

VoWH Local Plan Part 2 Examination: Matters and Questions

Dandara Ltd Hearing Statement (Respondent ID: 758199)

Introduction

- 1.1 This Hearing Statement has been prepared by Dandara Ltd who are promoting land located to the West of Wantage for residential led, mixed-use development alongside the delivery of the West Wantage Link Road (WWLR), the route of which was safeguarded within the Local Plan Part 1 (LPP1). The site is not proposed for allocation within the Local Plan Part 2 (LPP2).
- 1.2 The Statement concisely addresses the relevant 'List of Matters and Questions' (ID/3) and should be read alongside representations made by Dandara Ltd to the emerging LPP2 dated March 2017 and October 2017. As requested, a separate Hearing Statement has been prepared for each matter and question being addressed.

Matter 7 – Harwell Campus

Question 7.1 – Spatial Strategy Consistency

- 2.1 Whether the proposal in the LPP2 to allocate a site for 1,000 dwellings for an Innovation Village at Harwell Campus is consistent with the LPP1 spatial strategy for the District and specifically the South East Vale Sub-Area is considered within our Hearing Statement for Matter 3, Question 3.1.

Question 7.2 – Exceptional Circumstances and National Interest Test

- 3.1 The LPP1 originally proposed to introduce 1,400 new homes within the AONB associated with Harwell. The Inspector's Report to the LPP1 recognised that *"this would be major development, which the NPPF indicates should be refused in an AONB other than in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated it is in the public interest"* (para. 112). The Inspector recommended the deletion of the 1,400 dwelling AONB allocation on the basis that *"... there is little, if any, evidence to support the contention that this is essential to the realisation of the employment growth which the Plan and the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) envisage taking place at Harwell in the period to 2031"* (para. 115). Furthermore, *"I have seen no convincing evidence to indicate that any existing or new employers at Harwell would, in the future, not be equally successful in attracting people to work there as long as there is sufficient, suitable housing within the Science Vale area generally"* (para. 117).
- 3.2 Our representations to the publication version VoWH LPP2 go into significant detail at paras. 9.22 to 9.37 to demonstrate that the proposed allocation for 1,000 new homes at Harwell Campus fails to satisfy the three NPPF para. 115 criteria.
- 3.3 The LPP2 proposes to reintroduce 1,000 new homes into the AONB at Harwell following their removal from the LPP1 on the advice of the Inspector, necessary to make the LPP1 sound. It is not considered that there is a material change of circumstance to justify significant development in the AONB having regard to para. 116 of the NPPF. Whilst existing employers at Harwell have no doubt raised concerns regarding the supply and affordability of housing within the locality of the campus, the delivery of housing within the LPP1 and additional Science Vale provision included within the LPP2 will significantly increase supply

with no firm evidence provided to justify why housing in such numbers is required to be on campus rather than in locations such as Abingdon, Wantage, Grove or Didcot. There is certainly no evidence provided that the inability to deliver 1,000 new homes on campus would threaten planned economic and employment growth at the campus or within the wider economy more generally up to 2031.

- 3.4 As one of the NPPF exceptional circumstances and public interest tests relates to the need for development, the availability of land to the West of Wantage is an important consideration. Land to the West of Wantage does not fall within the AONB and as recognised within the HELAA, “does not impact on this designation” (appendix 19, pg. 7). The site therefore provides an opportunity to deliver new homes outside the AONB on land that does not impact upon its setting and is within easy commuting distance of Harwell. Furthermore, the delivery of the LPP1 safeguarded WWLR would significantly improve accessibility to the campus from the Western Vale and settlements beyond including Swindon (see LPP1 Inspector’s Report, para. 132). The LPP2 is therefore unsound by proposing significant development within the AONB which does not satisfy the NPPF exceptional circumstance and public interest test and cannot be considered to represent the most appropriate strategy when considered against reasonable alternatives.

Question 7.3 – Use of Employment Land

- 4.1 The 1,000 new homes proposed within the LPP2 at Harwell are located on land designated as an Enterprise Zone. Core Policy 6 of the LPP1 allocates 93 ha of land at Harwell Campus for future employment development with the objective of “*promoting Science Vale as a world-class location for science and technology-based enterprise and innovation, especially the Enterprise Zone sites at Milton Park and Harwell Campus*” (pg. 39). The ‘*Harwell Campus Exceptional Circumstances Report*’ (SQW 2017) suggests that “... 15.46 ha of the Enterprise Zone developable land is diverted to housing ...” (para. 7.5).
- 4.2 Notably, the allocation at Harwell within the LPP2 for 1,000 new homes was put forward for consideration during the hearing sessions for the LPP1. The Inspector’s Report considered the site but concluded that “*it would involve the development for housing of land recently designated as Enterprise Zone and would reduce the amount of employment land available at the campus*” (para. 122).
- 4.3 The SQW report looks at the implications of 15.46 ha of Enterprise Zone land being diverted for housing and concludes “... *even if 15.46 ha of developable land on the Enterprise Zone is diverted to housing, the remaining land has the capacity to accommodate 10,093 jobs by 2037*” (para. 7.6). Whilst this remaining amount of Enterprise Zone land is sufficient to deliver the 9,000 jobs expected to be accommodated at the campus within the LPP1 by 2031, clearly it significantly limits the ability of the campus to continue to expand in the future without putting significant pressure on the development of additional, more sensitive Greenfield AONB land. It is imperative that the Inspector considers the longer-term implications of diverting Enterprise Zone land to housing on a nationally important employment site with finite land resources for future growth due to the surrounding AONB designation.

Question 7.4 – Innovation Village

- 5.1 No quantitative evidence has been provided within the SQW or CBRE reports which suggests that job creation or economic growth targets for the Harwell Campus established within the

LPP1 would be put at risk in the absence of substantial new housing being introduced into the AONB associated with an 'innovation village'. Indeed, the 15,850 jobs target for the Science Vale set out in Core Policy 5 of the LPP1 was adopted as 'effective' within the context of the NPPF para. 182 soundness tests meaning deliverable over the Plan period despite the removal of the previously proposed 1,400 new homes at Harwell. This suggests that both the Inspector, and the Council when adopting the Plan, were satisfied that the jobs target could be delivered without a strategic housing allocation being provided at Harwell within the AONB. There remains no quantitative evidence to demonstrate that the 15,850 jobs target would be threatened without the delivery of new on-campus homes within the AONB with justification primarily surrounding the merits of certain methods of working which include an element of 'campus' housing which can assist in fostering knowledge exchange and clustering. It does not suggest that economic growth or job creation at Harwell is slowing, employers are relocating elsewhere or new firms are choosing alternative locations due to an absence of on-site housing, distinct from wider housing market pressures which are not unique to employers at Harwell.

- 5.2 The evidence base has singularly failed to demonstrate that on-site 'innovation village' style housing within the AONB, compared with housing elsewhere within the Science Vale with good accessibility to Harwell, is essential to the realisation of employment growth within the LPP1 and Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan to 2031 which would be a prerequisite to satisfying the NPPF para. 116 'need' test. The whole purpose of the identification and ring fencing of the Science Vale within the LPP1 is a recognition of the need for new homes across this area to serve the range of nationally important jobs available, including but not limited to Harwell. There is no evidence that a 'boosting' of housing growth across the Science Vale associated with allocations within the LPP1 and LPP2 would not address the affordability challenges experienced at Harwell alongside reuse / redevelopment of existing buildings on-site, for which an analysis of home delivery has not been provided, to deliver an element of innovation / campus style housing without conflicting with NPPF para. 115.
- 5.3 Perhaps the strongest indication that housing is not required to be located specifically on the Harwell Campus site to support economic growth and job creation is provided within the paucity of information relating to the tenure and occupancy of the 1,000 homes being promoted. The only quantified evidence is provided within Table 4-1 of the SQW report which suggests that 25-35% of the homes would be 'market sale' with 30-40% 'build to rent' and the remainder affordable housing. There is however no suggestion that the homes would be occupancy linked to those working on campus or any other mechanism that would prevent occupation by those not employed on the campus or even within the wider Science Vale.
- 5.4 It is evident that unless the 'market sale' units are discounted and occupancy tied, they will provide no more affordable accommodation than available elsewhere in the Science Vale and arguably would be more expensive / attractive to the open market, sitting within an attractive, green AONB setting on the A34. In a similar vein, unless the 'build to rent' accommodation is discounted and occupancy tied, those employees of Harwell who are struggling to afford accommodation locally due to their 'modest salaries' (SQW report, para. 4.14), will be no more able to afford rental accommodation at Harwell than elsewhere.