

Comment

Consultee	Mr Ashley Poyton (871676)
Email Address	[REDACTED]
Address	21 Mattock Way Abingdon-on-Thames OX14 2PD
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Comment by	Mr Ashley Poyton
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Q1 Do you consider the Local Plan is Legally Compliant? No

Q2 Do you consider the Local Plan is Sound (positively prepared, effective and Justified) No

If your comment(s) relate to a specific site within a core policy please select this from the drop down list. N/A

If you think your comment relates to the DtC, this is about how we have worked with the Duty to Cooperate bodies (such as neighbouring planning authorities)

Q3 Do you consider the Local Plan complies with the Duty to Co-operate? No

Q4 Please give details of why you consider the Local Plan is not legally compliant or is unsound or fails to comply with the duty to co-operate. Please be as precise as possible. If you wish to support the legal compliance or soundness of the Local Plan or its compliance with the duty to co-operate, please also use this box to set out your comments.

There was very poor consultation on the whole project and whilst I didn't have any major objections to the original plans, later meetings threw in new development areas that would have serious impact

on the Green Belt of Abingdon so that the surrounding villages would have no distinct boundaries from the town of Abingdon.

Core Policy 4 & all others that flow from it [particularly 8,13,15 & 20]

This development is based on a flawed and overstated Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) that has already been criticised for its inaccuracies by organisations such as CPRE and politicians alike. Some experts say that the housing assessment is double the actual housing requirements of the county.

The SHMA forecast is based on overstated forecasts of new jobs to be created in the county. Most of this work is due to be created in South Oxfordshire, yet the proposed developments are in the Northern part of the county.

Both the SHMA and job forecast are estimates and not based on any factual data. They are reliant on economic predictions and growth that are aggressive, unproved and extremely optimistic.

Concerning the North Abingdon development, there has been little thought given to the impact of additional housing on an already overstretched education, social and traffic infrastructure. None of the developments in this area make provision for work to change the Abingdon North A34 access to make this four way, so all the traffic will have to use the ringroad or town centre that is currently struggling to cope with the traffic that has to flow on these roads. Adjustments made recently to the Wootton Road roundabout do not help with the traffic situation. Before the housing stock around Abingdon is increased then I suggest that changes to the A34 junction would be required.

Proper Consideration

The SHMA should have been the starting point to collect evidence for the housing requirements to assess realistic targets. Instead this has been used as an opportunity by the Vale to push as many houses into the plan as possible with no regard for consulting with the residents that this has an impact on. They advised that post was sent to the houses that would be affected but then by throwing in new development sites at the last minute there has been no opportunity for them to produce the reports required to justify their need. Indeed, the consultants they used advised specifically against the development of the area around "Twelve Acre Drive", for example.

Previous Developments

There is a large development in Didcot, the Great Western Park, that is a much larger development than those proposed around Abingdon. Part of those plans included infrastructure and amenities (shops, schools, post boxes, bus routes, etc) but the focus has been on the houses and none of the infrastructure has been built, or is progress. The occupants who have moved into this site are stranded and have to find other ways to get to amenities that they were promised by the developers and council. Who is to say that this will not be repeated so that the focus is on more houses with the promises of infrastructure improvements that may (or may not) eventually be built.

There is also a site in central Abingdon, the Old Goal, which was supposed to have public facilities but there were deals done at the last minute so that the whole site is residential housing, that is not even in keeping with that of the town centre. Ugly square, flat roofed houses have been built in a town that dates back to the Iron Age.

North Wessex Downs

The Vale's uncritical acceptance of the SHMA figures as targets has already led to inappropriate allocation of sites within the Green Belt and the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The plan has identified two sites in this AONB for a total of 1,400 houses, which is threatening to undermine the rural character of the Vale.

Green Belt

The plan completely ignores Government advice that "protecting our precious green belt must be paramount" and that boundaries should be altered only in "exceptional circumstances". Previous plans have always said that protecting the Green Belt land is a priority and that extension of building northwards towards Lodge Hill should be "resolutely avoided". This has in the past been endorsed by Planning Inspectors, and this should be a significant consideration in the current Vale plan. The Council states that it does not want Abingdon and Radley to join up

The characteristics of the land in question have not been properly assessed. The land does in fact make a significant contribution to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The land to the east of Tilsley Park has high landscape value. Also, being on rising land, any building on it would have a large impact and affect the setting and special character of Abingdon.

The Vale have not recognised Blake's Oak Ancient Woodland immediately bordering the site to the West of the Oxford Road. The surrounding land is also valuable farmland. There are many footpaths and cyclepaths across it that are used for recreational purposes. There is a diversity of wildlife including skylarks and the open aspect is a key criterion for the preservation of Green Belt.

The Vale's case for building on the Green Belt in the North of Abingdon is not sound. Unmet housing need is not an exceptional circumstance to justify taking land out of the Green Belt.

Personal Note

On a personal note, as a family we currently enjoy accessing the local countryside using the footpaths adjoining Twelve Acre Road from Mattock Way. The proposed plans are to build on this land, which would be a great loss for us as a family and our neighbourhood.

In addition, it is apparent that Abingdon is already overdeveloped with modern housing with very little architectural diversity, additional mass building of modern houses would only add to this. The defining features of Abingdon are its historical town setting, river and the surrounding Green Belt. Building on this Green Belt land would be a detriment to the defining features of this small historic town.

SUMMARY

For the reasons above I consider the plans put forward by the Vale are unsound because they have not been justified by robust evidence. I consider that lower housing numbers (about half) are actually required in the county which would then be in line with figures provided by central government.

I would like the Inspector to strike from the Local Plan any development the North West Downs AoNB, and also to remove the allocation of housing outside the existing Green Belts, particularly where there is already very little land separating the towns from the villages as it is.

Q5 Please set out what modification(s) you consider necessary to make the Local Plan legally compliant or sound, having regard to the test you have identified above where this relates to soundness. (NB Please note that any non-compliance with the duty to co-operate is incapable of modification at examination). You will need to say why this modification will make the Local Plan legally compliant or sound. It will be helpful if you are able to put forward your suggested revised wording of any policy or text. Please be as precise as possible.

Improvements to infrastructure are made before the development of houses -eg four way A34 access at North Abingdon

The council listen to the advice given to them in the development report to not build on top quality agricultural land and retain the Green Belt area between Abingdon (the oldest populated town in the country) and Oxford.

There is an argument for building on land to the West of the Tilsey Park, Abingdon. Any such development will be bordered by the A34, therefore this would form a natural boundary for the housing, but I cannot see that this housing stock would be desirable to the potential buyer as this is a busy route and there would be noise issues, such as those encountered in Botley (West Oxford) where there are special walls installed to reduce the road noise for the local residents.

Please note your representation should cover succinctly all the information, evidence and supporting information necessary to support/justify the representation and the suggested modification, as there will not normally be a subsequent opportunity to make further representations based on the original representation at publication stage.

After this stage, further submissions will be only at the request of the Inspector, based on the matters and issues he/she identifies for examination.

Q6 If your representation is seeking a modification, do you consider it necessary to participate at the oral part of the examination? No - I do not wish to participate at the oral examination