

Core Policy 15

Core Policy 15 (the Spatial Strategy for the South East Vale Sub-Area) provides that existing business premises around Didcot Power Station will be safeguarded for employment use (not including vacant surplus land). It is not clear what is meant by “vacant surplus land”, nor why the Policy should seek to exclude such land from the strategic employment allocation. These comments have been made previously, however it is not clear to us that they have been taken into account in the further advancement of the Emerging Local Plan.

It is the objective of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to deliver sustainable development by creating a strong and competitive economy. At Paragraph 21 of the NPPF it is identified that in drawing up Local Plans, local planning authorities should set out a clear economic vision and strategy for their area which positively and proactively encourages sustainable growth, identifies strategic sites to meet anticipated needs over the plan period and supports existing business sectors, taking account of new or emerging sectors likely to locate in their area. Policies should be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan and to allow a rapid response to changing economic circumstances. This includes higher than expected levels of economic growth.

The exclusion of “vacant surplus land” from this allocation appears to be at odds with national policy, as well as the objective of providing 209 hectares of employment land in the South East Vale Sub-Area. There is no justification in planning terms for the exclusion, particularly where adjacent land is still considered suitable for allocation. The Council has not sought to provide justification, despite the representations made on the subject in the Spring of 2013 when the Council published the Local Plan 2029 Part 1 for consultation, and in April 2014 when we commented on the Housing Delivery Update of the Local Plan 2031.

Land to the west of the Power Station was granted full planning permission in 2011 (VOWHDC Ref: 11/01088/RENEWAL) for either B2 or B8 development. There have been no significant changes of policy since that date which would warrant a different view. The part of the site upon which the 2011 permission was granted was included within Policy E6 of the currently Adopted VOWH Local Plan.

The land to the west of the Power Station has also been the subject of two outline applications seeking planning permission for its redevelopment to provide new buildings for storage and distribution (VOWH Refs: P13/V1832/O and P14/V1906/O). Prior to the submission of the first application, the Council’s pre-application response identified no objection in principle to the redevelopment of the whole of the area edged in red on the attached plan (**Appendix One**). The Officer’s report to the District’s Planning Committee in respect of application P13/V1832/O (21st May 2014) identified that the land in question “is clearly within an easily identifiable parcel of [employment] land and is closely related to other employment/industrial uses. The site (and its environs) remains an allocated employment site in the adopted 2011 Local Plan and the emerging Local Plan 2031. Therefore, the fact that around a third of the site has not been developed to date is not a matter for debate in planning terms. As such officers have reached the rounded view that there is no conflict with the proposals and the local plan in terms of land use”.

Such a view was reiterated in the Officer’s Report to Committee in respect of application P14/V1906/O (17th December 2014); at paragraph 6.6, the report notes that “the Council’s policy section has stated there are no policy objections to the proposed use (B8) being accommodated across the whole of the application site,

including land that is currently not allocated for employment use". The Council's Planning Committee endorsed this view and resolved to grant planning permission at its meeting on 17th December 2014.

It is our view, therefore, that to enable the plan to be considered positively prepared, justified and consistent with national planning policy, Core Policy 15 ought to be amended to exclude the reference to "vacant surplus land" and the Proposals Map should also be amended to ensure that the area outlined is included within the shaded area denoting its inclusion within the strategic employment allocation.