

Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 2

Statement of Common Ground

Between

Vale of White Horse District Council

and

Natural England

February 2018

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) has been prepared by Vale of White Horse District Council (“VoWH”) and Natural England hereafter referred to as “the parties”. This SoCG documents those matters agreed with regard to the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 2 and supporting documents to assist the Inspector during the Examination of the Local Plan.
- 1.1 This Statement of Common Ground is principally intended to address the representations made by Natural England through the Regulation 19 publicity period for Local Plan 2031 Part 2.
- 1.2. This statement is provided without prejudice to other matters of detail that parties may wish to raise during the examination.

2. Background

- 2.1. The Council have made every effort throughout the preparation of the Local Plan 2031 Part 2 to ensure the Plan provides a robust, strategic framework for the effective delivering of sustainable development. Throughout this process the Council have continuously engaged with Natural England on policy development, additional allocations and specific evidence base studies, ensuring the Plan implements national policy appropriately.

3. Matters relating to Local Plan 2031 Part 2

Duty to Cooperate / Collaborative Working

- 3.1. Vale of White Horse District Council has continuously engaged with the Natural England through the evolution of the Local Plan 2031 Part 2. More

information and details of this engagement can be found in Topic Paper 1: Duty to Cooperate.

- 3.2. The parties agree that Vale of White Horse District Council has discharged its duty to cooperate for Local Plan 2031 Part 2.

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

- 3.3. Natural England has raised a small number of concerns in relation to the outcomes of the HRA (dated October 2017) as part of their response to the Regulation 19 publicity period for Local Plan 2031 Part 2.

Cothill Fen SAC – Air Quality

- 3.4. Natural England note the HRA's findings that the proposed additional allocations at Dalton Barracks and South East of Marcham are likely to lead to increased vehicular movements in the local area. The HRA of the Local Plan 2031 Part 2 makes a recommendation that the Dalton Barracks development should be subject to project-level HRA, as the development proposals will contain a greater level of detail that should be assessed most appropriately at that point. At present, in respect of effects on air quality, the HRA of the Local Plan 2031 Part 2 has assumed that the main routes used will not include the smaller roads around Cothill Fen Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
- 3.5. Natural England request that additional traffic modelling is needed to support this assumption. This modelling may demonstrate that the proposed additional allocations, alone and in combination with other plans and projects will lead to an increased number of vehicle movements that is small enough that they can be dismissed as being insignificant in terms of leading to potential air quality effects on Cothill Fen SAC. It is understood that the proposed development will seek to optimise traffic movements away from the SAC, including development of a new access road to maximise that outcome.
- 3.6. Alternatively, the traffic modelling may demonstrate that the increase in vehicle movements on the roads within 200m of Cothill Fen SAC leads to a need to undertake modelling of air quality (in particular, examining levels of oxides of nitrogen and nitrogen deposition), to determine if those increases in vehicle movements would elevate pollutant loads to an extent whereby a likely significant effect on the SAC might occur. It is considered probable that transport modelling, followed if necessary by air quality modelling, will result in a conclusion of no likely significant effects on the SAC.
- 3.7. Should this not be the case, mitigation would be required. The site development template for Dalton Barracks sets out measures that would offer mitigation opportunities, and that the developer would work with the Council and Natural England to ensure such measures would be delivered. The parties agree that further modelling work is completed to demonstrate how

movement of traffic on the smaller roads near to Cothill Fen SAC will not lead to a detrimental effect. The parties agree to continue to work closely on this matter and to prepare an updated Statement of Common Ground.

Cothill Fen SAC - Hydrology

- 3.8. Natural England makes reference to the HRA and that studies have been undertaken which demonstrate that it is very unlikely that surface or shallow sub-surface flows from the development footprint of Dalton Barracks would occur into the catchment of Cothill Fen SAC and nearby Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)¹.
- 3.9. Natural England highlight that these studies are not presented in the HRA and should be provided to support the conclusions made.
- 3.10. The parties agree that the updated HRA (February 2018) provides further clarity with respect to this matter, and addresses the concerns raised by Natural England.

Oxford Meadows SAC – Air Quality

- 3.11. Natural England note in their response that the HRA informing Local Plan 2031 Part 2 does not fully assess the in-combination effects on air quality at Oxford Meadows with the proposed growth in Cherwell, West Oxfordshire, South Oxfordshire and Oxford City. Natural England have met with all the Oxfordshire Local Authorities to identify a suitable approach to in-combination assessments of air quality at Oxford Meadows SAC in their Local Plans.
- 3.12. Since the Regulation 19 publicity period, Natural England have confirmed that the potential for likely significant effects may arise as a result of growth proposed in Cherwell District Council's partial review of Local Plan 2031 Part 1 and Vale's Local Plan 2031 Part 2.
- 3.13. The parties agree to work positively with Cherwell District Council to ensure that this strategic matter is appropriately addressed prior to the examination in public of both local plans. An update will be provided on this matter through a future Statement of Common Ground.

Harwell Campus

- 3.14. Natural England highlight a number of points which should be addressed prior to development coming forward at Harwell Campus. These principally relate to:
- demonstrating the exceptional circumstances test as set out in Paragraph 116 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF);

¹ Paragraph 5.5.5 of the Habitats Regulations Assessment (October 2017) informing Local Plan 2031 Part 2

- seeking clarity on how the tailored mix of housing will support the viability of the Campus;
- ensuring appropriate mitigation is proposed for the site that will minimise the impact of the development on the wider AONB;
- the need for careful masterplanning that is supported by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

3.15. The parties agree that the proposed comprehensive development framework for Harwell Campus, as set out in Core Policy 15b, represents a suitable approach to addressing the points raised by Natural England. The framework will be published as a Supplementary Planning Document and provide additional guidance including a tailored mix of housing to meet the identified needs of the Campus and a high-quality landscaping scheme which reflects the site's location within the North Wessex Downs AONB.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1. The representations made by the Natural England through the Regulation 19 publicity period of Local Plan 2031 Part 2 have been addressed through this Statement of Common Ground.
- 4.2. The parties agree that further transport modelling is required to understand the implications of growth on air quality at Cothill Fen SAC and will seek to provide an update on this matter prior to Examination in Public of Local Plan 2031 Part 2.

Signatures

Signed on behalf of Vale of White Horse District Council

Holly Jones
Planning Policy Manager

1 March 2018

Signed on behalf of Natural England

Marc Turner
Senior Adviser

23rd February 2018