



North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
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10th December 2014

Dear Councillor Barber,

RE: Proposed housing allocation of 1400 dwellings to the East and North West of Harwell Campus – Vale of White Horse, Oxfordshire, Draft Local Plan 2031.

The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Unit wrote to you in March and again in October 2014 informing you of our grave concerns at the Council's proposed housing allocation of 1,400 dwellings on greenfield Grade 2 agricultural land in the open countryside at Harwell Campus in this nationally protected landscape.

Whilst the AONB Unit understand the pressures on housing delivery within the Vale of White Horse District we cannot understand the need for such a substantial housing allocation at Harwell Campus. We urgently request you review why housing for a population of 3220 people is being proposed on greenfield sites at Harwell Campus that do not relate to an existing settlement and will result in real long lasting harm to the character and qualities of the AONB. Harwell Campus is also a specific area that the AONB have highlighted as being an open landscape with particular vulnerability to large scale development.

If a sensible level of housing is required to meet the local needs of Harwell Campus, there is substantial scope within the existing Campus boundary, without the need to expand it outward into the open landscape of the nationally protected AONB. We also agree with independent work that has been undertaken by the CPRE that confirms that other options are available outside the AONB, including of course brownfield sites.

The existing Harwell Campus is simply an employment site, not an existing community with schools, services and existing facilities. We believe this proposal does not meet local needs but is a specific long term strategic aim of the Council to expand Harwell Campus out into the AONB as a "new town." The Council previously acknowledged that this initial allocation of 1400 homes will also pave the way for a future reserve site for an additional 2000 homes.

The only action the Council have seen fit to take in response to our original concerns is the splitting of the 1,400 housing sites, now to the East (850 dwellings) and North (550 dwellings) of Harwell Campus. The Council are, however, still showing this part of the AONB as falling within a proposed "Housing Supply Ring Fence Area", so we know the Council's future intentions are to expand Harwell Campus for even more housing. The splitting of the housing sites of course does not overcome our original objections on impact on this nationally protected landscape.

It is our understanding this proposed housing allocation is the largest greenfield housing allocation within any protected landscape (AONB or National Park) in the UK. Above all this proposal threatens to undermine the whole basis of AONBs nationally. We are also aware of a number of other organisations, including Natural England, who have also expressed their fundamental concern over the Vale's proposals at Harwell Campus. The Council are under a legal duty under Section 85 of the CRoW Act 2000 to conserve and enhance the character and qualities of the AONB and accordingly afford it great weight in any decision. The Council are also a member of the AONB Partnership and have approved the statutory Management Plan for the AONB.

We are deeply disappointed that our requests to you for meetings to discuss this matter have not been met with any response. We also cannot tell you strongly enough how fundamental your decision on the future of Harwell Campus will be in respect of all AONBs nationally. We will again contact Lord de Mauley (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Natural Environment and Science) to express our continued opposition to the Vale's proposals and I include a copy of our representations to the current Local Plan consultation outlining our concerns in more detail.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Lord
MA BA(Hons) MRTPI
Planning Advisor

Enc.

cc. Ed Vaizey MP
Lord de Mauley
Charles Routh – Natural England
Stephen Preston – DEFRA
Howard Davies – NAAONBs.
Harwell, Chilton & East Hendred Parish Councils
Helen Marshall – CPRE Oxfordshire
"Save Chilton AONB" – Chilton Village Campaign Group