

Comment

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Address	71 Crafts End Chilton Didcot OX11 0SB
Event Name	Vale of White Horse Local Plan 20
Comment by	Mr Keith Mintern
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Q1 Do you consider the Local Plan is Legally Compliant? Yes

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

Q3 Do you consider the Local Plan complies with the Duty to Co-operate? Yes

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

Paragraph 5.61 states that "Two of our strategic housing sites are located within the North Wessex Downs AONB. In such circumstances, planning permission should be refused except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest."

Paragraph 116 of the NPPF in full is as follows: "Planning permission should be refused for major developments in the countryside where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include the impact of the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the countryside, including the impact of developing elsewhere outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way, and Any detrimental impacts on the recreational opportunities and the extent to which that could be moderated?"

Despite extensive searching through documents, there are no statements from the VWHDC which fully comply with justified the largest housing allocation on any greenfield site in any AONB or National Park in the UK with the following

?In identifying the preferred site package, the Council first considered those sites that were not located within the North Wessex Downs AONB. However, given the level of housing required, sites have been identified within the AONB and Oxford Green Belt.

A mix of sites are required that would deliver homes in the short as well as longer term to restore and maintain a five year supply. To achieve this it has been necessary to consider sites in AONB and Green Belt. (SOURCE: URS SA Report Final, February 2014, page 40)

This statement alludes to the fact that large scale housing allocations within the AONB have been proposed in order to meet the need. It does not demonstrate exceptional circumstances as required by the NPPF 115 and 116.

Further justification for building within the AONB is as follows:

?The Harwell Campus is an existing and well established development within the North Wessex Downs AONB (previously designated as a Special Scientific Area). The Campus is of international importance and national economic significance as a world-class centre for science, technology and innovation (European Space Agency). It is estimated that at least 5,400 net additional jobs will be created at the campus. (SOURCE: URS SA Report Final, February 2014, page 40)

NOTE: The European Space Agency has its headquarters in Paris, not Harwell, and has a number of other offices in the UK, most of whom are already working on the Campus.

The Council believes that the international significance of the site provides uniquely exceptional circumstances to justify the location. Any development will need to be sensitively planned to minimise impact on the AONB whilst delivering a high quality development. The original proposals have been refined and reduced based on more detailed landscape advice, restricting development to the edge of the AONB, so as not to cause significant visual harm. (SOURCE: URS SA Report Final, Paragraphs 13.3.5 and 13.3.6)

The VWHDC clearly believe that the economic benefits that might be derived from the proposed job growth at the Harwell Oxford Campus outweigh the circumstances? with which they should be allowed to build in the North Wessex Downs AONB. Surprisingly, the VWHDC has not given the Harwell Oxford Campus on housing requirements to support the campus prior to the publication of the Local Plan to be proven when the Harwell Oxford Campus published their initial strategy for the campus which appears to be at odds with the area.

However, there is no clear statement from the VWHDC on ?The need for the development, including the need for the development, in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, on the local economy?, and the impact of the development on the AONB. (SOURCE: URS SA Report Final, page 116)

KEY POINTS: With regards to the NPPF paragraph 116 ? There is unlikely to be any negative impact on the local economy if the North Wessex Downs AONB does not go ahead ? There are viable and alternative sites allocated outside of the North Wessex Downs AONB, in the Science Vale, that have already been identified by the VWHDC that can provide the housing needs without building in the AONB. The impact has been given to the environmental impact of the proposed developments within the North Wessex Downs AONB, and change of character through urbanisation. The cumulative impacts of the proposed developments, combined with the impact of the development on the AONB, and the inevitable coalescence of the new development with the ?Smaller Village? of Chilton have not been assessed.

The SQW/Cambridge Econometrics Report clearly does not regard housing delivery as a constraint to economic growth. If housing growth there is no evidence that one constrained the other? (SOURCE: Cambridge Econometrics, Economic Plan and Strategic Housing Market Assessment, Feb 2014, page 40). Therefore, by removing the strategic housing allocation at the Harwell Oxford Campus is unlikely to be constrained.

This assertion is further justified by the number of viable alternative sites close to the Harwell Oxford Campus, outside the AONB. ?The cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way?

77% of the Vale of White Horse is NOT within the North Wessex Downs AONB, and the VWHDC states that ?It is a fact that the Vale of White Horse can meet our housing needs? (SOURCE: Draft Local Plan to 2031, page 17, paragraph 69).

A review of the URS Strategic Assessment Appendices, and the Site Information Tables, confirm that several alternative sites have been identified but not inside the AONB, as scoring more favourably in terms of development potential than the sites around the Harwell Oxford Campus.

Appendix 9 of the URS Strategic Assessment of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1: Appendices concludes that ?In terms of the best-performing site options, these are considered to be sites at Valley Park, Didcot, which have no significant constraints and would lead to various positive effects, particularly in terms of housing, reducing travel times, and good access to employment sites and town centres?.

However, the VWHDC has not allocated any housing to Didcot A, despite them both being within the Science Vale and North Wessex Downs AONB.

Didcot A:

Didcot A has the capacity for up to 425 dwellings, with Core Policy 16 of the Local Plan: Didcot A Power Station, and the remainder of the site such as residential, ancillary retail, institutional or community use will be considered favourably.

The reason stated for not carrying this site forward was given as 'Redevelopment of the site to be supported by policy TPS 058', with site TPS 058

stating 'The site is safeguarded primarily for employment through Core Policy 13. The policy does however provide for site for mixed uses including residential. Therefore it is not appropriate to include as a separate allocation.' (Source: <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Topic%20Paper%203%20reduced.pdf>)

The Local Plan Part 2031 Part 1 Strategic Sites and Policies Housing Delivery Update Supporting Paper Appendix 1 (http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Supporting%20Paper%20-%20Appendix%205%20-%20Site%20Information) states, with regards to Didcot A:

'Sustainability Appraisal: No likely significant negative effects identified. Likely significant effects identified against three objectives:

And whilst potential transport issues have been identified, there are committed improvements to the road network and the site is well located. The report further notes that 'Potential opportunities for improved public transport links and the site is well located for access to the A34.'

Site 47: Land West of Steventon

The Local Plan Part 2031 Part 1 Strategic Sites and Policies Housing Delivery Update Supporting Paper Appendix 1 (http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Supporting%20Paper%20-%20Appendix%205%20-%20Site%20Information) states, with regards to the Land West of Steventon:

'Sustainability Appraisal: No significant negative effects identified. Significant positive effects against SA Objective 10:

The whole site has a maximum capacity for 1,175 houses.

Under transport, the following was stated 'There are capacity issues on the wider highway network, particularly to the south of Didcot. Development at this location may lead to a significant negative effect. The site is located close to Milton Park and has good access to the A34. The railway line to the south presents a barrier particularly as this is likely to be a significant constraint.'

The reasons for not developing this site were given as 'Existing significant utility infrastructure would constrain development. Highways constraints in the area.'

However, this site assessment was carried out on a housing allocation of 1,175 dwellings. If 350 houses were built on the site, then much of the above mentioned potential negative effects can be completely mitigated as less than 30% of the site would be developed. Steventon is also well placed to benefit from improved public transport links running between Grove and Milton to Didcot described in The Local Plan under Core Policy 17: Delivery of Strategic Highway Improvements within the South-East Oxfordshire. The site has a good selection of dining pubs, a Co-operative supermarket, a hairdressers, and a cafe amongst its services and facilities.

Site 12: Increased Density on Valley Park

Valley Park has already been identified as having an additional capacity for up to 1,200 homes.

The Local Plan Part 2031 Part 1 Strategic Sites and Policies Housing Delivery Update Supporting Paper Appendix 1 (http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Supporting%20Paper%20-%20Appendix%205%20-%20Site%20Information) states, with regards to Increased Density on Valley Park:

'Sustainability Appraisal: No likely significant negative effects identified. Likely significant positive effects against four objectives:

With the site being recommended for development because 'The site is well-located to the Great Western Park development masterplan alongside sites 10 and 11. Higher densities should be located towards the AONB and to minimise any impact on the AONB.'

Site 17: Harwell Oxford Campus

By contrast, The Local Plan Part 2031 Part 1 Strategic Sites and Policies Housing Delivery Update Supporting Paper Appendix 1 (http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Supporting%20Paper%20-%20Appendix%205%20-%20Site%20Information) states, with regards to Site 17 Harwell Oxford Campus:

'Sustainability Appraisal: Likely significant positive effects against three objectives. Likely significant negative effects against objectives 10 (Improve the quality of the environment and provide a high quality landscape and townscape) as the site is located within the AONB; and 9 (Reduce noise, vibration and light) as the site is close to the A34 and increased traffic, noise, and light could have a significant negative effect on the tranquillity of the AONB.'

Therefore, a quick appraisal of the potential alternative available sites indicates that the 1,400 houses at the Harwell Oxford Campus through strategic allocations at a combination of aforementioned sites: Didcot A (up to 425 dwellings), Land West of Steventon (up to 1,175 dwellings) and Increased Density at Valley Park (up to 1,200 dwellings).

These sites provide real and viable alternatives to building up to 1,400 houses within the AONB. All are well placed to be developed in the Strategic Assessment with less potential negative impacts than the Harwell Oxford Campus site.

By reallocating the houses within the AONB to these other sites, or distribute the housing across the western vale, for 116 of the NPPF ?The cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere outside the designated area, or meeting the need for housing can easily be met in other ways.

The last section of the NPPF Paragraph 116 states that an assessment should be included of ?any detrimental effect on opportunities and the extent to which they could be moderated?.

Whilst the VWHDC have carried out a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), the failings of which will be 5.63 of the Local Plan, little or no consideration appears to have been given to the detrimental effect on the environment.

The original appraisal of the site, Appendix 11 of the URS SA of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1: Appraisal of the Harwell Oxford Campus:

?SA 8: The landscape study recommends that the site has low landscape capacity and no part of the site is suitable for development within the AONB and there is also one listed building along the boundary of the site. Core Policies 34, 37 and 38 would apply to the AONB and surrounding a listed building would likely lead to significant negative effects in terms of the landscape and important views, natural features, tranquillity and noise and light pollution. As part of design and mitigation measures should contribute towards the objectives of the AONB Management Plan?.

?SA 9: The site is adjacent to the A34 which could lead to increased traffic (and associated air, noise and light pollution) along the road. The site is in a sensitive location within the AONB which could have significant negative effects in terms of landscape and tranquillity. Policies 29 and 33 would apply to reduce the significance of pollution impacts; however given the sensitivity of the AONB the impact of the site would be significant.

?SA 11: The site is a greenfield site which contains 140ha of Grade 2 Agricultural Land. Developing this site would result in the loss of Grade 2 land is the best quality in the borough and should be given greatest protection from development; however it may be deemed necessary?.

As such, the Local Plan does not comply with the NPPF paragraphs 115 and 116, or the CROW Act 2000 and is unlawful.

Q5 Please set out what modification(s) you consider necessary to make the Local Plan legally compliant or sound in the areas above where this relates to soundness. (NB Please note that any non-compliance with the duty to co-operate is illegal. You will need to say why this modification will make the Local Plan legally compliant or sound. It will be helpful if you use the same wording of any policy or text. Please be as precise as possible.

In order to make the Local Plan sound and legally compliant with the NPPF paragraphs 115 and 116, the following modifications are suggested: ? Remove the allocation of 850 homes from the Harwell East Campus. ? Remove the additional allocation of 150 homes from the North Wessex Downs AONB (reducing the total number of houses from 550 to 400 (including the 125 already given outline permission)). ? Include provision of up to 400 new homes (including the 125 already given outline permission), provided that all development is contained within the perimeter of the Harwell Oxford Campus. ? Reallocate the 850 homes from the Harwell East Campus and the additional 150 homes (900 homes in total) to other sites already identified by the Vale of White Horse, for example: ? (a) Valley Park (which has capacity for up to a further 1,200 homes) ? (b) Didcot A (capacity for 425 houses), or ? (c) Land West of Steventon (capacity for 1,000 homes) ? Remove the North Wessex Downs AONB entirely from the Science Vale ?Ringfence? in order to protect the Science Vale from falling behind in delivery of its housing targets.

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

After this stage, further submissions will be only at the request of the Inspector, based on the matters and issues raised.

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 part of the examination?