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Oxford Garden

On behalf of a consortium of Local Landowners by Locally Based Professionals.

The Vision

- To create a completely new settlement of around 25,000 houses within 6 miles of Oxford in one of the most economically buoyant and environmentally attractive parts of the South East, on land that is **not Green Belt**.
- This will be a satellite to Oxford, a Garden City that can enjoy the benefit of Oxford's commercial and lifestyle advantages without suffering from its physical limitations or historic constraints.
- A unique and self-sustaining community, including social and market housing, affordable custom-build and group self-build homes at high, medium and low densities, plus, employment, retail, and leisure, civic and academic facilities.
- This is a prosperous location with low unemployment and strong and effective demand, it will provide the opportunity for people from all backgrounds to realise their aspirations of home ownership.
- This site is at the heart of one of the key strategic locations for employment and housing growth within the UK; Science Vale Oxford Enterprise Zone/Growth Point. This is a major cluster of the high-tech knowledge-based businesses which are vital to our future economic prosperity.
- The site is highly connected and strategically located to give direct access to the A34 and to the (electrified) Great Western Main Line and Chiltern Valley Line services direct to Oxford and London Paddington.

Quality of Life

- Oxford Garden City will deliver the best possible quality of living environment and its identity will be defined as a grouping of distinct urban villages of individual character set within a framework of wildlife rich and accessible linear open spaces and watercourses.
- Opportunities for the full range of housing tenures, (including affordable group self-build, custom build and individual self-build), delivered within individual area based design code frameworks, will produce neighbourhoods that allow creative design and yet have their own distinct and identifiable character.
- Each neighbourhood will accommodate a mix of land uses and a wide range of housing densities, to be served by a road network giving priority to safe segregated footpaths and cycle-ways and a city wide guided bus-way system.
- Oxford Garden City will be designed from the outset to be developed in deliverable phases directly linked to the provision of essential local services and infrastructure.
- All residential areas will have easy access to local services and to employment locations within and beyond the town and be linked to the reopened Grove Railway Station which will be the focus of the transport hierarchy.
- The scheme will provide opportunities for new large scale regionally

important facilities, such as a hospital and sites for academic/university campus developments plus new hotels and an event/entertainment/sports arena and music festival/showground.

- The Urban Design ethos is of linear not concentric growth, to allow for long term flexibility in design and land uses.

Solution to Long Term Housing Delivery in Oxfordshire

- Oxford City is required to deliver approximately 1,390 dwellings per annum but has space to accommodate no more than about 400 houses per annum due to the physical constraints of the green belt.
- The Vale of White Horse draft Local Plan has recently identified 21 separate housing allocations spread across that rural District, creating maximum disruption and achieving minimum community benefit.
- Existing infrastructure remains inadequate and unless planning gain benefits are concentrated and exploited piecemeal residential development will not fund improvements.
- The local people opposed to the dispersal of housing throughout the villages are natural allies of the Garden City proposal, as are those who would benefit directly from a new station at Grove.

Economic Viability and Infrastructure

- The agreed minimum land value and high development land value can support and provide the necessary infrastructure.
- Public subsidy will not be required.
- Oxford Garden City is self-supporting and can fund key infrastructure improvements that cannot be delivered by fragmented and dispersed developments elsewhere.

Governance

- The long term governance of the new settlement is a matter for discussion but it will inevitably be based upon a partnership between key private and public sector stakeholders, including the Local Authority and Local Enterprise Partnership.
- The comprehensive master planning of the Garden City will be an essential component in establishing the holistic approach to long term delivery that is required.
- Initially the site area will fall within the neighbouring Parish Council's control, ultimately we believe it will fall under the jurisdiction of the Vale of White Horse as an additional large settlement.

The Proposal

The Location

1. The site which is the subject of this submission is shown on the accompanying location plan. This is a flat empty area of approximately 2000 ha, 9 miles south west of Oxford; the bulk of it is controlled by six principle land owners who are working with us to promote this combined site for the location of a new settlement built on garden city principles. Previously identified as suitable for an airport, then as a site for a new reservoir, it remains available and environmentally unconstrained.
2. Bounded to the South by the Great Western Main Line Railway, to the East by the A34 and adjacent to the Science Vale Oxford employment growth point and Enterprise Zone, this is a highly sustainable location for a new settlement.
3. Oxford Garden City will harness and facilitate the prosperity and economic buoyancy associated with Oxford's knowledge-based research and development industries in a location which will maximise the environmental and social benefits arising from building new homes and new employment opportunities.

The Site

4. This large area is empty and flat with little topographical interest or environmental sensitivity. The scale of this open space within an otherwise constrained and environmentally sensitive general area makes it highly unusual and this is reflected in the two large-scale development proposals which have previously been attracted to it, firstly for an airport and then the Thames Water reservoir. The physical attributes of this site are unusually well understood; it has very few physical or environmental constraints and is largely in use for arable farming.

Environment, Landscape and Ecology

5. All key environmental aspects of the proposed new settlement area have been examined and considered in detail as part of the previous Thames Water Reservoir EIA scoping study submissions. It is evident that there are no significant ecological or heritage asset issues to prevent the delivery of a garden city in this location. The site is bisected roughly diagonally by the Wilts & Berks canal, parts of the site are with flood zone and liable to flooding, there are existing hedges and field boundaries.

Analysis of Potential Constraints

6. For such a massive site area it is surprisingly (perhaps uniquely) free of environmental or planning policy constraints:

7. Flood Zone – Parts of the site are located within Flood Zone 2 or 3 as defined by the Environment Agency but the layout of any new settlement can accommodate these areas within a network of watercourses and linear open spaces, with resultant ecological and recreational benefits (see the schematic Concept and Land Use plans);
8. National and European Designations – The site is not designated at a European or National level in respect of ecology, habitats or heritage / archaeology;
9. Listed Buildings – The site does not include any statutory listed buildings or scheduled ancient monuments;
10. Archaeology - There is evidence of archaeology across the site but not of a level of importance that would inhibit development on the scale proposed, the structure of a new settlement could accommodate unexpected archaeological finds.
11. AONB – The site does not fall within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
12. Green Belt – The site does not fall within the Green Belt and its development as proposed would significantly reduce the pressure to build houses on the Oxfordshire Green Belt;
13. Conservation Areas – Not Applicable;
14. Protected Employment Sites – The site is not protected for employment purposes. The new settlement would unlock the employment generating potential of the 1 million square foot former military depot, Steventon Storage Facility, now owned by MEPC (Milton Park);
15. Effect of Adjacent Development – The site is not located adjacent to any land use that could be considered to conflict with the provision of a new settlement;
16. Community Facilities – The site does not currently provide any social or community facilities but would in the future deliver them;
17. Existing Housing – The development of this site would not require the demolition of a single dwelling.
18. Oxford Garden City would not contravene any local or national planning policy or landscape designations that would prevent its future delivery.

Proximity to Oxford and Science Vale

19. This site represents the largest unconstrained area of land that is closest to Oxford City beyond the greenbelt. As such a new settlement here would enable the economic growth and prosperity generated by Oxford to take root in a highly accessible and sustainable location at the closest point to the city. It is at the very heart of the Science Vale Oxford growth point, taking access directly from the A34 and Great Western Main line. In contrast to the numerous small residential allocations suggested in the draft Local Plan this site is close to local employment opportunities.

Accessibility and Connectivity

20. This site has several features which comprise a unique package of benefits in terms of its accessibility and connectivity to the road and rail network, both locally

and regionally.

21. National Rail Links - The southern boundary of the site is defined by the Great Western Main Line which includes the former Station at Grove, located in the south west corner of the site. Reopening Grove Station has been a longstanding local aspiration, supported by both the District and County Council. Recent informal discussions with Network Rail about the Garden City proposal indicate that, with sufficient investment to install a four track line, this is a realistic proposition.
22. Local Rail Links -The result would be a local stopping services to Didcot and to Oxford and thence to London Paddington. This service would also link both Wantage/Grove and Oxford Garden city to Science Vale's biggest employer Milton Park and to the Culham Science Centre. As explained below the eventual scale of the development could fund the necessary improvements to this line and be undertaken during the forthcoming electrification works. This provides a long-term solution in combining greenbelt protection with the economic prosperity. 50% of those who currently work in Oxford commute in each day, a new settlement in this location well served by road and rail, could reduce trip lengths to the minimum possible and increase the proportion who travel by public transport.
23. The A34 and Car Based Travel - Notwithstanding the concentration of houses close to employment opportunities it is inevitable that many trips outside the city will be made by car. There are several transport issues that threaten economic growth in this area, the capacity of the A34 being a key component. The forecast housing growth requirement, will one way or another, result in more cars on the A34 and on overused local roads. Oxford Garden City will at the very least act to reduce trip distances and it can provide new roads to the benefit of local villages. In particular it would deliver the long sought for Marcham by-pass, plus the removal of through traffic from Steventon, and removal of the Venn Mill problem on the A338. Crucially it provides the opportunity to link the A338 with the A34, taking traffic from the problematic A417. These are important local issues that blight the environment of many villages in this area.
24. The concept plan shows a new junction on the A34, this has been designed and is deliverable in financial and practical terms. In the event that it is not acceptable to the Highways Agency other solutions to create links to the existing junction are available.

Economic growth and prosperity

25. Considered in national terms this site is sustainably located at the heart of one of the key strategic locations for employment and housing growth within the UK, the Science Vale Oxford. This is a major cluster of the high-tech science-based businesses which the coalition government sees as pivotal to future economic development and national prosperity. This location brings with it the benefits of

effective demand for new homes and associated services and employment land.

A Garden City

26. This is an opportunity to create a completely new settlement of around 25,000 houses, with new employment and improved infrastructure, on a large flat unconstrained site, outside the greenbelt but within 15 minutes of Oxford.
27. Oxford Garden City will deliver the highest possible quality of life and its identity will be defined by urban villages of individual character set within a framework of wildlife rich and accessible linear open spaces and watercourses.
28. Each neighbourhood will accommodate a mix of land uses and the full range of housing densities and be served by a road network giving priority to safe segregated footpaths and cycle-ways and a frequent guided bus-way system.
29. Oxford Garden City will be designed from the outset to be developed in deliverable phases, each directly linked to the provision of local services and infrastructure. All residential areas will have easily access to services and employment opportunities and be linked to the new Grove Railway Station in the South West corner of the town.

Phased Delivery

30. The housing requirement for this part of Oxfordshire is expressed as an annualised rate of delivery which for Oxford City and the Vale equates to a total of about 2400 homes per annum over the next 17 years. In this context it is important to recognise that Oxford Garden City is not proposed as a monolithic single entity of 25,000 plus houses, it will evolve over that period and take shape over time in accordance with a flexible delivery master-plan.
31. It will be a phased development punctuated by trigger points at which certain key elements of infrastructure and local services will be necessary and be provided. The effective choreographing of this process is an essential component of the delivery of this new place and the responsibility of the planning authority working within the Garden City Joint Venture Partnership.
32. The concept plan for the city envisages a collection of urban villages of distinct character which will evolve over time and combine to become this new place. It will be a 'garden city' in the sense of integrating town and country but also in having the critical mass necessary to fund and secure viable city level services, shops, recreational uses and ultimately urban life.

Design Brief

33. This will be a satellite to Oxford, a Garden City that can enjoy the benefit of Oxford's commercial and lifestyle advantages without suffering from its physical

limitations or historic constraints.

34. The design will facilitate the creation of a unique and self-sustaining community, including social and market housing, affordable custom-build and group self-build homes at high, medium and low densities, plus, employment, retail, and leisure, civic and academic facilities. Linked together by footpaths, segregated cycle ways, open spaces and water-ways.

Transport

35. All parts of the settlement will be linked by segregated footpath, cycleway and road systems which prioritises safe walking and cycling and the use of a guided bus-way system within the town. Oxford is as cycling friendly as a busy car based town can be, but Oxford Garden City will be better, it is a flat new site and safe cycling will be the central feature of its transport design. Taking lessons from the Dutch experience this City can be significantly better in lifestyle terms than anything yet built within the UK.
36. The overall aim is to ensure very easy and safe access from this town to Oxford and nearby Science Vale employment areas. This will be a combination of Cycle, Car, Bus and Rail links to Oxford and beyond.
37. The reopened Grove Railway Station will be the focus of public transport provision and the vehicular and pedestrian/cycle way network.
38. All houses and flats to be within a fixed maximum easy walking and cycling distance of open spaces and guided bus stops and with easy safe access to local schools. Each of the neighbourhood character areas will be linked to each other and the town centre by a guided bus-way.
39. The urban design approach take will avoid creating isolated areas cut off by inner ring roads or other transport barriers.

Landscape, Water and Open Spaces

40. This is a flat and open landscape, of little scenic quality. The proposal can do much to enhance its current appearance. Within the design there is the need to maintain clear physical and visual separation from the nearby villages of Marcham, East Hanney and Steventon, hedge and tree planting and careful landscape design can achieve this.
41. Intensive development will generally avoid areas identified within flood zone, these flood zone areas will form the framework of open spaces which define the main neighbourhood character areas and the overall shape of the Garden City.
42. They will contain areas of open water and assist in Sustainable Urban Drainage for the entire area linked by new and existing open species rich watercourses.

43. The Canal which bisects the site will form the central linear open space and walking/cycling transport route.
44. Smaller watercourses and species rich hedgerows with trees will help form a smaller scale framework within and between the separate neighbourhoods. Waterways will be a defining aspect of this place, they enhance the quality of a neighbourhood and add more value to the houses that front onto them.
45. The existing watercourses will be used as part of the design and layout of adjacent residential and commercial land uses. Houses and flats will front onto these water courses which will be specifically designed and enhanced to maximise their wildlife potential and amenity value.

Housing Density & Design

46. The last image in the appendix is a scaled aerial photograph of Letchworth Garden City imposed upon this site. This image is included simply to demonstrate the sheer scale and potential of the area of land available. There is huge scope to produce a truly excellent new settlement that caters for all needs and budgets in terms of design and tenure.
47. The separate neighbourhoods that will combine to form the garden city will be designed and laid out with the intention of creating areas of distinct character and obvious difference, although with some common design themes to identify the city as a place in its own right. The aim should be diversity of design within individual neighbourhoods having the shared identity of this garden city as a natural living environment. Individual design codes may be an appropriate mechanism, but without stifling design freedom within areas devoted to self-build.
48. There will be a wide mix of tenures and development models including custom build, group self-build and individual self-build. This is entirely feasible and consistent with the need to reach the landowners required minimum land value.
49. High densities will be required in locations with especially good access to employment and public transport. This will be a city, not a vast characterless suburban sprawl. Inevitably there will be leafy low density character areas and this is to be welcomed because that is what the market demands, but the viability of affordable housing, public transport and local shops and services will require significant areas of high density homes. The overall density suggested in the viability appraisal is 32.5 dwellings per hectare, but the reality is likely to be considerably higher.

Leisure and Recreation

50. The master- planning and layout of this new garden city offers the opportunity for

environmental and ecological enhancements that are aimed at producing an exceptionally high quality of living environment and access to outdoor recreation. It will provide the opportunity for the restoration of the Wilts and Berks Canal, and the incorporation of open spaces for informal and formal sports and recreation. The creation of expanses of open water, canals and the utilisation of flood zone areas for public open space will enhance the recreational value and biodiversity of this area beyond all recognition.

Retail/Commercial

51. This settlement will not be zoned in terms of different land uses, variety and mix will be key aspects of the urban design. The flexible use of homes for commercial purposes will be encouraged through designs that facilitate alternative use in whole or in part. There will however still be central commercial places within the urban villages and main 'town centre' perhaps with scope for neighbourhood level retail if it is viable. There will be commercially viable science/business parks, well located to be easily accessible by guided bus, cycling and from the strategic road network.

Linear Growth

52. Historic villages and towns have often evolved around a central core, with concentric rings of growth building up around it. The consequence is that the central, often commercial part, can become congested with traffic and disproportionately small compared to the eventual size of the settlement. There is then inevitable pressure for retail parks and superstores on the edge, encouraging car based activities and the character of the place is lost.
53. In contrast to this the commercial and retail central elements within the urban villages and settlement as a whole will be arranged in a linear format, much like the traditional High Street which accommodates an element of through traffic. This will provide scope to grow and expand along a transport route and water way or within a specifically protected linear open space. In this way the commercial areas can expand or contract according to commercial pressures, in all cases residential uses will remain mixed within these central commercial areas. Zoning will not be permitted outside the business parks.
54. Commercial land uses will be dispersed within settlement so that all neighbourhoods will be able to accommodate some employment, if there is demand. Large new employment areas will be close to the Railway Station and A34 Junction. The A34 Junction site will accommodate hotels business parks and the relocation of the Steventon Storage area.

Regional Facilities

55. The master-plan will set aside sites for hotels and a new district hospital. Given the sheer size of the available land there are real opportunities for the widest

range of land uses – including faith/church developments, academic/educational developments (Christchurch College Garden City campus?) with student accommodation. Sites for regional event/entertainment/sports arena and music festival/show ground. The close proximity to the A34 and new Railway Station creates as yet unknown opportunities for all manner of uses, all of which encourage economic development and enhance quality of life.

Long Term Housing Delivery Solution

Context

56. Oxford City is a wealthy and highly prosperous town, its academic institutions and commercial organisations are hugely and internationally successful. It has some scope to improve its built environment and to deliver more houses and jobs, but the opportunities for significant future growth are limited. New development within the City is physically and environmentally constrained by its important conservation areas, historic buildings, protected open spaces and restricted road system. Externally it is constrained by the Oxfordshire Greenbelt, by areas of flood zone and by a transport network which is struggling to cope with current levels of traffic.
57. Science Vale Oxford is a concentration of knowledge-based employers and research and development facilities of international importance and is recognised as an important Government Growth Point. Science Vale is comprised of three main establishments Harwell Oxford, Milton Park and Culham Science Centre. The total directly employed is in the order of 12000. These three main sites of Science Vale face their own limitations. Milton Park is an Enterprise Zone, and this is the least constrained in having further potential for physical expansion with unimplemented planning permissions. Harwell Oxford has further scope for redevelopment but is located within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Culham is located within the Oxfordshire greenbelt.
58. The Vale of White Horse is the District within which this proposal falls. It is a predominantly rural district with the market towns of Abingdon Wantage/Grove and Faringdon. This is a prosperous area that has already accommodated significant new residential development in the recent past. A feature of the district is the large number of small attractive villages' in sensitive rural locations, whilst the major employers are largely concentrated within the east of the district within the Science Vale Oxford. A substantial proportion of the District is within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Beauty, a significant area is also within the Oxfordshire greenbelt.

Housing Land Supply

59. In terms of housing land supply requirements Oxfordshire might be considered a victim of its own success. The 2014 Strategic Housing Market Assessment concludes that the objectively assessed housing market needs of Oxfordshire are

in excess of 100,000 new dwellings between 2011 and 2031. This is both a very positive reflection of the economic buoyancy and success of the area but also a potential threat to the highly attractive rural environment which has been partly responsible for the economic success and desirability of this area in the first place.

60. The housing requirements set out in the SHMA are not theoretical, they represent an objective assessment of local housing need and space for these houses needs to be found. The numbers are without precedent in terms of annual housing delivery in this area. The Vale of White Horse must find an additional 7430 houses between now and 2031. Oxford City must find land for 27,800 in the same period, but has previously identified a maximum remaining capacity of no more than about 7000. SODC must find space for 15 - 16000 dwellings against a significantly lower current identified need. These numbers are not only an opportunity they are a threat to existing communities and the environment of existing villages and towns.

Managing Growth

61. Managing growth is now a serious practical challenge facing authorities in Oxfordshire and particularly Oxford City, the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire District Council, the three authorities surrounding the Science Vale Oxford Growth Point. This 'planning problem' is a cause for celebration that that many less fortunate parts of the country would envy. It is a direct result of the success and economic achievements flowing from the businesses and organisations that have chosen to locate in this area. The conundrum facing the local planning authorities is how to accommodate growth without undermining those features of the area that have made it so commercially and environmentally attractive in the first place.

Current Proposed Solution

62. No substantive information is yet available as to how Oxford City will seek to accommodate its increased housing requirement, nor how SODC will find land for so many new homes within its sensitive rural area. The Vale of White Horse has published its Local Plan (Part 1). This increases the forecast housing land requirement for the Vale from 4400 dwellings to 11,830, an increase of 7430 new homes. This draft plan proposes to disperse these new houses widely across the district which will have a direct impact on 16 different parishes.

Disadvantages of the Dispersed Small Scale Allocations

63. The fragmented allocation of houses across the district in a piecemeal way can deal with the initial 5 year land supply period but it minimises the opportunity of capturing the increase in land value and concentrating planning gain benefits. Although superficially attractive as a way of dispersing the impact of additional traffic this will not work, because employment is concentrated largely in one area,

in the same location as the main strategic road network. So the focus of traffic movements will inevitably be to the east.

64. This dispersed option maximises potential harm to the character and environment of existing settlements whilst minimising the potential benefits that can arise from new residential development. In each of the village locations schools will need enlarging or children will be bussed elsewhere. Only the minimum can be done to accommodate these new dwellings in terms of local infrastructure because these small schemes do not benefit from the economies of scale. Each 106 agreement will be negotiated independently in an uncoordinated and fragmented way over time.

Affordable Housing and Public Transport

65. New affordable housing in the Vale of White Horse will be provided as part of the twenty one proposed separate residential development schemes, but much of it will be in relatively unsustainable locations that are remote from services and least likely to benefit from current public transport provision. The fragmented dispersal of new housing across the district also minimises the potential for the creation of new or enhanced public transport services because there will be no real concentration of demand in a way that makes those services viable or at least supportable with minimum public subsidy.

Release of land within the Greenbelt and AONB

66. The current solution for the Vale of White Horse requires the release of greenbelt land and it proposes significant numbers of houses within the highly protected landscape of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In our view this new draft local plan demonstrates very well the problems associated with trying to accommodate significant new growth through dispersal to existing settlements without the funds to provide genuinely enhanced local or strategic infrastructure.

Conclusions

1. The case in favour of Oxford Garden City is that it provides a long term environmentally sustainable solution to housing delivery in Oxfordshire and at the same time it will harness and encourage economic growth.
2. For the foreseeable future Oxfordshire Planning Authorities will face the perennial problem of finding acceptable places to build new houses. Meanwhile existing infrastructure struggles to cope and the cost of providing services for new households increases.
3. Oxford Garden City is outside the greenbelt in a highly sustainable location at the heart of Science Vale Oxford, one of the largest, most successful and well-connected areas of existing employment growth in the South East.
4. Oxford Garden City has the potential to provide around 25,000 homes with space for the future growth of the high tech, high value R&D industries of Science Vale Oxford. It can provide the necessary social and transport infrastructure from the beginning.
5. The only alternative is to build ever more homes on the edges of Oxfordshire's towns and villages, spoiling the character and appearance of locally valued places and adding further unwelcome pressure on existing local schools, health centres and roads.
6. The historic scale and layout of Oxfordshire's towns and villages was never intended to accommodate current levels of traffic and urban sprawl. Oxford Garden City is designed to be built in phases along with the open spaces, schools, services and infrastructure it needs.
7. There is now a genuine choice to be made: do we risk spoiling the environment of existing towns and villages through over-development or build an entirely new place, designed to accommodate long term sustainable housing and employment growth at the outset.