is not based on the logical implications of the Climate Change Act for the development of land and buildings over the next 15 years.
  - The Plan is not based on **robust and credible evidence** that relates to the necessary reduction in carbon emissions from existing land and buildings as well as all new development.
  - The document will not be **effective** due to the failure to understand the repercussions of the statutory and advisory carbon reduction targets.
  - The development supported by the Plan will not be **deliverable** in accordance with the criteria in the Plan. Development would need to accord with other criteria in order to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.
  - The Plan is not **flexible** in the sense that it would need substantial change to be contributing to the achievement of sustainable development.<sup>1</sup>
  - It would not be possible to **monitor** the contribution it is making to the achievement of sustainable development as it lacks the necessary criteria (eg carbon reduction targets and rates) to carry out that fundamental exercise
  - The Plan is not consistent with **national policy** in respect of carbon reductions or the **Climate Change Act** (see NPPF paras 14 and 94).

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<sup>1</sup> S.39 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

- 1.03 This paper considers the proposed policies and supporting text and describes where the Plan fails to provide a ‘..proactive strategy to mitigate and adapt to climate change.’<sup>2</sup> A development plan for a period during which carbon emissions must be reduced by at least 6% every year (the Tyndall estimate is 8% to 10% if starting now) is very different from any previous plan. The necessary scale of carbon reductions imposes an obligation on the Plan to include a proactive strategy which demonstrates how all the new development being proposed can be used to make both new and existing development more sustainable.
- 1.04 Just on the question of the objectively assessed need for new housing, a paper was produced on the SHMA which explains why this should be only one part of such an assessment in terms of both the number of dwellings and the type which are needed as part of a programme of sustainable development. This must include a strategy which addresses the unsustainable level of under-occupation of the existing housing stock and prevents the building of further uncaring, unneighbourly and unsocial residential areas.
- 1.05 A public meeting was held by the LPA on 19 November 2014 to explain the strategy set out in the Plan and answer questions. The question was put as to **whether either the LPA or its Local Plan was in any way responsible for ensuring that the proposed 40% growth in jobs and housing (and associated infrastructure) would comply with the law (Climate Change Act 2008) and policy (NPPF para 94) that require carbon emissions from new and existing development to decrease by between 50% and 60% during the Plan period?** Although there was a professional officer present, the following answer was given by the Cabinet member for Planning Policy:
- neither the Plan nor the District Council are immune from having to deal with these targets,
  - it is doubtful that the UK will meet its EU obligations,
  - The locational strategy (eg larger villages and Green Belt sites) would reduce emissions.

It seems that at least in respect of sustainable development the Plan is ‘owned’ and to be defended by the politicians rather than a technical document to be explained and justified by the professional officers. ‘Sustainable development’ is not a term to be found in the Foreword signed off by the councilors nor in any of the promotional material. It seems that the council(lors) has/have taken the view that carbon reductions targets are very unlikely to be achieved, and it would be unrealistic to expect the Plan to reflect or help achieve the reduction of carbon emissions required by law and policy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Para 94 of NPPF

<sup>3</sup> The Councillor added that Didcot A should have continued to burn bio-mass (showing a deep lack of understanding of carbon accounting) and was not apparently aware that the Plan should reflect the

- 1.06 Clearly the Council will not accept this portrayal of its position. However, the following analysis of the Plan shows that it has succumbed to the rhetoric of economic growth and lacks the necessary ambition to achieve Government carbon reduction targets despite there being proven ways of constructing carbon negative buildings, effecting a modal shift to low carbon transport and localizing and de-carbonising the food chain. It would be contrary to both the CCA 2008 and the NPPF to find a Plan to be sound that has been prepared on the premise that such targets are unattainable. The Council should be required to reconsider the way in which jobs and homes might be created to assist in the creation of a low carbon economy.
- 1.07 In contrast, the Environmental Change Institute has responded to the prospect of 100.00 new homes in the County by explaining how these could contribute and actually drive the process of change to a low carbon economy.<sup>4</sup> And in recent research into the attitudes of young people, the most popular Narrative was.
- “Climate Change is here and now - Climate change isn’t a problem for the future, it’s happening now. Current generations are going to have to live with its consequences but are also the ones who can take the lead in getting to grips with it. We need to de-carbonise the economy, starting with the power sector, and keep global temperatures within the ‘2 degrees ’target to avoid the worst consequences of climate change.”<sup>5</sup>
- Those responsible for producing the Plan appear to be out of touch with what experts regard as feasible, what is necessary, what is statutorily required, and actually what people want.
- 1.08 Comments on the Design Guide the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and CIL Schedule are attached.

## **2. Analysis and objections**

2.01 Foreword - '...based on the very latest evidence.' , but not apparently the IPCC synthesis report published in October 2014 (or the UK 4th Carbon Budget, the 2011 Carbon Plan or RTPI Future Horizons 2014). ‘...Providing more houses will help make housing more affordable’. Having made this claim, the examination of the Plan must establish where the evidence is for this assertion? And what the impact is expected to be, so that it can be monitored (see test of soundness).

2.02 The Foreword to makes no reference to the presumption in favour of sustainable development that para 14 of the PPF says should be a golden

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UK carbon reduction targets in the 2011 Carbon Plan and 4<sup>th</sup> Carbon Budget which are more challenging than those agreed in the EU.

<sup>4</sup> Oxfordshire’s low carbon economy [Environmental Change Institute](#) 2014

<sup>5</sup> *Young voices; How do 18 to 25 year olds engage with climate change?* 2014 Climate Outreach Information Network

thread running through plan, an omission which might explain the failure of the Plan to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The leaflet delivered to all households is titled “supporting growth in the Vale”. There is no mention of how growth could be made sustainable or how carbon emissions from both new and existing development are to be reduced.

2.03 In the Introduction refers to the ‘objectively assessed housing need in the SHMA’. The actual numbers of dwellings is only one of the factors to be taken into account in assessing housing need and ensuring development is sustainable. Adopting the approach set out in the Plan would give rise to more housing needs and increase carbon emissions. The SHMA failed to properly identify sustainable forms of housing and based its figure on a level of economic/employment growth that, without improvements to the infrastructure that have not yet been identified, would make the district less sustainable for both existing and new residents and businesses.

2.04 In ‘Core policy 1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development:’ the Plan has chosen to replicate the wording from the NPPF. As written the policy would only be relying on the expectation that development in accordance with the Plan would be sustainable. However, that would simply not be the case unless the policies are much more closely related to the need to reduce carbon emissions by the 6% every year that is now necessary to comply with the Climate Change Act. Any delay will require reductions closer to the current estimate of the Tyndall Institute of 8% to 10%. Without specific reference to these figures, and the requirement of applications to demonstrate this level of reduction (possibly through an Energy Assessment), it would not be possible to know whether developments would be in accordance with this Core Policy. Incidentally the Plan policies, in less easily measured respects, would also fail to achieve social and economic sustainability (eg see comments below on local food, social care and affordability).

2.05 As worded, Core Policy 1 also implies that the Plan will become out of date when, with timely reviews, that should never be the case. To operationalise the ‘presumption’ in the NPPF the Core Policy should start by saying that that all applications must include the information necessary to establish that it would represent sustainable development. Developments that cannot show that they will be sustainable will be refused (‘normally’ is unnecessary due to the effect of s38(6)). This Core Policy should also require development proposals to demonstrate how new houses or employment would make the whole District more sustainable.

2.06 The Bruntland definition included in the NPPF (para 5) and referred to in the Plan, has been interpreted by an inspector as the need for development to “consume its own smoke”<sup>6</sup> if future generations are not to be disadvantaged.<sup>7</sup> However, the Plan starts with a false dichotomy at para 1.14 suggesting that, ‘this means that we should consider the long-term

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<sup>6</sup> APP/N2345/A/12/2169598

<sup>7</sup> It should not have to be said that any ‘smoke’ that is not consumed will impact on and have to be treated by future generations, contrary to the NPPF definition of sustainable development.

consequences of development alongside our short-term priorities.’<sup>8</sup> In fact, carbon reductions must be made a short term priority given impacts that are already being felt at 0.5 degrees of warming, and the very limited window available to prevent GHG emissions causing more than 2 degrees of warming (and associated more frequent and extreme weather events). Reductions that this (and all other) local plan should be securing in the short term are far more effective and important than those which might be achieved in the longer term. There is no convincing evidence that development in accordance with the Plan will reduce and not actually increase carbon emissions (eg new building, new roads, more congestion, high carbon food).

2.07 At para 1.23 the Plan repeats the terms “objectively assess need “ without any apparent questioning of the evidence on which the Plan is based. In fact, the SHMA expressly based a figure of “need” on the Local Enterprise Partnership guess as to what might happen to the Oxfordshire economy. It also confused demands, requirements and needs and made some insupportable assumptions about downsizing and upsizing as well as owning up to an inadequate understanding of self/custom building, which has become a Government priority. Importantly, neither the LEP nor the SHMA have taken into account the real difficulties in providing the infrastructure that would allow growth to take place without increasing congestion to levels which would make the area less sustainable for both new and existing residents and businesses. The SHMA is not ‘objective’ and is only one of the sources of information on which housing need within the District should be assessed.

2.08 ‘Key challenges and opportunities:’ includes “2.8 facilitate the right type of housing in the most sustainable locations... Meeting the needs of our rural areas... Supporting some development across the rural areas to retain and enhance services to help improve the vitality and sustainability of our rural communities.” The first ‘challenge’, which is completely missed, is the unsustainable level of under-occupation across the District. Nearly 80% of houses have 1 and more often 2 and sometimes more spare bedrooms. The chronic shortage of attractive downsizing options is a financial burden to those in the social housing sector (due to the bedroom tax), but is also the most unsustainable characteristic of the owner-occupied sector – where under-occupation is most prevalent. If the need to balance the size of households with houses is not faced head on by the Plan, housing in the District will reproduce this pattern and will never be sustainable. Building larger houses will continue to create a demand and need for smaller houses and make downsizing no easier. The Plan should provide the framework for requiring new housing to meet and not create such needs.

2.09 While it might not be right to prevent development in rural settlements, there should be a clear statement that any substantial development (many villages will have allocations in the Local Plan or NDPs of 200+ dwellings) would need to make very substantial contributions to physical infrastructure to

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<sup>8</sup> This reflects statements made by the councillor responsible for the Plan referred to at para 1.05 above.

benefit from the presumption in favour of sustainable development (see comments above on Core Policy 1).

2.10 Para 2.13 states that, “It is important that growth across the district effectively addresses any highway constraints and helps to deliver a shift towards more sustainable modes of travel.” A sound Plan must include effective policies and not pious words. There is no evidence that substantial contributions to public transport will be required from new developments and these are not currently included in the CIL schedule.

2.11 It is inaccurate and misleading to have the objective of, “Maintaining the very good bus services, particularly between the main settlements”. This could not have been written with reliable information about the current situation on the Premium Route between Oxford – Abingdon – Didcot. Thames Travel would confirm that this is currently proving almost impossible to operate to any reasonable standard, partly but not only due to congestion in Abingdon and Oxford. This is a crucial route and fundamental to both the objective of the Plan to reduce car dependency and to preventing new development making the area even less sustainable for existing residents and businesses. The statement would have more truth if the area being considered excluded Drayton and Steventon, but actually the precarious nature of the A34 is a factor that also affects Abingdon.

2.12 Fig 5.6c shows a service of 15 mins between Milton Park and Abingdon. This is twice the level of the existing service (that requires public subsidy at weekends and evenings) which struggles to maintain a 30min service. Increasing the frequency will require substantial funding but is unlikely to be achieved with the existing congestion which is occurring even before the projected growth in houses and jobs. A sound Plan would set out the measures that will achieve the remarkable modal shift implied by this objective. Developer funded car clubs and rigorously enforced travel plans for all new commercial developments, Park and Ride facilities on the A34 at Milton Heights and Abingdon to serve Oxford and Milton/Harwell, and a comprehensive cycle network all have the potential to make the transport system more sustainable and meet transport carbon reduction budgets, but have not even been considered in the production of this Plan.

2.13 “Ensuring that employment and housing growth is located to reduce the need to travel by car and encourage walking and cycling for short journeys”. A development plan should comprise firm policies and not warm words. There are no policies in the current Plan that would suggest any modal shift would take place. This is particularly so given the significant number of allocations in car dependent rural areas without a firm commitment/requirement to improving either the facilities or the bus services.

2.14 “Supporting improvements to public transport, cycling and walking to provide attractive alternatives to travelling by car and to help minimise traffic congestion, particularly between the district’s main employment and service centres.” This again implicates the Thames Travel services to the south of

Abingdon that cannot operate efficiently and offer an alternative to the car because of **existing** levels of congestion.

2.15 The provision of new road infrastructure will encourage even more car use and reduce the incentives to use buses and bicycles. This is a fundamental inconsistency with the objectives of the Plan and with the Climate Change Act and associated carbon reduction budgets. People living in rural areas without a car are dependent on bus services which are being made inefficient and unsustainable due to the existing level of car use, congestion, and the progressive removal of subsidies due to public spending cuts.

2.16 There is a Vision that, “High design and environmental standards will have been achieved through new development, which will be resilient to the likely impacts of climate change.” This implies that, having not done sufficient to mitigate GHG emissions, the LPA has some understanding of both ‘resilience’ and the likely consequences of over 2 degrees of warming. However, this level of understanding is not evident in the Plan which is silent on what is implied by resilience and what extreme weather conditions will mean across the District?

2.17 “SO 1: Provide for a range of homes across the district to deliver choice and competition in the housing market and to meet the identified need, including for affordable housing.” This strategic objective needs to be set in the context of the unsustainable level of under-occupation across the District. It should also acknowledge the ‘choice’ should include self-building and co-housing for which registers should be kept.<sup>9</sup> An assumption has been made that 35% of the houses built on strategic sites would be sufficient to meet the need for affordable housing. The Plan does not refer to fact that most of these houses are only affordable due to subsidising the demand (eg Help to Buy) and/or Government grant to Registered Providers and housing benefit. The Plan should concentrate on making these houses genuinely affordable that implies a greater understanding of the contribution land prices make to the costs of housing delivery.<sup>10</sup>

2.18 “SO 4: Improve the health and well-being of Vale residents, reduce inequality, poverty and social exclusion and improve the safety of the Vale as a district where everyone can feel safe and enjoy life.” Unlike the reduction in carbon emissions, this objective might be more than could reasonably be expected of a development plan. However, at least the power to reduce inequality by addressing affordability and the imbalance between the size of houses and households could be exercised through the Plan.

2.19 “SO 8: Reduce the need to travel and promote sustainable modes of

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<sup>9</sup> The VWHDC has committed itself to starting a register of self-builders in line with South Oxfordshire DC and the recent Government consultation Right to Build

<sup>10</sup> The report on CIL provides a useful analysis of affordability and land costs but the Plan fails to adequately address this problem or show that the issue of genuine affordable housing (ie without public subsidy) has been understood.

Transport.” There are no effective policies in the Plan that show how this objective is to be achieved. The CIL and grants are being invested in road schemes but not to improve public transport. No reference is being made to developer funded ULEV car clubs through s106 obligations placed on developments that, unmitigated, will otherwise make congestion and GHG emissions even worse. The draft National Planning Policy Statement on Transport suggested:

While, considered in isolation, individual schemes may result in an increase in CO2 emissions, the Government’s overarching plan for reducing carbon emissions will ensure that any such increases do not compromise its overall CO2 reduction commitments. Increases in carbon emissions from a development should not therefore need to be considered by the Examining Authority and the Secretary of State.

However, this remains a draft (to which little or no weight should be given) and there are no ‘overarching’ proposals either from the DfT or the LPA to suggest that GHG emissions from transport are going anywhere but up, without intervention by the LPA in the granting of planning permissions. The Government is relying on the 2011 Carbon Plan that requires the transport sector to be heading for zero carbon by 2040 that will in practice require substantial reductions at local level that will need to be achieved through the Plan.

2.20 “SO 12: Minimise greenhouse gas emissions and other pollution (such as water, air, noise and light) across the district and increase our resilience to likely impacts of climate change, especially flooding.” While the objective to “minimise” is clearly desirable it is also unrealistic and problematic in application and monitoring. It would be much better to find in the Plan an objective that all applications for new developments must include the information that demonstrates it will be carbon neutral (ie ‘consume its own smoke’ as per Brundtland and the NPPF) which should include ‘allowable solutions’, post occupation evaluations and criteria for monitoring purposes.

2.21 In considering the ‘Settlement hierarchy:’ the Plan directs, “...growth to towns and larger villages...[which]... will help to ensure the delivery of sustainable development because: these settlements provide the best range of services and facilities and new development will help to support and enhance them - locating new homes in the communities with the best services and facilities will enable the residents in the new homes to access them by walking, cycling and public transport, so reducing the need to travel by car - it will enable more affordable homes to be built where there is most need, and...”. It is a choice being made by the LPA to support significant growth in larger villages. However, there should be no pretence and, importantly for the test of soundness, there is no evidence that this strategy will be sustainable in terms of reducing the very high level of car dependency in these areas. This strategy would only be ‘sustainable’ if there were also some very prescriptive policies in terms of very greatly enhanced facilities and workplaces, developer funded low carbon car clubs and substantial contributions to public transport. Conditioning development in these ways is not unrealistic but absolutely necessary to start to benefit from the



presumption in favour of sustainable development and grounded in a sound local plan.

2.22 There are no policies in the Plan that will enable the housing needs of larger villages to be met throughout the whole of the Plan period. 90% of village residents want to move within their village (compared to 20% within towns)<sup>11</sup>. This need could be met by requiring the phasing of the larger sites or between sites in villages (inc those being promoted through neighbourhood plans, the planning applications for which will be determined by the LPA). To meet local needs the Plan would also need to require the larger sites in villages to meet the need identified in 'local housing needs surveys' that would have previously been located on 'exception sites'. This will require a special level of discounting of the land value to make these dwellings affordable to the local people identified through these surveys. By not conflating or combining these 'exception sites' with rural allocations the Plan is ignoring the evidence contained in these surveys that will inevitably lead to support for developments on even less suitable sites around villages.

2.23 "4.15 The scale of development on these strategic sites will enable infrastructure to be provided that offers wider benefits to their local areas." It is necessary for a sound Plan to ensure that the level of housing and job growth in the District will finance the infrastructure necessary to reduce congestion, increase the reliability of the bus services and make the area more rather than less sustainable. The Plan should include the criteria against which this objective could be tested. The ONS figure for under-occupation in the District is available to measure progress on the more efficient use of the existing and new housing stock and the bus companies have records of the frequency and reliability of their services so as to benchmark changes during the plan period.

2.24 Under the Spatial Strategy it seems that most of the jobs are expected to be at Harwell and Milton Park. In terms of low carbon travel this would seem to overlook the potential of Culham Station (just outside the District) which could service significant areas of brownfield land adjacent to the JET and the Culham science park? It would also be a simple matter to measure and monitor the use of commuting by bus and train. Such a facility could act a park and ride to Oxford/Birmingham and Reading and London for Abingdon residents.

2.25 It might seem to be insignificant in the context of the projections for jobs in Science Vale, but the SHMA predicted (objectively assessed?) a significant need for housing associated with a growth in agricultural employment. If accepted as part of the evidence base for this Plan then there should be a policy in the Plan. A sound Plan would make it clear that these new agricultural dwellings should be located in sustainable locations (ie on the edge of villages and not in the open countryside), probably reserved as part of

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<sup>11</sup> When asked, 9 out of 10 people living in the countryside said that they would prefer to stay where they are, compared to urban areas where only 2 in 10 people stated that they wanted to stay – and half reported a desire to move to the countryside. (The Taylor Review p34 [http://www.wensumalliance.org.uk/publications/Taylor\\_Review\\_Livingworkingcountryside.pdf](http://www.wensumalliance.org.uk/publications/Taylor_Review_Livingworkingcountryside.pdf))

residential allocations in villages. This would be consistent with the encouragement given to local food production in the draft Design Guide.<sup>12</sup>

2.26 “4.42. Any new development increases the use of, or demand for, existing services and facilities. Where new homes or jobs are developed and there is insufficient capacity to meet additional demand it is essential that new facilities and infrastructure are provided to meet the demand created.” That should be case, but the Plan would need to require village services and employment opportunities to be substantially improved to make rural locations sustainable. Drayton School needs to be added to the list of facilities to be financed through CIL as the small proportion made available to the Parish Council would be insufficient.

2.27 “4.47. The requirement to provide new or enhanced infrastructure must not be so onerous as to render development unviable, taking into account other policy requirements such as affordable housing provision. For this reason an independent viability study has been carried out to inform this strategy and the draft IDP45”. And Core Policy 7 states that, “...If infrastructure requirements could render the development unviable, proposals for major development should be supported by an independent viability assessment on terms agreed by the relevant parties including the Council and County Council, and funded by the developer. This will involve an open book approach.” The Plan should note that viability is important but actually the only presumption in the NPPF is in favour of sustainable development. This places an onus on the Plan to deal with sustainability with at least and probably greater thoroughness than that given to viability (see the report commissioned from HDH). On the evidence to the Policies, the Sustainability Appraisal has failed to achieve this.

2.28 The evidence supporting the IDP and levels of CIL was necessary for the production of the Plan, but the economics of land development change very rapidly and are bound to do so during the Plan period. In these circumstances policies should require a general practice of ‘open-book accounting’ not only where there is an obvious shortfall of genuinely affordable and appropriate housing, sustainable housing standards, sufficient infrastructure provision to make a development sustainable etc. (see associated comments on the CIL proposals). The levels of CIL are described as ‘cautious’ as is the level of affordable housing (both lower than neighbouring districts and the levels at which any of the housing developments would be unviable). As very substantial infrastructure improvements in villages (including their bus services and low carbon car clubs) would be necessary to reduce their car dependency and associated carbon emissions, there should only be a minimum necessary profit from these unsustainable developments. It should be explained that these rural allocations (in intrinsically unsustainable locations and not benefiting from the NPPF presumption) are being supported only due to constraints of Green Belt, AONB and flooding potential in more sustainable locations. This would

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<sup>12</sup> A policy on local food relating to the use of land and buildings should be in the Local Plan and not a design guide

justify the maximum financial assistance to make these rural locations more sustainable.

2.29 The vision of 'How the Abingdon-on-Thames and Oxford Fringe Sub-Area will change by 2031:' has a long wish list of objectives but this would be in spite of a Plan that does not include the policies necessary to achieve them. In fact by 2031 there should be at least a 60% reduction in carbon emissions from an area that would by then have grown in houses and jobs by about 40%. Achieving such a reduction would be very surprising in the context of a Plan that lacks credibility by proposing land use policies indistinguishable from those under which the existing unsustainable development (buildings and infrastructure) has taken place over the last 60 years. Not only must these reductions come from the new development, but this new development must be aimed at reducing reductions from existing development (ie public transport, developer funded low carbon car clubs for houses and workplaces, enhanced local food chain, local employment etc) if the Plan is going to contribute to the sustainability of the District.

2.30 Sub Area Strategies: Drayton, Marcham and Steventon (but not Sutton Courtenay?) are included with Abingdon in the Oxford Fringe sub-area described as "5.4. The sub-area is a highly sustainable location for development particularly due to its proximity to the city of Oxford and excellent public transport connectivity." In fact the areas to the south and possibly the west of Abingdon have dire bus services, especially at peak hour when congestion is at its worst. What the Plan describes as 'excellent' bus services to the South and possibly west of Abingdon have to be subsidised at evenings and weekends and are increasingly vulnerable to cuts in public spending. The Plan should acknowledge these fundamental differences from North Abingdon where the services are indeed excellent. The position to the south of Abingdon is so bad that the County Council has been opposed to any major developments (ie more than 20) and is now faced with the 160 houses allowed on appeal to the south of Abingdon. This is a very serious issue for the sustainability of existing, let alone any new development in this area, that should not be ignored by the Plan. This is all set out at 5.32 and 5.33 of the Plan and justifies the absence of strategic sites to the south of Abingdon. In fact a 'strategic site' of 200 dwellings was proposed in Drayton and was only withdrawn when the neighbourhood plan (currently under examination) proposed over 200 houses on three different sites. It would seem that this NDP would not meet the basic condition of compliance with this Local Plan, were it adopted. However, the LPA has accepted the NDP and should/must therefore include policies with which these 200+ dwellings should accord which would make them sustainable in transport terms.

2.31 The A34 itself is notoriously liable to congestion (not only at peak hour) that could render the ambitious growth projections (the residential growth in the SHMA is predicated on the predicted job growth) unlikely to be achieved due to the capacity of the A34. There are substantial new developments planned at Begbroke (jobs), North Oxford (houses, jobs and mainline station), Botley (houses and retail/jobs), North Abingdon (houses), Milton and Harwell (jobs and houses) which will be largely dependent on a functioning A34. The

LEP, SHMA and now this draft Plan all lack credibility by failing to address and quantify the problems with the A34 (proposed junction improvements would encourage its use) and the uncertainty this creates for the growth of both jobs and housing.

2.32 It should be an important part of the Plan to identify the measures that could mitigate this strategic challenge. A 55mph speed limit would reduce the differential speeds (HGVs at 50mph and cars up to 80mph)<sup>13</sup> and frequency and severity of RTAs which are a major cause of congestion. Lower speeds would improve the smooth running and reduce congestion. Noise from engines and tyres would be reduced and air quality would be increased; all important factors given the proximity of some of the strategic allocations to the trunk road. Finally, both the lower speeds and less congestion would reduce CO2 emissions in the direction of carbon reduction budgets. The 50mph limits placed on the trunk road network around Oxford (including the A34) have all be negotiated and agreed by Highways Agency and with the relevant district/county councils.

2.33 Many people in Drayton (and Steventon) look towards Didcot for shopping, its station and entertainment (theatre, bingo and cinema) rather than Abingdon. There are significant numbers of existing and proposed jobs in the area just south of these villages which together with the significant highway problems to the south of Abingdon suggest that Drayton (and Steventon) should be in the South East Vale sub-area.

2.34 Paras 5.34 to 5.36 refer to a southern by-pass and new river crossing. Were land to the south of Abingdon being proposed for development to pay for its construction it might be a scheme worth consideration. However, as all (and more) than the required growth is being accommodated elsewhere in the District this road line will simply serve to statutorily blight this area (including Stonehill House) to no purpose. There is no development potential along this route in the open countryside that does not, therefore, require to be safeguarded.

2.35 'How the South East Vale Sub-Area will change by 2031:' the description refers to the creation of sustainable communities and reduced traffic congestion but this would be in spite of a Plan that does not include the necessary policies. In fact by 2031 there should be at least a 60% reduction in carbon emissions from an area that has grown by about 40%. It would be very surprising if this could be achieved with fine objectives and ineffective land use policies indistinguishable from those under which the unsustainable development has taken place over the last 60 years.

2.36 The SHMA has been accepted by the VWHDC as the objective assessment of housing need in the District. Given the level of 'need' was based on untested assumptions made by the unrepresentative Local Enterprise Partnership and the SHMA itself has not been the subject of any public scrutiny, it is inevitable that it would be examined through the approval

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<sup>13</sup> The difference is nearly 40% when a 25% differential is regarded as dangerous

process of the draft Plan and that the figures will be questioned. A paper was submitted attached<sup>14</sup> that questioned the reliability of the assessments in the SHMA, particularly on the type of housing. Although the whole of that paper was relevant to the weight afforded to the SHMA by the LPA as the objective assessment of quantitative and qualitative housing needs, the following extracts illustrate just some of its failings.

“2.04 Paragraph 7.17 contains an important discussion about the role played by different sizes of housing. Extraordinarily, it identifies a benefit or providing larger houses as increasing the ability of smaller households to up-size and release smaller dwellings, but does not refer to the much greater potential of increasing the supply of larger dwellings by building smaller ones to facilitate downsizing. Reference to Rightmove (2014 01 31) for just one village showed 10 dwellings with 4 bedrooms (or over), 7 with 3 bedrooms, 2 with 2 bedrooms and no one-bedroom units. If this is a typical mix what ‘need’ would be met by building more three and four bedroom units? The need for smaller dwellings in the social and rented sector to meet demand arising from the bedroom tax is noted. The SHMA lacks credibility and reliability as evidence for development plan preparation in the absence of a proper analysis of how the demand for downsizing in the owner occupancy sector should be or could be addressed...

...2.11 The SHMA seems to be fighting against the data (ONS 2011 figs on under-occupation) and the above trends to avoid the obvious conclusion that providing almost exclusively smaller dwellings is the objective way to meet housing needs in the rural and suburban areas...

...2.14 Saying that some smaller dwellings might help is completely inadequate. What is required from the planning system (there are many other influences on the housing market) is a supply of large numbers of smaller dwellings attractive to those referred to in the SHMA as currently occupying more space than they need...

...2.19 Self and custom built homes are discussed at para 8.75 to 8.88. The need for this arises from Government advice (NPPF 50 and Govt incentives/grants) but the analysis carried out fails to draw any firm conclusions and recommendations. There are very tentative suggestions that would be very unlikely to increase the proportion of self-building from historic rates (<10%). In fact, if the very substantial scale of development being proposed by the SHMA is to be achieved without some structural change in its delivery the proportion of self-building is likely to shrink. As this would not accord with the wishes of Government the SHMA should have made some positive proposals for how self-building could be substantially increased. Development plans informed by the SHMA should be expected to allocate sites (or a

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<sup>14</sup> Appraisal of Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment May 2014 Daniel Scharf MA MRTPI

minimum proportion of larger sites) to self-building or group self-building (that would be entirely consistent with co-housing). The volume housebuilders are seeing an increase in their building rates at the same time as saying the 200,000 per year is unrealistic. In these circumstances there should be policies designed to allocate sites suitable for smaller builders (Tattenhall NDP has a limit of 30 dwellings per site/development) as another distinct form of delivering houses. Without positive proposals this part of the SHMA lacks any purpose despite para 8.75 saying that it is 'needed'...

### **...3. Conclusions**

3.01 Para 9.1 raises the three questions to be answered by the SHMA all relating to housing 'needs'. Clearly this cannot be based on the analysis that conflates and confuses needs with demands, wants and requirements. And the overall figure is based on projections of job growth that have not been properly scrutinized.

3.02 At para 9.55 the SHMA suggests that increased supply will reduce price although there is very little if any evidence to that effect. The housing market is so much more complex than a simple model of supply and demand. The SHMA is right to say that the affordability of housing should be taken into account when assessing the contribution towards achieving sustainable development. However, in doing so, equally important issues have to be considered as to the environmental costs of building new houses on the scale being proposed together with the infrastructure required to enable the local economy to continue to perform despite already serious congestion problems. There is a failure to appreciate that sustainable development is achieved through meeting economic, social and environmental objectives and not trading one off against another. The emphasis on economic growth suggests a misunderstanding of that fundamental point.

3.03 There is no evidence of the capacity or the desire of the housebuilding industry to build at the rates implied or proposed in the SHMA. In fact were the price of housing to be reduced by supply in the way being suggested, the incentive to increase building rates will be reduced. It would be expected that the SHMA would identify the owner-occupying pensioners as the greatest source of finance to drive housing growth (nationally 4m households are looking to downsize in the next 5 years, half of those looking to move house are downsizers and the potential capital to be released into the economy runs to £trillions). A greater number of smaller houses can be built on less land. The SHMA is discredited by the many repeated references supporting the building of larger houses to enabling upsizing, the demand for which (even if it exceeds existing plentiful supply) could more easily be achieved through the release of larger dwellings by downsizers.

3.04 By failing to properly consider how planning authorities could increase self-building the SHMA fails to recognize that self-building integrates the supply with the demand for housing. This would be less dependent on the vagaries of the housing market and the traditional models being followed by volume housebuilders. Reliance on a local champion for self-building (para 9.90) should be seen as an abrogation of the responsibility for the SHMA to make positive recommendations of how identified housing needs could be met. A planning authority responsible for preparing development plans (with the SHMA included in the evidence base) cannot reasonably wait for 'champions' to emerge when the same objective can be achieved through planning policy.

3.05 The distinct lack of enthusiasm for self-building is only exceeded by the muddled thinking in respect of co-housing. 'Intentional communities' are increasingly being recognized elsewhere (including abroad) as an attractive way of meeting the complex demands of downsizers, but also providing an alternative to new and younger households that are currently being forced to share unsuitable properties (including with parents). This pattern is described at para 9.89 but it is entirely unclear about what would be achieved by the SHMA recommendation to look at room sizes, property types and HMOs? Co-housing is entirely consistent with the group/self-building being incentivized by Government. It is also consistent with the need to reduce the costs of caring for pre-school children, the sick, disabled and the elderly. The SHMA identifies most of these needs but makes no positive suggestions how they could be met.

3.06 The SHMA cannot be seen as an objective assessment of housing needs in general or in the specific sectors identified. Given that it is unlikely to be revisited in the timescale during which the local plans will be produced, LPAs should dedicate themselves to a detailed analysis of the SHMA to decide what recommendations should be followed, which should be rejected and where housing needs have simply not been included. The SHMA is not designed to assess the implications for the environment or for infrastructure provision. When these essential matters are taken into account the 'need' for small dwellings including substantial proportion dedicated to co-housing and self/group- building becomes clear. The fact that these needs have not emerged from the evidence and analysis included in the SHMA is evidence of its deficiencies and reasons for limiting the weight that should be given to its conclusions.

3.07 If the substantial scale of new housing envisaged by the SHMA is proposed in development plans and site allocations, this would have the benefit of providing space for different forms of delivery. There would be no cost to a developer if part of a large site is allocated to self-building and/or co-housing during the years it might take to build out the remainder in more traditional ways. It is not clear what purpose the partial analysis provided by the SHMA might have in supporting the

work of plan preparation, but it is a good example of a document dedicated to housing supply but which has failed to grasp the special characteristics of self-build and co-housing, deficiencies that could and should be made good by the LPAs in their local plans.”

2.37 ‘Core Policy 22:Housing Mix:’ The SHMA should be one part of the assessment of housing ‘need’ but, to a large extent, is no more than a description of ‘demand’. This is illustrated at Para 6.4 which says that the SHMA “identifies that there is most need in the Open Market sector for 3-bed units with the lowest need for 1-bed units. For affordable housing, there is a greater need for 2-bed units with the lowest need for 4-bed units.” In fact it is private owners who want (not need) larger dwellings, often for investment purposes, while social tenants want smaller dwellings to escape the bedroom tax. It is no accident that levels of under-occupancy and the potential for downsizing is greater in the owner occupancy sector. This is an important potential and trend which is not reflected in the Plan.

2.38 Para 6.4 refers to the growing number of smaller households but not to the unsustainable level of under occupation (ONS 2011 – QS-408EW) that is a result of the failure to provide attractive downsizing alternatives. The SHMA analysis of household size was extremely weak. It is unclear what is intended by Core Policy 22, but, to soundly address objectively assessed need (see ONS figures), it should be making it clear that small dwellings should be the predominant form of housing required to meet the needs in the District. This could be left to the market (where a number of builders are ahead of the planners in realising the potential of addressing the downsizer market – estimated at 50% of those looking to move), but the development plan is actually required to plan positively to meet identified needs. In this case the undeniable need is to plan positively to reduce the unsustainable level of under-occupation.

2.39 ‘Core Policy 23: Housing Density.’ Neither the policy nor paras 6.7 and 6.8 deal with a crucial issue of the merits of terraced housing. Historical examples are raised but do not then lead on to the current ‘functions’ (eg energy efficiency, orientation, affordability and sociability) that justify this ‘form’ of housing. Although it is implied that terraced housing would mean higher densities, if research had been carried out into downsizing (or the lack of it) the LPA would have been able to require a supply of small dwellings on larger plots. The failure to address this crucial aspect to the sustainable use of the housing stock means that the Plan for the period to 2031 should be found to be unsound.

2.40 ‘Core Policy 24: Affordable Housing:’ This policy and preceding paragraphs are not up to date with the Government’s proposal that self-building can be a form of affordable housing<sup>15</sup>. The Plan is the opportunity to formalise the fact that self/custom-building/finishing is an affordable way of providing housing (definitions of these categories will be required in a sound

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<sup>15</sup> DCLG Consultation on *Right to Build*



local plan) and, as the Government has removed the liability of CIL/s106, should be part of the 35% which is already exempt from CIL and s106 contributions. The Plan should also be referring to 'affordable living' as well as 'affordable housing' as running costs will be what actually matter to the occupiers, and fuel poverty and other running costs are known to be one of residents' major concerns. In these circumstances energy efficiency is not just an environmental priority but is fundamental to the affordability and sustainability of housing. The Plan should prioritise smaller, terraced housing as being more affordable (in private and social rental sectors) in construction, purchase/rent and occupation.

2.41 'Core Policy 25: Rural Exception Sites:' The LPA appears to have overlooked the fact that the Plan includes a significant number of allocations/strategic sites in the rural areas on land that, in the absence of the Plan, would not be granted permission for housing. Logically, this Core Policy should require provision to be made on any or all of these sites (where a local housing needs survey has been carried out) for plots to meet local housing need on the terms set out in the Policy. If this is not done, unnecessary additional harm will inevitably be caused to the setting of villages. This potential is only acknowledged by the Plan in respect of Green Belt villages (eg Radley) where the allocation could and should easily include what would have been a rural exception site.

2.42 'Core Policy 26: Accommodating Current and Future Needs of the Ageing Population:' This is a very important part of the Plan but seems to be in danger of being out of date before its adoption. The concept of Lifetime Homes that encourage under-occupation and isolation is being reconsidered and replaced by Lifetime Neighbourhoods within which people can move as household circumstances change, including aging and caring. This does not mean that there should not be a supply of homes built to a high mobility standard, but these will mostly be smaller dwellings and any larger ones should be covered by a policy requiring adaptability/sub-division to be incorporated in the original design.

2.43 This section should have referred to the design of dwellings 'suitable' for the elderly but not 'for' the elderly'. These can be attractive to downsizers in their 50s or 60s rather than more specialist accommodation designed to meet special needs which are normally occurring in later life. The Plan has not picked up the reference to bungalows in the SHMA. The Plan should address this issue (so many small bungalows continue to be extended into large houses) and explain the benefits of dwellings with self-contained ground floor but with accommodation at the first floor to take advantage of the foundations and roofspace. The Plan should then provide the justification for conditions removing permitted development rights and limiting extensions to retain the required balance of dwelling types, affordability and energy efficiency. Such policies only seem to be strict in the context of the lax control that has resulted in a legacy of unsustainable development, most if not all of which now requires to be upgraded.

### **3. Missing policies**

## **Housing – energy efficiency**

3.01 The failure of the Plan to include policies that are likely to be effective in contributing to the achievement of sustainable development can be traced to the defeatist attitude of the leading councillors. The Leader is on the Local Enterprise Partnership responsible for producing the jobs and housing figures in the SHMA and (unlike other districts) replicated in the Plan. The member responsible for the Plan does not believe that it is sound, ie sufficient to ensure that the District reflects European or UK carbon reduction targets as required in the NPPF. The fact that these targets are very challenging must mean that their impact should be clearly apparent in the policies. In fact none of the known measures of substantially reducing carbon emissions can be found in the Plan.

3.02 Reference has already been made to the need for a policy to require conditions to be imposed to limit permitted development and house extensions. Another policy necessary to secure the intentions expressed in Core Policies 22 to 26 would require all dwellings of more than 2 bedrooms to be designed so that a subsequent sub-division, including to self-contained accommodation, would be easy and relatively cheap (and conditions could allow this change of use without further application/permission). This form of adaptable housing is necessary to facilitate the sharing of housing in order to reduce the unsustainable level of under-occupation. A lifetime home would be one that could easily be divided.

3.03 The Government is inclined to leave the energy efficiency of buildings to be controlled by the Building Regulations. However, that does not relieve the LPA from the requirement to adopt a Plan which includes the golden thread of 'sustainable development' (NPPF para 14). There is also the requirement from 2016 (ie effectively every permission granted under the Plan) for housing to be zero carbon. In this case the Plan must be seen to be positively planning for a reduction in GHGs in accordance with the Climate Change Act. There should be a requirement for planning applications to include the submission of Energy Statements so that (with post-occupation evaluation) the LPA can monitor the situation and be satisfied that all new developments are sustainable by virtue of 'consuming their own smoke'.

## **Self-building**

3.04 The LPA has said that it is starting a Register of potential self-builders. In these circumstances the Plan is unsound by reason of having no enabling policies designed to meet this need (see NPPF para 50 and the requirement to deliver choice in housing including self-building). The need to meet the demand for self-building<sup>16</sup> would also be consistent with the Government's various financial incentives and the consultation on the Right to Build. The

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<sup>16</sup> The Government expects levels of self-building to rise substantially above the historic average of 10%. The Drayton Neighbourhood Plan survey found 145 people out of 2000 adults – of the only 64% responding to the survey – wanting to self-build in a village where only about 200 dwelling are likely to be built. This would translate to about 7000 people across the District.

volume builders have indicated that they do not have the capacity to build the numbers of houses required to meet identified needs and alternative forms of delivery such as self/group building will be required. The obvious and probably only way to meet this demand is to reserve plots on allocated sites. This would be little different to properties currently sold 'off-plan' where the price is adjusted to cover the developer's costs in servicing the plot and the amount of work that would not then be carried out by the main contractor. A number (20% would raise the historic average as envisaged by Government) of plots could be reserved in this way and released back to the developer if there is no demand for self/custom-building/finishing (including that from the LPA register). The Plan would need to carefully define the different categories of self/group/custom-builders/finishers as some would logically fall within the definition of affordable housing. A Registered Provider could buy the plot and the occupier build/finish the house that would then be in shared ownership. Houses built by groups or individuals could also be owned by a Registered Provider but let at lower and genuinely affordable rents reflecting the cheaper means of delivery.

## **Affordability**

3.05 The HDH support for the rates of CIL and affordable housing is based on their analysis of various models for assessing the price of development land. However, the report fails to adequately deal with the principle that the concept of 'affordable housing' (that did not exist before a High Court judgement in 1992), has been distorted by the resistance of those responsible for supplying houses to adjust the land prices to ensure that housing can be affordable without subsidising the demand side. Housing benefit, Funding for Lending, Help to Buy and grant to housing associations are all ways of moving public funds into the pockets of landowners that enable unaffordable houses to be sold and let. The planning system should be true to the original concept of affordable housing and deliver houses at prices that do not require public subsidies which are not in the hands of the planning system (inc DCLG). The Prime Minister can announce the removal of housing benefit to under 25s and the Chancellor can remove or change the Funding for Lending, Help to Buy and grants through the HCA at any time. Open-book accounting should ensure that the delivery of genuinely affordable housing is not jeopardised by onerous demands (ie CIL and s106). Conversely the same accounting system should ensure that, where viability allows, 35% of housing sites is genuinely affordable without subsidy.<sup>17</sup>

## **Co-housing**

3.06 The list of housing choice that the Plan must deliver under NPPF para 50 is not exhaustive. There is demand for co-housing that is not being met by the Plan policies and will not be met without being supported if not privileged

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<sup>17</sup> This is the approach to affordability being recommended by The Lyons Housing Review commissioned by the Labour Party and published in October 2014

by the planning system.<sup>18</sup> The Plan could do this simply by requiring parts of larger sites to be reserved for that purpose and released back to the developer if no demand is expressed (the LPA should be keeping a register with that of self-builders with which it would complement and overlap). Co-housing is the most environmental, social and affordable to build and occupy and, therefore, the most sustainable form of housing as new build or retrofit – both of which should have supportive policies as a strand in the golden thread of sustainable development.

3.07 Co-housing is becoming increasingly attractive to those reaching an age where social care is becoming one of the main uncertainties and for those providing care and accommodation to and for the elderly.<sup>19</sup> The UK is one of the few countries where co-housing is not understood or normalised and while it is looked on and ignored by planners as quirky, radical or experimental, they are not doing their job of providing genuine choice in housing (NPPF para 50). This has become a matter of serious public interest given the unsustainable levels of under-occupation, and the public and private costs of social care.<sup>20</sup> “House building that reflects the space and accessibility that older people want is essential if we are to support people to live independent lives, free up large family homes, and control the costs of social care.”<sup>21</sup>

3.08 As well as being an attractive alternative to retirement homes, co-housing projects can have wider benefits to society as members of a mutually supportive community are likely to be less dependent on social and medical services. Unfortunately, “...In the UK, the average period between securing a site and moving in is three to four years – twice that of the US – but that could be reduced with good professional input from local authorities”.<sup>22</sup> The planning system cannot shirk the responsibility for the difficulty people have in creating co-housing projects. The article describes how getting co-housing projects off the ground, “...can be awfully hard work.” And this is a challenge to planners to ensure that their plans do as much as possible to enable (and not prevent) the growth of this important and sustainable housing sector.

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<sup>18</sup> 50 out of the 64% of about 2000 adults surveyed in preparing the Drayton Neighbourhood Plan were interested in co-housing would translate into about 2500 people across the District.

<sup>19</sup> *Housing choice for older people* (Help the Aged 2006). And “While these may not be ground-breaking ideas, they go beyond what is currently on the market. Many of them could – and should – apply to all of our new housing, but this is an opportunity for older people and their housing providers to lead the way, starting a virtuous circle of downsizing and reinvestment.” *HAPPI Housing our ageing population: panel for innovation 2009*

<sup>19</sup> “...the mix of available housing plays such relevance...emphasis should be given to increasing the supply of smaller, starter homes in villages (as well as ‘entry level’ affordable homes in villages). Doing so should narrow the rural-urban price differential.” *The value of rural amenities RICS Research October 2012*

<sup>20</sup> *The generation strain: Collective solutions to care in an ageing society* Clare McNeil, Jack Hunter IPPR 2014

<sup>21</sup> *For Future Living: innovative measures to join up housing and health* IPPR North 2014

<sup>22</sup> Quote from Jo Gooding co-ordinator of the UK Co-housing network Guardian 2014 11 21 *How to create happy communities through co-housing* <http://gu.com/p/436e2/sbl>

## Local Food

3.09 The Draft Design Guide (para 3.4.4) indicates that local food is a material planning consideration which impacts on the sustainability of development.<sup>23</sup> It is clear that the necessary reductions in GHGs cannot be achieved without the planning system addressing the question of local food and enabling the growth of opportunities for growing, processing and distributing local food. The RTPI now see this as a material consideration,

At the same time, planners and others will need to learn from and also respond to communities, who may in some cases be ahead of both policy-makers and professionals in reacting to these challenges or changing behaviours (such as supporting more local food produce or reducing car use).<sup>24</sup>

A development plan to 2031 cannot claim to be sound and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development if it is silent on the question of supporting local food and fails to plan positively for this to be enhanced.

3.10 One readily available policy to enhance local food supply is to require one or two dwellings in all developments on the periphery of towns and villages to be made subject to agricultural occupancy conditions (accepted as part of the affordable housing quota) and the developer (landowner) would be required to include at least 1 ha of land as a smallholding as well as land for allotments for the new housing. The preference would be for this to be adjacent, but in any event it must be reasonably accessible, to the new housing. This would be the reasonable response to the proposals for new agricultural dwellings in the open countryside which should be supported if the Plan does not seek to meet the need in a more sustainable way.

## 4. Conclusions

4.01 These representations have been directed to the purpose of the various policies. However, the policies need to be sufficiently clear and unambiguous for developers, the LPA and interested parties to know whether or not a proposal does or does not accord with the Plan. There are many policies with 'should' that should be 'must'. There are other policies that seem to be 'permissive' when the intent would appear to be proscriptive (with specified exceptions). The examination must include a check on the wording of all the policies and all the "wherever possible's" and preferences rather than requirements could be included in explanatory text.

4.02 The draft Plan is unsound because (by the admission of the leading councillors) it does not plan sufficiently and positively to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. By the unquestioning adoption of

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<sup>23</sup> Estimates of carbon emissions from food vary from under 20% from the Committee on Climate Change to 50% from UNCTAD.

<sup>24</sup> [http://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/1025151/rtpi\\_planning\\_horizons\\_2\\_future-proofing\\_society\\_june\\_2014.pdf?dm\\_i=1L61,2L0GQ,A2M5B8,9FIQ6,1](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/1025151/rtpi_planning_horizons_2_future-proofing_society_june_2014.pdf?dm_i=1L61,2L0GQ,A2M5B8,9FIQ6,1)

growth targets for jobs and housing, achieving sustainable development might have been made more challenging for a district council. However, the Plan should not be defeatist but take whatever measures are required to show the ways in which sustainable development will be achieved and require these of new development. Taking a positive approach to new development might have revealed ways in which more houses and more jobs could actually make it easier to achieve sustainability across the District. The Environmental Change Institute at Oxford University has been in discussion with the local authorities<sup>25</sup> and it is astonishing that there is no evidence in the Plan to show that this advice from experts in this field has been taken into account.

4.03 The notable failure of the housing and transport policies included in the Plan and the absence of other policies spelled out in section 3 of this analysis together describe a Plan that would not sufficiently reduce the carbon emissions from the new and existing development in the District (there should be some evidence of how annual reductions of between 6% and 10% would be achieved). If the growth/development of jobs, housing and infrastructure is carried out in accordance with and at the scale expected by the current Plan it is almost inevitable that it would cause carbon emissions to increase. A sound plan would be able to demonstrate consistency with the Climate Change Act. Without any appraisal of the kind necessary to measure the performance of policies against the 2011 Carbon Plan or Carbon Budgets means that the Plan is unsound for being incapable of adequate monitoring.

4.04 The LPA feels that it has suffered from its failure to have an up to date Local Plan and being able to demonstrate that a 5 (or 6) year supply of housing land is readily available. It is the case that permission has been granted for a substantial number of houses which could and are being built in unsustainable locations and to inadequate standards of energy efficiency. However, the enthusiasm if not desperation for having a local plan adopted should not have prevented the LPA from including policies that would have ensured that future permissions would only be granted for developments that were genuinely sustainable and genuinely affordable. The LPA should be required to produce a new Plan that provides for low carbon transport, low carbon, sociable and affordable housing, sufficient opportunities to meet the demand for self/group/custom-building/finishing and co-housing and the development of local food infrastructure.

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<sup>25</sup> Oxfordshires low carbon economy [Environmental Change Institute](#) 2014

## DESIGN GUIDE COMMENTS (THE “GUIDE”)

### 1. Introduction

1.01 Absent from the Foreword to the Draft Plan is any reference to the challenge of carbon emission reductions in accordance with either the Climate Change Act, now about 6% per year or, as many climate scientist suggest, between 8% and 10%. None of the existing building stock which is being taken as a context for the new housing was built as zero carbon (or carbon negative) providing the standards of heating and lighting now considered essential. The Guide should acknowledge that carbon reductions are more important than new building being “in keeping”, and that the form of housing with the function of being carbon neutral or negative might look very different from the existing stock.

1.02 The other fundamental aspect to housing that is missing from the Plan and which should inform the Guide is the crisis facing social care. There are two dimensions (also part of sustainable development) to this crisis – the deficit in caring (resulting in the loneliest society in Europe if not the world) and the unaffordable and unsustainable human and financial costs.<sup>26</sup>The IPPR report predicts a collapse of the current system of care by 2017.

1.03 A Plan with an end date in 2031 but being prepared at a time of acute environmental, social and economic crises, should provide the framework under which all new developments must be designed to reduce carbon emissions and facilitate the caring that will be required as the existing systems are strained to breaking point.

1.04 The Guide should make it clear that the design would not be found to be unacceptable were it to prioritise the environmental, social and economic impacts in ways that have not yet been properly taken into account in a Guide which is in many ways looking back for its references and criteria rather than facing up to the extraordinary challenges which will have to be addressed in the next few years.

### 2. Comments

2.01 Para 1.4.1 refers to the, ‘...challenge to deliver sustainable development.’ But where in the Design Guide is there any definition of the social, economic or environmental components to assist the designer? How,

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<sup>26</sup> *The generation strain: Collective solutions to care in an ageing society* Mcneil C and Hunter J IPPR 2014

for instance, should the designer interpret the “presumption in favour of sustainable development” that should be the golden thread leading towards a grant of planning permission? How is the “zero carbon” requirement to be accommodated in the design of buildings? How is “negative carbon” to be achieved if this is found to be necessary when other sectors (e.g. transport in accordance with policies in the Plan) fall short of carbon budgets? How are developments intended to “consume their own smoke”, an inspector’s honest and accurate interpretation of the Brundtland definition of sustainable development included in the NPPF?<sup>27</sup> Guidance is particularly important in respect of listed buildings, conservation areas and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty where the planning authority is most likely to be faced by conflicting priorities.

2.02 That Table 1.1 does not include details of either the Building Research Establishment or the Green Buildings Council is indicative of the missing ingredient of the Guide.

2.03 The photograph at the beginning of Chapter 02 responding to the site setting includes a seat in a public space. It is a sadly neglected part of planning practice to study the use of street furniture and, in particular public seats/benches. Encouragement to add or include seats into public spaces should be based on firm evidence of their likely use. Figure 3.35 actually shows a bench in use but looks very much as if it is a very urban environment unlikely to feature in many places within the Vale of White Horse District. In Europe, there is, for instance, a practice of including picnic tables in preference to benches that can attract greater public use. This is not a trivial matter given the advantages of having people using and lingering in the public realm. However, it is the understanding of public spaces and their ‘kitting-out’ which need further exploration.

2.04 The section 3. ‘Establishing the structure’ is generally sound, including the advice under ‘Natural resources and sustainability’. However, there is no mention of the implementation gap. There is not much in this advice that is new, but there is plenty of evidence that we are not living in either town or village as ‘sustainable communities’. Even without attempting a definition of a ‘sustainable community’, it is clear that this advice has not yet assisted in the creation of a society or built environment that will not need substantial adaptation to a low carbon economy and caring society. One of the issues that could be addressed by the Plan (and Guide) is to make some of this guidance mandatory. For example, ‘Principle DG12: orientation, the layout of development should maximise the benefits of daylighting and passive solar gains.’ The Guide purports to set a high standard by maximising potential benefits and, hopefully, this will be reflected in all future housing layouts. ‘Such matters as design, layout and even the orientation of buildings are crucial in this context [ie sustainable development].’ (see appeal decision at footnote 2).

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<sup>27</sup> APP/N2345/A/12/2169598



2.05 Section 3.4 Health, wellbeing and recreation includes '3.4.4 Local food growing can provide a healthy outdoor pursuit, a strong magnet for community integration and contribute to sustainability.' And 3.4.5, 'Applicants should consider opportunities for local food growing **such** as community orchards, provision of allotments or other community garden projects.', Which becomes, "Design Principle DG20...Consider opportunities to encourage local food growing such as community orchards, provision of allotments or other community garden projects". If, as described, local food would contribute to the achievement of 'sustainability', which is a fundamental and legal objective of the planning system, this design principle which relates fundamentally to the use and development of land and buildings, should become an important Core Policy in the Plan. Simply incorporated as design guidance would fail in this regard and not contribute to the soundness of the Plan. This is not just a matter for health and wellbeing. The Guide and Plan could contribute to the growth of local food production, processing and distribution which impact on local economy/jobs as well as the sustainability of food production itself.

2.06 The failure of planning and design guidance can again be seen through paragraph '3.5.4 A fundamental principle for any new sustainable development is to reduce the need to travel by car and promote sustainable forms of transport thus reducing energy consumption.' There is no sign that any new development has had the effect of reducing car ownership or use. In fact, the Plan (and neighbourhood plans) are proposing suburban and rural developments which have, and without the addition of some very different transport policies, will continue to have notoriously and unsustainably high levels of car dependency.

2.07 One of the most important aspects of the sustainability of housing development is the way in which it can be used to reduce the unsustainable level of under-occupancy across the District. Small homes in lifetime neighbourhoods (those designed or adapted) to provide housing for all age groups and abilities) should be prioritised. Even where a need might be proven for larger homes these should be designed to be adaptable easily and at minimal cost.

2.08 An important element in lifetime neighbourhoods is the extent to which the design facilitates mutual support. Recent housing development has prioritised privacy at the expense of sociability. All new housing should be designed to prioritise sociability, but not necessarily at the expense of privacy.

### **3. Conclusions**

3.01 The Guide includes many suggestions about energy, sociability, food growing and transport that have not been translated into clear, precise and effective policies in the Plan itself.

3.02 If the Plan and Guide had reflected an understanding of both past failures, and the scale of the challenges of carbon reduction (6% to 10% per year) and that the social care system is on the pint of collapse, there would

have been a greater prospect of both guidance and policies contributing to the achievement of sustainable development.

## INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY PLAN

1. The obvious point to be made about the IDP is the extraordinary scale of funding that is intended for road projects without any sign of the support that will be required to increase the frequency (and reliability) of the bus services eg 15 mins on the Milton Park Abingdon route. The Real Time Information system is precarious (50% of buses do not appear on the system when it is working), many stops are not equipped with screens or shelters. Buses need to be given priority (eg a bus gate at the Ock Street roundabouts).
2. As it stands the IDP is the clearest demonstration that the Plan is unsound as it is designed deliberately to increase car use instead of introducing any effective measures to reduce either car dependency (despite policies in the Plan making assurances to that effect) or associated carbon emissions – contrary to every expectation of the transport sector in the Climate Change Act and associated budgets (estimate of 60% reduction by 2030). CIL must contribute to improvements to the bus service even if developers might be required to contribute directly (through s106 obligations) to bus companies serving the routes on which developments will depend.
3. The only other known ways of reducing carbon from transport are low carbon car clubs that should be funded by developers (through s106) or CIL, and massively improved cycling facilities. These do not seem to feature in the IDP.

## RESPONSE TO CIL PROPOSALS

1. The HDH recommendations are described as 'cautious'. Given that almost all residential sites can be seen to be viable at £200/sq m and 40% of affordable housing (see also the higher levels of CIL being proposed in SODC and WODC) the proposal to adopt £120/sq m with 35% affordable housing should be seen as both 'very cautious', but more, as an opportunity to negotiate for high standards of energy efficiency (ie zero carbon or Passivhaus), large proportions of terraced housing, generous garden areas (important as part of the need to encourage downsizing of dwellings). The basis for terraced housing being less profitable is unclear, given the normal associated increase in densities. The large discrepancies between sites in comparable locations throws some doubt about the reliability of the HDH analysis and conclusions.
2. There needs to be definitions of self/custom- building/finishing. There is insufficient help from the Regulations to identify the 'genuine' self or communal building that are intended to qualify for the exemption – that, incidentally, does not appear to have been included in the documentation.
3. The inclusion of definitions might also be the opportunity to decide what form of self/custom-building/finishing should reasonably be seen as affordable housing (currently eligible for exemption from CIL). The recent Government Consultation on self-building describes ways in which self-building can be done in conjunction with a Registered Provider. The HDH report explores the margins of viability and if self-building (with its CIL exemption) is not made part of the 35% affordable housing it is unlikely to grow at or to the levels hoped for by Government.
4. The HDH report does not address 'exception sites' that in rural areas should now be included in the 'strategic sites' (where these are being proposed in the Local Plan) or allocations in neighbourhood development plans. The proportion of such sites meeting the 'local housing needs' would also affect the additional land vale.
5. A definition/clarification is also needed for how the Council will interpret "in-use" for the exemption for the change of use of existing buildings. This does not appear to be the same as a lawful existing use, that remains lawful in a dormant state. The Council should make clear what evidence it will be requiring to prove that the building had been in-use for the required period.
6. There is a clawback provision for annexes that also needs to be supported by definitions – which must address or distinguish the liability to pay a clawback from the change to two dwellings that is a separate exemption?
7. Under 'transport' the levy is proposed to pay for road works (eg Lodge Hill slips) but no reference is made to bus services. This encouragement of

car use is the exact opposite of what is and will be required to meet the 6% to 10% annual carbon savings (total of 80% to 90% by 2050) required by the Climate Change Act, the 4<sup>th</sup> Carbon Budget and 2011 Carbon Plan. While the transport sector claims that higher and faster reductions might be possible in other sectors, this is unproven and there is a strong case to be made for faster and deeper cuts in all sectors. In fact the support being given to increasing aviation emissions (see new runway proposals) suggests that even greater reductions in road traffic will be required under the Act and related carbon reduction budgets. The Council must be aware that the congestion in parts of the District poses as great a threat to development as concerns about financial viability. Further growth without sorting out the congestion will make new and existing housing and businesses less sustainable (contrary to the presumption in the NPPF). It is insufficient to list road schemes and not include those which have been identified as necessary to deal with traffic congestion (eg bridges at Culham and junction of Ock Street/March Road with Drayton Road). It is likely that the only way to deal with congestion and carbon reductions will be substantial improvements to public transport and financing the 'premium routes', including the extra vehicles/drivers, real time information and bus priority measures.

8. The list of schools to receive funds for expansion does not include Drayton Primary – although the school is at capacity and there are potentially over 200 dwellings on the sites being allocated in the Neighbourhood Plan (as well as demand from south Abingdon) prepared under the supervision of the District Council. Although the Parish Council should become eligible for a proportion of the CIL payments (more if the NDP becomes adopted) the village is intrinsically unsustainable as a location for this scale of residential development and all available funds would have to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development such as making the recreational facilities attractive to village residents. More of the CIL (or s.106 contributions) must contribute to the big ticket items of the school and the public transport (that is also omitted from the CIL schedule).

9. The Plan should adopt the instalments policy, recommended by HDH, that would be compatible with phasing of larger sites in the rural areas (where there is a high propensity to want to move within the village) where this would be reasonably necessary to meet local housing needs through the 16 year plan period.

10. Given the uncertainties about the additional value that could have been available as contributions through CIL or s.106 and the cautious approach taken to CIL, it is essential that all significant applications should be subject to 'open-book' accounting. In this way the LPA could satisfy itself that any resistance from the developer to reasonable requests to meet planning policies (eg zero carbon housing, physical and social infrastructure, small/terraced housing, self/custom building, other affordable housing) would not affect the viability of the development and the price being paid for the land was not excessive in the context of these reasonable and necessary demands.

