

Representations on the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011 to 2031

On behalf of:
The Gow Family

1.0 Introduction

1.1. McLoughlin Planning have been instructed by the owners of land at Appleton to promote their land for housing development through the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031.

1.2. The Gow family land is on the north side of the village of Appleton and is referred to in the Green Belt Review -site 7 - as being suitable for being released from the Green Belt as it no longer serves a Green Belt purpose. These representations are focused on:

- Seeking the release of the land from the Green Belt.
- Promoting the land for housing development.
- Addressing any other issue the Gow family may have with the day-to-day development management policies of the Local Plan.

1.3. Representations are made with the specific objective of promoting land at Appleton for housing development and policies are considered in turn below.

Core Policy 1

1.4. The Policy is supported in that it reflects the requirements of the Frameworks and the presumption in favour of sustainable development. In addition, the second paragraph of the policy is also supported in that it reflects the need for the Council to make decisions, which it may not necessarily have the policy Framework for.

Core Policy 2

1.5. There is the concern that the Policy is unsound because of the open acknowledgement in the Policy that there could be an need to accommodate additional development from neighbouring authorities as part of the Duty to Co-Operate (DTC).

1.6. The respondents support the need set out in the 4th paragraph of the policy to undertake a full strategic review of the Oxford Green Belt. However, this should not be at the expense of making decisions in the Plan about green belt release in the interim. This will be expanded on in more detail in other representations.

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1.7. Support is given to the aims of the plan in terms of facilitating the right type of housing in the most sustainable locations. However, in terms of what is considered the "most sustainable" locations, further clarity is required about providing housing in rural settlements, which whilst may not have access to a full range of facilities

and services, are none-the-less important locations for providing services to the locality.

- 1.8. In terms of meeting the needs of our rural communities, the respondent supports the Plan's recognition that additional development in rural areas will assist in retaining services and ensure viability of rural communities. This should be expanded to support the development of both green belt and non-green belt villages.

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- 1.9. The need to provide new housing in locations which will reduce the need to travel is accepted. However, in respect of rural communities, the need to travel to a wider area may necessitate the need to travel by private car. New development in rural communities should not be simply resisted because of travel patterns, where it can achieve other sustainability objectives.
- 1.10. The lack of appropriate development in rural communities has meant that transport services have been lost forcing more cars on to the roads.

Protecting the environment and responding to climate change (page 27)

- 1.11. Protecting high quality landscapes are recognised, but there is a need in the framework that landscape protection should be in accordance with a criteria based policy and the relative weight to be applied to the landscape designation should be commensurate with the landscape status of the site, whether that is international, national or local.

Section 3: Spatial Vision

- 1.12. The respondents support the spatial vision as advanced, insofar as it advocates new development in the District. However, the following comments are made.
- 1.13. There is a requirement that the Vision has to be justified and in response to this, the concern is that the vision is silent about the need for green belt release. Green belt release to help meet the needs of the District and neighbouring authorities is a key policy issue. There is a need with the Vision to make reference to the need for carefully considered green belt release to provide the necessary support in other parts of the plan to allow green belt sites to come forward.

Page 30 & 31 S03 and S09

- 1.14. Support the need for development to be located at sustainable locations . However, the requirement for development to be located at the "most sustainable locations" appears to drive developments to locations where there is a variety of transport modes to use and does not reflect the differences between urban and rural areas of the district. Development in rural areas may not be inherently sustainable in that

there could be a higher reliance on the private car, but equally, development could support existing services and facilities. and ensure that they remain sustainable. In fact by preventing development in a rural community only seeks to reduce the likely hood of the community being sustainable.

- 1.15. It is recommended that these objectives are refined to better reflect the guidance in paragraph 29 of the Framework.

Page 33 - Sub Area Strategies Abingdon on Thames

- 1.16. Reference should be made to the wider hinterland of the sub-area where there a number of small villages (as per the settlement hierarchy). These villages serve important roles in meeting immediate local needs.

Figure4.1

- 1.17. In conjunction with other representations, it is recommended that the third column of the figure is modified to reflect to make specific reference to the release of green belt land around villages (such as Appleton) to assist in meeting the District's needs. It is recommended that Appleton is upgraded to a large village.

Settlement Hierarchy and CP3

- 1.18. The respondents support the Plan's approach in that it looks to provide a settlement hierarchy for managing development. However, the respondents make the following comments.
- 1.19. In terms of the Abingdon on Thames sub area, the classification of Appleton as a Smaller Village is not justified, when assessed against the evidence base. The respondent's position is that the village should be seen as a large village in that it has more in common with a 'small' larger village. A good example of this is comparing Appleton with Uffington (in the Western Vale Area). This village scores 14 in the Councils Village Facilities Study and this makes it the lowest scoring Larger Village in the District.
- 1.20. When evaluating the two settlements, the key differences is that
- Uffington has local employment
 - Uffington has better open space provision.
- 1.21. Critically, Uffington is not a larger settlement. An analysis of the 2011 Census data shows that Appleton is a larger Parish, with a population of 915, when compared against 783 for Uffington. In addition, the village has a Doctor's Surgery whereas Uffington does not. This shows that Appleton performs an important service centre

function beyond its immediate environs. New development in the village will be controlled by the green belt.

Policy CP4 Spatial Strategy

- 1.22. In general terms, the Gow family do not seek to question the level of housing being provided for in the District. However, there are a number of concerns about the approach of the Policy and the reliance upon a Local Plan Part 2.
- 1.23. The Local Plan seeks to provide 20,560 new homes over the Plan period of 2011 to 2031. Of this, some 2031 have already been completed (assuming to March 2015). Out of the remaining 15,360 homes, 13,960 are accounted for the strategic allocations made in the document, leaving 1000 for Part 2 and a 900 unit windfall allowance.
- 1.24. The Gow family's concern is that the level of development left for Part 2 of the Plan accounts for less than 5% of the overall plan figure and given the heavy reliance on strategic sites it is questionable as to whether the Plan can maintain a 5 year supply of housing land, as required by the Framework and PPG. This could lead to development decisions being made on sites not identified in the Plan, leading to a reduction in the 1000 homes available for Part 2 allocations. The net effect being that it could make Part 2 redundant. Another concern is further unplanned development could lead to higher levels of development than planned for in the District, leading to decisions in the future to not release sites from the green belt for development. National Guidance and Ministerial speeches have made it clear that development in the green belt can only be realised through the development plan process. This puts green belt settlements at an inherent disadvantage in ensuring their long-term sustainability compared to non-green belt locations. It is recommended that Core Policy 4 is modified to "ring fence" an element of housing numbers to allow for the future release of green belt sites through part 2 as a minimum, or failing that, make the necessary allocations in Part 1.
- 1.25. In terms of the presumption in favour of sustainable development, it is considered that the presumption applies to all settlements within defined parts of the hierarchy, save for those locations which are not listed. The Policy's approach to the presumption conflicts with the Framework in that there are no such limitations on development.
- 1.26. The Gow family are also equally concerned about the Plan's reliance on Neighbourhood Planning to deliver the level of housing required. Neighbourhood Plans are critically reliant upon the relevant neighbourhood coming together to produce a plan, which has to be in general conformity with the Local Plan Part 1.

Settlements which are not pro-development can simply avoid the requirement to provide new housing in accordance with Core Policy 4 by not producing such a Plan. This places increasing reliance on Part 2 of the Plan, which remains to be seen to be delivered.

Core Policy 7

- 1.27. The Gow Family recognise the need to provide necessary on-site infrastructure in accordance with Core Policy 7. However, further detail is urgently required as per the type of infrastructure that will have to be funded by new development.

Figure 5.1

- 1.28. It is recommended that Appleton is upgraded to a Large Village and that an annotation is added to the plan showing that a green belt release will take place to support development.

Page 51 the 2031 Vision for the Sub-Area

- 1.29. In conjunction with other representations, there is a need to ensure that the vision is justified. Other aspects of the Plan endorse development at all levels of the settlement hierarchy. However, as drafted, the 2031 vision ignores the need for green belt review along with any mention of development at smaller villages. In order to make the Vision sound. Reference should be added to development at smaller villages, as per Policy CP3 and CP4 of the Plan.

Core Policy 8

- 1.30. As per other representations the Gow family's position on Appleton is that the evidence base supporting the village's position as a small village is flawed when compared against other Larger Villages in the District and that the services and facilities provided by Appleton are sufficient to mean that it acts as a local service centre for the surrounding villages.

Housing Delivery Table

- 1.31. The Gow family support the need for the sub-area to accommodate 5438 dwellings over the plan period. However, as per other objections, there is the concern that the need to maintain a 5-year housing supply and availability of non-greenbelt locations for new development mean that the part 2 allocations figure could be reduced. This in turn could seriously limit Part 2's ability to release land from the green belt to provide homes to help support Smaller/Larger villages.
- 1.32. As a result, it is recommended that either the necessary allocations are made in the Policy (notably at North Appleton) or that the policy is modified to specifically ring fence housing coming forward from green belt locations.

Core Policy 13

- 1.33. The Gow Family support the Policy in so far as it relates to the need for green belt review. However, as worded, the Policy is unclear as to exactly what it proposes. As a result, further clarification is sought.
- 1.34. The Framework allows for green belt to be reviewed and considers that Local Plan Review provides the necessary circumstances to allow for a review to be justified. It is understood that the latest revisions to the PPG do not necessarily require Green Belt review to support housing needs, but this has to be seen in the context of allowing new housing to take place in green belt villages to allow them to meet other Framework objectives (notably paragraph 55).
- 1.35. The first paragraph in the Policy states:
- "The Oxford Green Belt area in the Vale, as amended following local Green Belt Review..."*
- 1.36. It is not clear from this Statement as to whether the Plan will fully endorse the findings of the Green Belt review (which forms part of the Plan's evidence base) or whether further consideration of the green belt issue will take place. This is important as if the Review has identified parcels which are no longer fulfilling green belt purposes, then these should be released from the Green Belt, which in turn mean that they can be developed to assist the Plan in meeting its housing requirements and the need to maintain sustainable patterns of development, by supporting villages (e.g. Appleton).
- 1.37. With the above in mind, the following analysis of the site's performance against Green Belt guidance is provided below:
- 1.38. As set out above, the site is in the Green Belt and there is a need for the Plan to consider the role and function it performs in Green Belt terms in line with the guidance in paragraph 84 of the Framework. The Gow family note that the Council has commissioned a consultant to undertake a review earlier this year and set out my additional thoughts on the site as follows:
- "To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas"*
- 1.39. This is strictly not relevant as Appleton is not a "large built up area" however, in terms of the site itself and how it performs, it is adjacent and well related to the urban area of the village. It is well contained and defined by existing physical boundaries, which provide logical limits to development. As a result, development will not "sprawl".

"The prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another"

- 1.40. As with the first objective, the site is adjacent to a village, which is located away from the major urbanised area of Oxford and Abingdon. It does not sit in any visually strategic gap between the two, so development will not lead to the merging of towns either physically or visually. In terms of dealing with the point of merging smaller settlements, given the visual containment of the site, this is not considered to be an issue.

"To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment"

- 1.41. Appleton is something of a linear settlement. This site is visually very well contained and defined by existing boundaries, with development on three sides. As a result, it does not have a countryside feel, but rather that of an area of transition between development and the wider countryside. The site therefore, could be released from the Green Belt, without compromising this objective.

"To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns"

- 1.42. In heritage terms, Appleton has a defined conservation area, which is to the south of the in the historic core of the village. The approach to the village from the north is represented by post war housing as is somewhat conventional in its feel. In contrast, the site to the south is immediately adjacent to the village conservation area and it is considered this would have a more direct impact on the setting of the village. So whilst Appleton is not a town, the release of the site will not compromise heritage objectives of the Framework.

"To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land"

- 1.43. Given the Plan's housing target and open acceptance of Greenfield housing allocations, it is clear that there will be a requirement for Greenfield sites to be released. In turn, this necessitates the need to consider green belt sites as well.
- 1.44. Therefore, given the above conclusions on Green Belt and the other concerns about ensuring the delivery of housing in the village, it is recommended that the Plan firstly removes land from the Green Belt and allocates it for housing development.

Core Policy 22

- 1.45. As drafted, the Policy is not in accordance with guidance in the Framework. The risk with the Policy is that the reliance on the SHMA could lead to prescriptive decisions being made by the Council about the type of open market housing being provided, which could lead to possible imbalances in the provision of housing on a site. In contrast, paragraph 50 of the Framework requires LPAs to "plan for a mix of housing" this is not prescribe a mix of housing. The test for an alternative non-SHMA mix is excessive in that it requires an alternative to be demonstrated which could bring into question the validity of the SHMA.

Core Policy 26

- 1.46. The Gow family object to the requirements of the policy as it is not clear what the Policy is seeking from other forms of residential development which are not specifically targeted to meeting the needs of an ageing population.

Core Policy 36

- 1.47. The provision of broadband services and infrastructure is not within the remit of the development industry, but rather BT Openreach, the operator of the telecoms network and other smaller broadband suppliers. The concern is that the definition of "appropriate infrastructure" could be used to require developer to provide systems, which are simply not within their control or technical capacity to do so.
- 1.48. A further concern is what constitutes "superfast broadband" and how this requirement will be assessed through the planning application process.

Core Policy 37

- 1.49. The Gow family broadly support the aims of the Policy, which encourage high quality design. However, not all of the requirements will be relevant to all developments, for example criterion vii and the need to encourage a mix of uses.
- 1.50. In addition, there are conflicting requirements in the policy, such as the need to provide convenient access for vehicles along with the need to provide a high quality public realm. Application of County highways standards could see the two objectives compromised. As a result, the policy should set out the criteria as a series of relevant aim to be applied where appropriate.

Core Policy 40

- 1.51. The requirements of the policy are onerous and not in accordance with national guidance. Matters relating to building performance are best suited to be addressed through the Building Regulations process.
- 1.52. In terms of the need to orientate habitable rooms within 30 degrees of south, this will not be possible on all development sites for all units proposed and the need to demonstrate that it is not appropriate to do so places an unnecessary burden on developers, especially where the layout of a site and its physical characteristics are the key in addressing this issue.

Core Policy 43

- 1.53. The Gow Family object to criterion viii of the policy as it could be used to support a sequential approach to the development of sites. Paragraph 113 of the Framework requires agricultural land quality to be "taken into account" and does not advocate a sequential approach.

Core Policy 44

- 1.54. The Policy is contrary to national guidance by virtue of the fact that the policy seeks to protect the “landscape” of the district from harmful development. Guidance in paragraph 113 of the Framework requires criteria based policies against which proposals can be assessed. This also requires plans to make distinctions between international, national and local designations.
- 1.55. As drafted the Policy sets out a blanket approach to landscape protection, irrespective of the level of designation afforded to it. This could lead to disproportionate weight being attached to landscape features by the Council.
- 1.56. In addition, it is not clear as to how the Plan expects developments to enhance damaged landscapes outside of land which is immediately under the applicant’s control.

Core Policy 45

- 1.57. The Gow family support the provision of green infrastructure (GI) on development sites. However, there are the following concerns with the policy and supporting paragraphs:
- 1.58. The joint Green Infrastructure Strategy document has yet to be produced and does not appear to be available for consultation. This could lead to the Strategy setting disproportionate levels of GI in new developments. It is essential that the Strategy is available for examination.
- 1.59. Welbeck question the role and function of the Green Infrastructure Audit in the Plan’s preparation. Whilst the standards set out are obtained from Natural England, these are not necessarily relevant to the District as the pattern of accessible natural green space is fractured across the district. The concern is that this audit represents an unachievable set of requirements for development sites.
- 1.60. The Plan cannot require development proposals to improve assets, which do not relate to those proposals. As drafted, the Policy could be used to require improvements to GI or Conservation Target Areas, which are outside of an applicant’s control and are unrelated to any application proposals.

2.0 New Housing Allocation

- 2.1. In conjunction with the above representations, it is recommended that the following allocation be made at Appleton.

Land to the West of Eaton Road, Appleton

- 2.2. 4ha of land is allocated for residential development and associated public open space and structural landscaping. The site will deliver up to 80 dwellings. A plan showing the site is included in the LDA Design material.
- 2.3. As part of any development proposals, the applicant will be expected to examine and explore the potential of burying the power lines under ground.
- 2.4. In supporting the proposed allocation, the Gow Family has commissioned LDA Design and CTC consulting to provide a series of technical notes about ecology and landscape (LDA) and highways (CTC). These notes, which accompany these representations demonstrate that there are no in-principle constraints to the site's development against these sensitive issues.
- 2.5. In terms of the site's topography, as it slopes west to east and there is a field drain, this means that the site can be drained through the use of SUDS.
- 2.6. In terms of other parts of the case for an allocation, the following should be noted:
- 2.7. Whilst the Plan is silent as to whether the site would be allocated for development in the fullness of time, the release of the site for development has to be considered against the provisions of paragraph 55 of the Framework.
- 2.8. In Appleton's case, it has a good range of services and facilities (Village Hall, Doctors, Primary School, community shop and pubs) which benefit from residents making best use of them. Additional development in the village will assist in maintaining these services and providing a throughput of children for the primary school. The risk is that without additional housing in the village, the school will become increasingly dependent on children coming into the village from other villages, which in turn leads to unsustainable patterns of development taking place. Additional housing will also provide the potential for a greater mix in the demographic structure of the village and provide a logical location for local affordable housing needs to be met, where residents can make the use of services in the village, without having to resort to travelling outside of it. Therefore, in summary, the release of the site will allow for paragraph 55-compliant form of development to take place.

- 2.9. Appleton village conducted a housing needs survey in spring of 2013 where it was identified the need for more housing especially for affordable housing as well as accommodation for older people who wished to downsize and still stay a member of the local community.
- 2.10. It is understood that in the Spring of 2014 when the local Parish looked at the VoWH proposals they were broadly supportive not negative to the idea of having development on this site. They obviously have concerns as to what might development might take place however they do see it is an opportunity whereby they could perhaps achieve some of their objectives identified in the Appleton housing needs survey. The Gow family have lived and farmed in the area for over 100 years. They are aware of the sensitivity of any development and as such would look to work with the local community as the family are likely to be there for another 100 years.
- 2.11. The lack of development within Appleton village over the last 25 years has meant that services such as the local bus service to Oxford has been put under pressure to reduce its service or stop altogether.
- 2.12. The lack of appropriate development over the years in rural communities - such as Appleton - has inhibited the development of sustainable transport solutions for these communities. Appropriate development should be encouraged along existing rural bus service routes so core policies 1, 33 & 35 are truly supported.
- 2.13. Para 5.2 of the enclosed feasibility transport and access report states that "this site presents an ideal opportunity for residential development and meets all transport criteria."
- 2.14. Para 5.1 of the enclosed feasibility transport and access report states that " Of particular significance are;
- a footway adjacent to Eaton Road, catering for safe and convenient pedestrian access to the village centre and the facilities available there;
 - low traffic volumes, enabling safe and pleasant travel within and nearby the village by bicycle;
 - a substantial range of bus services, offering convenient access to nearby major urban areas, thereby permitted convenient and sustainable accessibility of major land uses not provided within the village; and,
 - straight and level alignment of Eaton Road, providing excellent levels of visibility, considerably over and above the Manual for Streets requirements, defined in light of existing observed traffic speeds.

- 2.15. Para 3.8 of the enclosed feasibility transport and access report states that: "the visibility splays achieved from the existing agricultural field access significantly exceed the calculated safe requirements."
- 2.16. Para 4.3 of the enclosed feasibility transport and access report states that: "Adjacent to the site frontage on Eaton Road are located bus stops serving both directions of travel."
- 2.17. Para 3.3 of the enclosed landscape report states that "Development within the site given its limited scale, location and context would have no significant effect on the prevailing character and appearance of the North Vale Corallian Ridge."
- 2.18. Para 6.0 of the enclosed landscape report states that: "The appraisal has concluded that there are no significant or overriding landscape, visual or heritage constraints which would preclude the principle of development within the site or would significantly limit the potential of the site for residential development. Development would not give rise to significant or widespread adverse visual effects and could be successfully integrated into the existing village edge within well defined boundaries."
- 2.19. Para 4.2 of the enclosed ecological feasibility study states that: "The arable field on site is considered to be low value for biodiversity. The rough grassland to the north is of low floristic diversity and common in the wider area and nationally. The hedges support native woody species, but are generally sparse and therefore are considered to be of value in the local context only."
- 2.20. Para 5.0 of the enclosed ecological feasibility study also states that: "This report has considered the ecological context of the land at Appleton in order to inform consideration of the suitability of the site for residential development. The appraisal has concluded that there are no significant or overriding ecological constraints which would preclude the principle of development within the Site or would significantly limit the potential of the Site for residential development."
- 2.21. The local community took action to bring superfast broadband, through Gigaclear Ltd, to Appleton with Eaton parish in 2012 to become one of the few rural communities currently in the UK to have superfast broadband. This can only support the ever increasing opportunity of working from home and as such reducing the road use.
- 2.22. While details of core policy 2 have not been identified at present, this site being situated 6 miles west of Oxford city centre and on a current bus route could help provide some of the housing need to meet core policy 2



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