

## Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031

The Plan appears to be based entirely on the figures presented in the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) which was produced for the Council by an external consultant. The very high forecasts for housing in the SHMA are extremely controversial and have been greatly criticised by a number of organisations as well as politicians. Indeed, in one critique by a leading planning expert, it has been concluded that the estimate in the SHMA may be too high by a factor of two. There has already been extensive housing development in the area due to speculative building, with many more already approved planning applications in the pipeline, and the Plan appears ignore these. Neither does it take into account the environmental and social issues which would result from such a massive rapid increase in population in the Vale. Rather, it appears to assume that such expansion can be absorbed with few serious problems, which is far from the truth.

As far as Shrivenham is concerned, it is clear from even a brief look at the proposed figures for new housing along the A420 corridor, that the village has been targeted as suitable for major expansion while other villages have been left virtually untouched. One reason according to the Plan appears to be *‘good access to local employment’*, though where this is is a mystery to local residents, many of whom are forced to commute long distances for work. Another, is that *‘new residents will help to sustain the services and social life in this rural community’*. In fact, some of the services in the village are already over stretched while there has always been a flourishing social life in the village. So wrong on both these counts! An alternative approach could be that many of the smaller villages in the area would benefit from new housing which could boost their populations to a level where some of their lost local services could be restored.

A major problem in the area is congestion on the A420, which the plan says may suffer *‘capacity problems towards the end the period’*. In fact, everyone who lives in the area knows, and a recent independent transport study has confirmed, that the A420 is, at times, already at full capacity, with long queues of slow moving traffic and any further housing developments feeding on to it can only exacerbate this situation. The solution in the Plan to upgrading the A420 appears to be limited to the addition of new roundabouts at Shrivenham and Faringdon. Whilst these will improve access to and from the A420 for residents of these villages they will do nothing to ease congestion along the highway and could, in fact, make things worse by slowing traffic and increasing queueing. The only satisfactory solution to the problems of the A420 would be to make it dual carriageway from Swindon to Oxford but there is no mention of this anywhere in the plan.

The Plan states that its adoption will mean that *‘the quality of rural life will be maintained’* yet a number of potential development sites for substantial numbers of houses have been identified both within the Green Belt and in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Up to now, Government policy has dictated that these areas should be open to consideration for development only in *‘very exceptional circumstances’*, a policy that the Plan seems to ignore. In the circumstances, if such development goes ahead it is impossible for the quality of life and the rural environment

not to be destroyed for ever.

In conclusion, if the numbers of new houses proposed in the Plan are imposed on villages and towns in the Vale, it is impossible to see how the public services and infrastructure could possibly be improved sufficiently within the timescale to cope with the increased level of demand. The result will be a reduction in the quality of life for everyone and irreversible destruction of the countryside. The housing targets need to be reconsidered and rather than being based unquestioningly on the SHMA should be tied in more closely with the Government's own much lower household projections.

#### **Dr R E Colyer Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031**

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