
VALE OF WHITE HORSE

LOCAL PLAN PART 2 EXAMINATION

MATTER 1: DUTY TO CO-OPERATE AND OTHER LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

For CEG

(Representor ID: 1096815)

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Matter 1 – Duty to Co-operate and other Legal Requirements

1.8 Have the likely environmental, social and economic effects of the LPP2 been adequately addressed in the Sustainability Appraisal? Does the appraisal test the plan against reasonable alternatives for the spatial strategy of the plan and the distribution of housing?

1.8.1 We do not believe that the Sustainability Appraisal compares all reasonable alternatives to identify the likely significant effects of the available options (as required by Planning Practice Guidance, Paragraph 017, Reference ID 11-017-20140306). This is a legal compliance matter.

1.8.2 We are also concerned that the likely environmental, social and economic effects of the Local Plan Part 2 have not been adequately addressed in the Sustainability Appraisal.

Reasonable Alternatives – Abingdon North

1.8.3 A primary role of Local Plan Part 2 is to set out policies and locations for new housing to meet the Vale's proportion of Oxford City's unmet housing need.

1.8.4 The work undertaken by the Oxfordshire Growth Board to arrive at the apportionment of Oxford City's unmet housing need is described in the 26th September 2016 Growth Board Papers, with Vale Officers part of the working group that commissioned and completed the relevant technical work.

1.8.5 A Spatial Options Assessment Project was central to the process, with City, District and County Council partners identifying the strategic options for testing. It was made clear at the time that the areas identified for development consideration were not '*precisely defined sites*', but to enable an effective assessment against some of the assessment criteria, the Councils and their consultants needed to define areas on a plan.

1.8.6 The areas shortlisted for development consideration were subject to comprehensive assessment, which took account of transport infrastructure; education impacts and needs; a full range of sustainability considerations; the contribution the areas make to the purposes of the Green Belt; and other factors including viability and deliverability.

1.8.7 The Growth Board's recommended apportionment of the Oxford City unmet housing need was directly based on the estimated capacity of the development areas shortlisted as being best suited to meeting Oxford City's unmet housing need.

1.8.8 In the Vale of White Horse District, sites at Botley (550 dwellings), Cumnor

(550 dwellings) and Abingdon North (1,100 dwellings) were ‘shortlisted’ – and hence the proposed (and then agreed) working assumption of 2,200 dwellings.

- 1.8.9 The following extract from the Growth Board Papers (26th September 2016) provides some helpful clarification on the status of the areas/ sites that underpin the apportionment.

132) The Growth Board should note that whilst the apportionment is a recommendation, this list of areas of search that underpins should only be viewed as input to the process rather than an output. This is because, although the Project Team based the Programme upon officers’ collective existing knowledge of areas of search that would be most suitable to meet Oxford’s unmet need, subsequent Local Plan work may bring other sites forward.

133) The Programme is not seeking to allocate or release sites, but has at a high level and using a common basis, through the work streams; identify the evidence of each district’s ability to absorb additional growth to meet a share of Oxford’s unmet need. It will be for each of the districts through their normal Local Plan processes to allocate sites sufficient to meet their proposed share of Oxford’s unmet need under the requirements of the Duty to Co-operate.

134) It is also important to note that the yield figures for each area of search represent estimated housing numbers to be delivered by 2031 – total capacities at a number of these sites may change through local assessment as part of the more detailed Local Plan process, taking a wider range of planning factors into account, including the potential to deliver further housing beyond 2031.

135) The detailed results for each of the areas of search that were considered in developing the apportionment are set out at Appendix 5.

- 1.8.10 It is of course right that the Growth Board work should not and cannot allocate sites, but equally, to give any meaningful steer on the most appropriate apportionment of unmet housing need, the Councils (both collectively and individually) must have given significant weight to the Growth Board process and findings.

- 1.8.11 The Growth Board work recognises that subsequent Local Plan work ‘*may bring other sites forward*’ and that ‘*the total capacities at a number of the sites may change through local assessment as part of the more detailed Local Plan process*’ - but it is very difficult indeed to see how in the space of less than six months the Council’s view on Abingdon North can change from it being considered ‘best suited’ to meeting part of Oxford City’s unmet housing need, to a position where the site doesn’t feature in any way (even at a reduced capacity) as a reasonable alternative for the purposes of sustainability appraisal.

- 1.8.12 There is a brief and ‘informal’ appraisal of a number of site options, including Abingdon North, in the Interim SA Report prepared by AECOM in March 2017, but Table 6.2 of this Report confirms that Abingdon North was not taken forward as a reasonable alternative for full assessment.
- 1.8.13 We raised this issue with the Council in our 4th May 2017 submissions to the Preferred Options consultation, so there has been ample time for the issue to be addressed by the Council. Our letter of representation stated:

‘The key point here is that if the Oxfordshire Growth Board work provides evidence of a District’s ability to meet part of Oxford’s unmet housing need, the areas under consideration (including Abingdon North) must have in-principle merit as development opportunities, otherwise they provide no such evidence of a District’s ability to meet part of Oxford’s unmet housing need. This is not to say that the Vale of White Horse District Council must allocate land in accordance with the Growth Board work, but it must be the case that further development at North Abingdon (Abingdon North) is a reasonable alternative, and should therefore be fully and properly considered in the Local Plan Part 2 work, including through the Council’s Sustainability Appraisal process (see further comment below).’

- 1.8.14 We respectfully suggest that this a legal compliance matter for the Inspector to consider. The SA Report, as required by Planning Practice Guidance and Regulation 12 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, must ‘*identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects on the environment of reasonable alternatives, taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the plan*’.

Reasonable Alternatives - Dalton Barracks

- 1.8.15 The SA Report (September 2017) discusses the Dalton Barracks proposal at paragraph 10.2.2. It confirms the Local Plan Part 2 proposal for around 1,200 new homes at Dalton Barracks in the plan period, ‘*whilst recognising that the longer term potential for development is potentially considerably higher (subject to further detailed work)*’.
- 1.8.16 There is a lack of clarity over what scale of development at Dalton Barracks the SA Report is considering.
- 1.8.17 It is very important to understand whether AECOM have appraised the 1,200 units proposed in the current plan period, or whether they have appraised the potentially much larger scheme – which will of course have very different environmental, social and economic impacts.
- 1.8.18 In this regard, the SA Report does not consider or assess the reasonable alternative of leaving Dalton Barracks in the Green Belt, as a Major Developed Site in the Green Belt, with its redevelopment permissible under the terms of paragraph 89 of the NPPF.